

MJ Starfish Talent 20: Adult Social Care

Adult social care is one of the largest areas of spend and greatest challenges for local authorities across the country. Whether it is commissioning high-quality care, shaping sustainable provider markets, integrating services with health partners, or improving outcomes for people with complex needs, council officers are at the forefront of delivering meaningful change.

With CQC assurance increasing the focus on leadership and performance, and local government reorganisation likely to enhance the number of, and add complexity to, director of adult social services roles, strengthening the leadership pipeline across the sector is more important than ever.

As part of our regular series on 'rising stars' in the sector, we celebrate those adult social care leaders who have been nominated by their councils for their impact on improving lives and building resilient, person-centred systems of care.

ALISON BEREVS
Head of Quality and Care Provisioning, Oldham Council

Alison leads the adult social care team's quality assurance, contract performance, brokerage and care arranging functions. She has strengthened the quality, safety and effectiveness of commissioned services, ensuring providers consistently meet high standards and deliver safe, effective care for Oldham residents.

Alison's passion for data and insight has driven the development of the Oldham Provider Dashboard – a system wide intelligence tool that enables early identification of risk, proactive mitigation, and stronger market oversight. The dashboard provides senior leaders and the wider workforce with clear, shared assurance on performance and risk.

Through her leadership, Alison has embedded stronger oversight, improved provider relationships, and a culture of continuous improvement across the commissioning cycle.

STEPHEN CAMPBELL
Principal Occupational Therapist, West Northamptonshire Council

Stephen leads transformational improvements across prevention and therapy services, driving measurable impact in performance and patient outcomes. Over the past year, he has reduced community therapy waiting times from 20 weeks to four weeks through strengthened oversight, robust scrutiny, and the development of a clear therapy framework to support safe, in-scope practice.

Stephen has also fostered a collaborative, team-based approach across services, enabling staff to work more effectively together and deliver high-quality, person-centred care that improves independence, safety, and overall wellbeing.

LISA FALCONER
Head of Service Home First – Adults Wellbeing and Culture, City of Doncaster Council

Since joining in 2024, Lisa has driven significant improvements across a range of key services; successfully leading a major improvement programme within the adaptations service, reducing waiting lists, strengthening financial performance and implementing more robust structures and processes to ensure sustainable service delivery.

Through innovative leadership, she has also played a pivotal role in the transformation of reablement services, contributing to the achievement of an Outstanding CQC rating for the Reablement at Home service.

Lisa is fostering a positive cultural shift across services, embedding compassionate leadership, improving psychological safety and creating an environment where colleagues feel supported to deliver their best. Her passion, determination and commitment to person-centred care have made her a highly valued leader.

FLORIA FEROZE
Assistant Manager, Contact Cares, St Helens Borough Council

Floria has worked with St Helens for eight years and is currently an advanced practitioner in adult social work (working age), with a strong commitment to strengths based, rights led practice. Her role involves supporting practitioners with complex decision-making, safeguarding, Mental Capacity Act matters and court-related work, while consistently ensuring that individuals' views, wishes and outcomes remain central to practice.

Floria is known for being calm, reflective and ethically grounded, particularly when working in high risk and highly complex situations. As a participant in

the Talent 20 programme, she is further developing her leadership skills to influence practice, support professional learning and contribute to meaningful service improvement across teams.

SHARON FURTADO
Independence and Wellbeing Team Manager, Portsmouth City Council

Sharon leads prevention and early intervention services that help people stay independent, improve wellbeing, and reduce reliance on statutory care and support. With a strong focus on inclusion, co-production, and strengths-based practice, Working with residents and local and professional partners, she has shaped services that tackle loneliness and social isolation while connecting residents to practical, meaningful community opportunities, from gardening and cookery to social and physical activity groups.

Sharon also oversees the Community Connector Service, which provides personalised one-to-one support to help people build confidence, identify goals and take positive steps towards greater independence and wellbeing.

LISA JONES
Service Manager for Occupational Therapy and Sensory Services/Principal Occupational Therapist, Cornwall Council

Lisa leads a multidisciplinary team delivering a holistic, strengths-based and person-centred approach to supporting residents.

With more than 25 years' experience in adult social care, including a decade as a community equipment specialist, Lisa brings a thoughtful and collaborative approach to service development. She works closely with colleagues and partners to help people maintain their independence through equipment, technology, adaptations and rehousing solutions. Since moving into her current role, Lisa has contributed to a range of service improvements through partnership working.

