

# THE MJ Starfish Top Talent: Housing

The recent publication of the 'Securing the Future of England's Council Housing' report has inspired us to acknowledge the up-and-coming housing professionals across the country who are working tirelessly to prevent homelessness, transform housing services and deliver new homes and maintain them. We are proud to recognise the housing directors of the future.



**Subhan Ali**  
Service Lead for Strategic Housing and Development



**Blackburn with Darwen Council**  
Building strong communities is what drives Subhan, who has helped transform some of the borough's most challenging brownfield sites – bringing forward 450 new homes in the last three years alone. For him, it is not just about meeting needs. Subhan's passion is for raising aspirations and changing lives. Subhan has been described as visionary in his approach, exemplified by his work developing an exemplar extra care living scheme in Darwen. With an ambitious £1bn vision for growth, Subhan is a driving force behind the council's mission to ensure no-one is left behind.

**Amy Bennison**  
Team Manager – Supported Housing, Older People Service



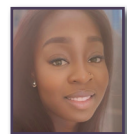
**Bristol City Council**  
Responding to the cost of living crisis, Amy arranged for every colleague in the service to be signed up to be able to issue food bank and other food vouchers. She also arranged cost of living support and advice for residents, helping Bristol's vulnerable residents through very tough times. A great collaborator, Amy has developed links across teams to promote and develop positive service outcomes for residents. Amy is celebrated for her motivation and appetite to take on new opportunities, questioning and challenging the way the council delivers services, and for regularly looking for better ways of working.

**Alison Dalton**  
Group Leader, Strategic Housing and Growth



**Barnsley MBC**  
Alison tirelessly strives to deliver against the key themes of the council's housing strategy; maximising existing stock, supporting communities and people, and enabling sustainable housing growth to meet need. With planning experience in both the public and private sector, Alison works collaboratively with colleagues across the council to accelerate housing growth, identifying opportunities and developing creative solutions. Alison has a passion for delivering housing led regeneration and is looking forward to the challenge of delivering the council's new build and acquisitions strategy over the next five years.

**Zorba Emelonye**  
Service Manager – Housing Options



**London Borough of Brent**  
Zorba leads a dedicated team focused on supporting families at risk of homelessness, including those affected by domestic abuse. With a strong commitment to staff development and emotional well-being, Zorba creates a supportive environment where the team thrives, allowing them to deliver high-quality care effortlessly to residents. Passionate about empowering applicants to take control of their housing journeys, she ensures that they gain the skills to maintain stable tenancies without future reliance on local authorities. A champion for cognitive and neurodiverse needs, Zorba is known for driving meaningful change and addressing difficult issues to improve outcomes for homeless residents.

**Jazz Gallocker**  
Senior Compliance Officer



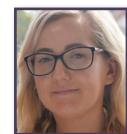
**Melton Borough Council**  
Jazz started her career in Melton as a Compliance Officer shortly after the council self-referred to the Regulator of Social Housing and she has since progressed up to Senior Compliance Officer, leading on compliance, implementing processes, policies, systems and collecting data. The Regulator has recently reinspected Melton and provided a judgement with high level of assurance against the safety and quality standard, showing the huge impact that Jazz has had on the safety of tenants.

**Henry Gregory**  
Housing Partnership Manager



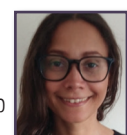
**West Northamptonshire Council**  
Henry joined West Northamptonshire Council in 2023 and he is responsible for the client relationship between the council and its housing ALMO. Henry works alongside senior leaders to develop a model that is truly person centred – he tackles his role with energy and enthusiasm and is not afraid to make tough decisions and manage performance in the process. He is always on the front foot, intercepting future issues and risks and focussing on providing solutions and suggestions that are innovative, realistic and deliverable. He is passionate about making West Northants a place where people really can live their best lives.

**Sasha Hawkins**  
Business Improvement Manager, Housing



**Arun District Council**  
Sasha leads the Business Improvement Team at Arun District Council and is responsible for the delivery of strategic and operational improvement projects across housing services. Sasha has utilised her knowledge of housing regulations, customer insights, data and people skills to deliver an improved customer experience for residents and drive service innovation. The team has recently completed a large systems implementation project, delivering a brand-new housing management system for use across the whole service. The project was delivered on time and in budget and has improved ways of working and the customer experience through improved processes and customer journeys.

**Hallaine Ingram**  
Housing Supply Officer



**Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames**  
Hallaine has been recognised for her ability to set up and lead a new workstream to identify and acquire properties in the borough. Over a short period of time she has proactively built a strong network of contacts and has successfully negotiated on a number of properties that will make a real difference to people's lives. She regularly works with colleagues across the council, collaborating to build strong relationships, and her drive and determination to succeed is evident for all to see. She is a real asset to Kingston, and the council is currently looking at expanding both her programme and team.

