



# Be bold, be a rebel – anything is possible

**A prominent joint-appointment within Haringey has shown the value of taking a bold approach to recruitment and how getting support from the right areas can make all the difference. Here, along with comments from three key figures in the process, Starfish outlines the task they were given and the positive results that emerged**

It's very rare to see leadership positions in local government that focus entirely on culture, especially at a time when many are reducing resources in this area and resorting to providing statutory functions alone. So, supporting Haringey LBC to appoint their joint assistant directors of culture and creativity, Yamin Choudury and Kenneth Olumuyiwa Tharp, was an exciting piece of work for both Starfish and the council.

It's fair to say these high-profile appointments are a reflection of the council's commitment to making their leadership team more representative of their communities, their bold approach to focusing the search exclusively outside of local government and their flexibility throughout the process – which resulted in not one, but two hugely credible industry leaders being recruited into a job share position.

This commitment has without a doubt contributed to Haringey being crowned London Borough of Culture for 2027.

Three figures from both sides of the partnership give their take on this radical approach to recruitment with Starfish.



**Jess Crowe, director of culture, strategy and engagement at Haringey LBC**

'The first thing to say is, why did we create this leadership role in a discretionary area, and why prioritise it? Essentially, we had

two choices – (1) manage decline and focus on delivering just the statutory core services, or (2) say no, that's not good enough – we must take control of our destiny and try new things to bring resource into the borough and build on the incredible cultural assets and activity we already have.

'We chose the second option, and the only way to justify it was to do something different – to create a role that didn't just focus on our brilliant libraries but brought together culture, heritage, events and communities in a new way. We saw huge opportunities in taking a different approach, leveraging the existing cultural work and connections in the borough, and bringing creative thinking to the space, but to do this, we had to be bold.

'We needed expertise in a different sector for us to continue to help our residents, not just through the provision of services, but by growing the local economy. Our new culture and economic strategies are intertwined, so we needed to recruit talent that understood the culture sector and would help us do better for our communities by creating more opportunities. This aligned well with the themes of our Borough of Culture bid, about being a rebel borough, building on our strengths of being diverse, welcoming, open and vibrant.

'Another key theme in our bid was about being on an adventure and trying new things, genuinely, not just going through the motions. We adopted

this for our approach to recruitment which resulted in a better outcome and brought diverse skills into our sector.

There is a narrative of doom in local government: it's all very difficult, we are in decline, councils up and down the country are having to make really difficult choices because of their finances, and it can be a tough place to work. We face the same challenges in Haringey, but it's our responsibility to show that it's still possible to do different and exciting things to achieve better outcomes for our communities.

'Appointments like this don't happen without being brave, having focus and clear direction, from both Members and officers. You've got to be committed to it, stick to your values and be bold!'

**Sunita Patel, principal consultant at Starfish**



'This was such an interesting commission to work on, and completely chimed with our values as a firm. It allowed us to focus our search exclusively in the creative sector and showed what is possible when an organisation is clear about what it wants and is committed in its ambition.

'The result is Haringey has two strong, high-profile leaders from the creative sector, both from global majority backgrounds, making their wider leadership team more representative. Not to mention, they are in a job share – often you will

find women in job shares who may need to manage their time around caring responsibilities, but this is an example of what is possible beyond that.

'It's not an option to say "we can't find people" or "it's really hard to make diverse appointments" – it can be difficult, but requires hard work and a client who is willing to support and develop candidates first and foremost.

'If a client is really clear that it's an important part of the process to present a strong and diverse candidate pool, and we're committed to doing the work, then you can end up with something that looks very different from usual senior appointments, as it has in Haringey.'



**Cllr Peray Ahmet, leader of Haringey LBC**

'I'm delighted with the appointment of our two very talented assistant directors for culture and creativity. It was important for me we recruited people who feel as passionately about Haringey as I do. Starfish helped us cast a wide net to candidates who may not have a traditional local government background and taking this approach has paid off and helped us to deliver and achieve our Borough of Culture ambition.' ■

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