In her previous role, she played a key part in the mobilisation of the Community Equipment Loans Service, working alongside commissioning colleagues to shape elements of the service specification and support a smooth transition to a new delivery model.

SARB KAUR
Service Manager, Coventry City Council

Sarb is a dedicated and valued service manager, playing a vital role in leading high-quality, person-centred services for adults with care and support needs. Through strong leadership and a clear commitment to excellence, she ensures that services are safe, effective, and compliant, while always focusing on achieving the best possible outcomes for individuals.

Sarb positively influences practice by supporting and developing staff and encouraging creative ways to help individuals maintain independence. With a proactive approach to quality assurance, safeguarding, and continuous improvement, she contributes to building a responsive and compassionate service that meets organisational goals and the diverse needs of the community.

ORLAITH KELLY
Strategic Lead – Integrated Neighbourhood Social Work Teams and City Wide Services, Adult Social Care, Manchester City Council

Orlaith is a shining example of excellence in adult social care, rising through social work management with a blend of strategic insight and

citizen centred leadership. Strong strengths based, person centred practice underpins everything she does, matched by exceptional attention to detail and a relentless work ethic.

Approachable and values driven, Orlaith delivers professional support and challenge with integrity and compassion, inspiring teams across Manchester to deliver consistently high quality, ethical and impactful support.

LAUREN KEMP
Occupational Therapy Team Manger, Leeds City Council

Lauren worked on a remote assessment project in 2024 which showcased the ability to complete a range of assessments using video calling to assess people's functional needs, allowing the team to target people on the assessment waiting list. Waiting lists were dramatically reduced, and prevention of further deterioration, reduced travel times, environmental benefits and documentation efficiencies added to the successes.

On top of this, Lauren has been pivotal in the design of the technology/application of an upcoming project innovation – 3D room modelling with measurement capabilities and more, which has recently been approved by Leeds ASC. The application supports remote assessments, which demonstrates how occupational therapists can use Humant's digital platform to remotely complete environmental assessments and access visits with selected functional assessment activities without needing to be present in the home.

DAWN LANGSFORD
Service Manager, Wiltshire Council

Dawn is a passionate social worker and a dynamic and forward thinking leader with experience across adult social care, including hospital discharge, community teams and mental health. She brings a creative and highly collaborative approach, driving innovative, strengths based solutions that improve outcomes and independence.

Dawn has a strong track record in data led performance, partnership working and service transformation, combining strategic insight with a clear focus on delivering meaningful, sustainable change.

HAMZA MADNI
Team Manager – Emergency Duty Team, Bradford Council

Hamza is a trusted system leader at the point where adult social care, health and emergency services meet. He leads with moral clarity and calm authority in the most demanding moments, guiding Mental Health Act decisions that shape people's lives.

Rooted in Bradford's strengths based, social care led approach, Hamza consistently challenges default medicalised responses, influencing partners to pursue humane, least restrictive alternatives that preserve dignity, relationships and community. His leadership sets the tone for crisis practice across the system, ensuring compassion and judgement sit at the centre of decision making.

EMMA MIDDLETON
Adults Service Manager for System Improvement, Peterborough City Council

Emma joined Peterborough City Council in September 2023, leading transformation programmes across adult social care, with a strong focus on change management, digital innovation, and sustainable system improvement.

She played a key role in leading the preparation for the council's CQC Assurance, achieving a Good rating in January this year.



Alongside this, Emma successfully completed a chartered manager degree apprenticeship, demonstrating exceptional commitment to professional development while delivering high-impact organisational change and improving outcomes for residents. Emma continues to implement and embed digital tools that support the frontline ASC workforce.

BUSAYO OLOKODE
Team Manager, London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Busayo leads a multidisciplinary social work and occupational therapy team delivering high-quality, responsive services and is a warm, values-led leader who brings authenticity, courage and purpose to her role.

Busayo leads with compassion and integrity, strengthening safeguarding practice, promoting reflective learning and driving improved outcomes for residents. She is deeply committed to inclusion, staff wellbeing and professional development, creating a culture where people feel seen, valued and empowered.

Busayo is a thoughtful and inspiring leader, widely respected by colleagues, and undoubtedly a future leader to watch.

NITA PATEL
Head of Service Occupational Therapy and Principal Occupational Therapist, London Borough of Bromley

Nita is a passionate and enthusiastic advocate, not just for the way occupational therapy can support residents, but also for public service. She joined Bromley in 2024 as a highly experienced leader, having worked in a number of other London boroughs, who valued the opportunity to solely work with the occupational therapy setting as Bromley's Head of Service and Principal Occupational Therapist.