**Naomi Morris**  
Head of Strategic Enabling



**Birmingham City Council**  
Naomi has led on the development and delivery of the housing strategy at Birmingham, leading to the disposal of council sites for 100% affordable homes for the first time since 2009. She has developed and written the council's HRA Business Plan, unlocking £1.4bn over 8 years, and turned around relationships with residents after historic challenges on two multi-million-pound regeneration schemes. She has also led on the council's intervention with both the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman, leading to the Ombudsman stepping back from formal engagement in February. Naomi is passionate

about delivering on major strategic projects that genuinely improve the quality of housing services for residents.

**Will Neville**  
Rough Sleeper Outreach Team Lead



**Herefordshire Council**  
Following a period of upheaval at the council, Will was promoted to Team Lead for the Outreach Team and the hub providing supported accommodation for rough sleepers. He is passionate about eradicating rough sleeping in Herefordshire, and through his dedication and persistence, the number of people sleeping rough dropped by 90% over a six-month period. Will has built excellent partnerships within the voluntary and the community sector and his partnership working has seen him take centre stage as a guest speaker at a number of national events. He leads a small but incredibly committed team that build relationships with clients and puts their needs at the forefront of every decision.

**Andrew Tonkin**  
Head of Homelessness Prevention and Advice



**London Borough of Newham**  
Andrew heads up the Homelessness Prevention and Advice Service at Newham. He has led a wholesale transformation of the service and introduced a number of innovative ways of working, significantly improving homelessness prevention and reducing demand on temporary accommodation. Working closely with partners and key stakeholders, he has reformed the pathways into the service, allowing the council to successfully manage service demand, which is the highest in London.

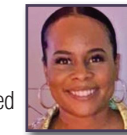
**Sophie Round**  
Housing Delivery Programme Manager



**City of York Council**  
Sophie leads York's award-winning Housing Delivery Programme which seeks to create an

exemplar for sustainable affordable housing by building new council-owned homes to meet certified Passivhaus standards, set within communities which residents are proud to call home. Sophie's work demonstrates an unwavering commitment to reducing the environmental impact of new-build housing by using low embodied carbon materials and pioneering renewable technologies to deliver net-zero carbon homes. Sophie is passionate about raising the quality of social housing, leading several refurbishment and retrofit projects to create homes fit for the future.

**Marie Samuel**  
Rapid Rehousing Manager



**London Borough of Southwark**  
Marie's career in local government housing started as first point of contact for homeless households in need of assistance at times of crisis. As her passion and experience in supporting residents in housing need grew, Marie developed a special interest in responding to the most complex and intractable forms of homelessness. As an emerging leader, Marie has an impressive track record in managing teams and strategic partnerships that develop new approaches and initiatives across housing needs and homelessness. Marie continues to lead on, and implement, capital and revenue projects in excess of £20m, enabling Southwark to respond to rough sleeping through the prevention and relief of homelessness, in order to meet the needs of its diverse residents.

**Darryl Smedley**  
Head of Neighbourhood Intervention and Tenant Support



**Sheffield City Council**  
Darryl is a values driven, visible, aspiring future leader who has led on reshaping the governance, performance and assurance framework for housing services. He has collaborated with peers and senior leaders to scope, design

and implement a robust framework, and also used performance and benchmarking data to develop prioritised continuous improvement action plans in order to drive forward the council's approach to self-assessment. His focus is on delivering strong outcomes that put residents at the heart of what the council does.

**Victoria Stahlman**  
Housing Health and Disability Team Manager



**Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea**  
Victoria joined RB Kensington and Chelsea in 2017 after the Grenfell tragedy to support the delivery of the council's rehousing commitments to bereaved and survivors, specifically those requiring accessible housing. She now leads a specialist team focused on ensuring accessible homes go to those with the greatest need and applying planning policy to maximise the number of high-quality accessible properties available for the borough's residents. A specialist Housing Occupational Therapist, Victoria is passionate about the transformative impact that accessible housing can have on the quality of lives for people with disabilities.

**Russ Williams**  
Housing Operational Lead (Rental Income)



**Stoke-on-Trent City Council**  
Prior to his career in housing, Russ was a restaurant manager and he has used his experience in the hospitality trade to drive forward a culture of great customer service for Stoke-on-Trent City Council's residents. Russ now has over 16 years social housing experience and he has a keen interest in the latest technology in revenue collection. He led Stoke's income team to become the first landlord service to receive the Housing Quality Network's Sustaining Tenancies: Managing Income accreditation.

**Leadership journeys, expertly navigated.** When it comes to creating leadership teams who will change our world for the better, the best course to steer is not necessarily the most obvious. We don't shy away from difficult conversations or less predictable choices; we tell it how it is and we recruit across a range of sectors to access diverse talent.

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