When Nita was younger, she enjoyed painting and working with clay as an artist but now enjoys helping to mould and craft a team together with diverse skill sets, blending both occupational therapist professionals and social workers together as part of Bromley's transformational work to provide a more responsive service to residents seeking support through the front door. This work has dramatically reduced waiting times and helped residents maintain their own independence in their own home.

JACKIE POSTIN
Operational Manager, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

Jackie has 28 years' experience in adult social care, serving as operational head across multiple services for the last four years. She has a portfolio covering learning disability day opportunities and Shared Lives, older adults residential accommodation, extra care, transport and community meals.

Jackie demonstrates innovation and developed the 12-week pathway service for people with learning disabilities to enhance their independence. This was commended by *The MJ* at its 2025 Achievement Awards and received the Safeguarding Adults Board – Empowerment Award at its 2024 edition.

Jackie was recognised for her commitment and honoured with Sandwell Council's Manager of the Year award in 2025.

SARAH SKEET
Strategic Manager – Neighbourhoods, Somerset Council

Sarah is an energetic and committed system leader who drives an ambitious, prevention-focused, high-performance culture. She delivers place-based transformation by bringing services, partners and communities together to provide joined-up, locally driven support that improves outcomes and maximises system impact.

Sarah aligns health, social care and community services to enable integrated, resident-focused support, bringing clarity to redesign and innovation. She is strategically developing resilient services aligned to local and national priorities and works collaboratively at regional and national levels through the Adult Social Care Community of Practice and South West Association of Directors of Adult Social Care services programme to influence and deliver meaningful change.

SALLY STEELE
Head of Hospitals, Oxfordshire County Council

Sally is an occupational therapist of 21 years and is leading system-wide collaboration at Oxfordshire, improving hospital discharge, patient flow and integrated care outcomes. With extensive experience across health and social care, she specialises in the interface between health and social care, intermediate care and service transformation in respect of neighbourhood working.

Sally works in partnership with colleagues in the NHS, the voluntary sector and care provider partners to deliver efficient, person-centred pathways, including the outstanding Home First and Discharge to Assess pathway in Oxfordshire. She is recognised for her collaborative approach to driving operational improvement, strengthening partnerships, and using data to inform strategic decisions and enhance service quality across the Oxfordshire system.

AMANDA TAKAVARASHA
Principal Social Worker and Head of Quality Assurance & Practice Development, Suffolk County Council

Amanda is the professional lead for social work for adult social care and leads the Quality Assurance & Practice Development service.

She has worked at Suffolk since 2008 in frontline and first line management roles before becoming the professional lead in 2022. Since this time, with her dedicated Quality Assurance & Practice Development team, Amanda has focused on leading and influencing the conditions that enable excellent social care practice, supporting practitioners, managers, and leaders to deliver consistent, person-centred outcomes with the people of Suffolk.

This has included developing equality diversity and inclusion practice standards, which have been adopted regionally by other local authorities and an Ethical Decision-Making Framework underpinning practice decisions in complex social situations. Amanda is regarded for her visibility and support at all levels of the organisation and representing her profession and social care more broadly by chairing the Regional Principal Social Worker network and at other national bodies.

CALUM TITLEY
Service Manager, Transformation, Stockton on Tees Borough Council

Calum is an experienced social worker. Since 2009 he has built an adults social care career in Stockton-on-Tees, with expertise in safeguarding, social work and crisis response. Progressing from frontline practice into team and service management roles, he has a reputation for values-driven leadership, risk management and supporting high-quality decision-making.

Calum's advanced qualifications include AMHP and he brings strong legal literacy and reflective practice. He leads transformation of the adult "front door", focusing on improving access across digital, streamlined pathways and strengths-based approaches to deliver better outcomes for people and a resilient workforce.

FARRAH YAQUB
Head of Provider Services and EDI Lead Adult Social Care, Luton Council

Farrah is delivering some high-profile transformation initiatives for Luton Council. She has been recognised for her willingness to take on challenging and complex opportunities and her ability to deliver cross-cutting programmes at pace.

Farrah has a keen interest in supporting inclusivity and driving equality, influencing this agenda at a corporate level. She recently led a reconfiguration of extra care housing provision, resulting in greater uptake of this accommodation by those with Care Act eligible need, reducing demand for residential care.

Farrah champions co-production, as well as developing diverse talent and succession planning.

In times of polarised debate, we don't shy away from the difficult issues to find the best people. We're specialists in finding and supporting modern leaders for local authorities. Whatever your organisation's situation, our people can help.

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