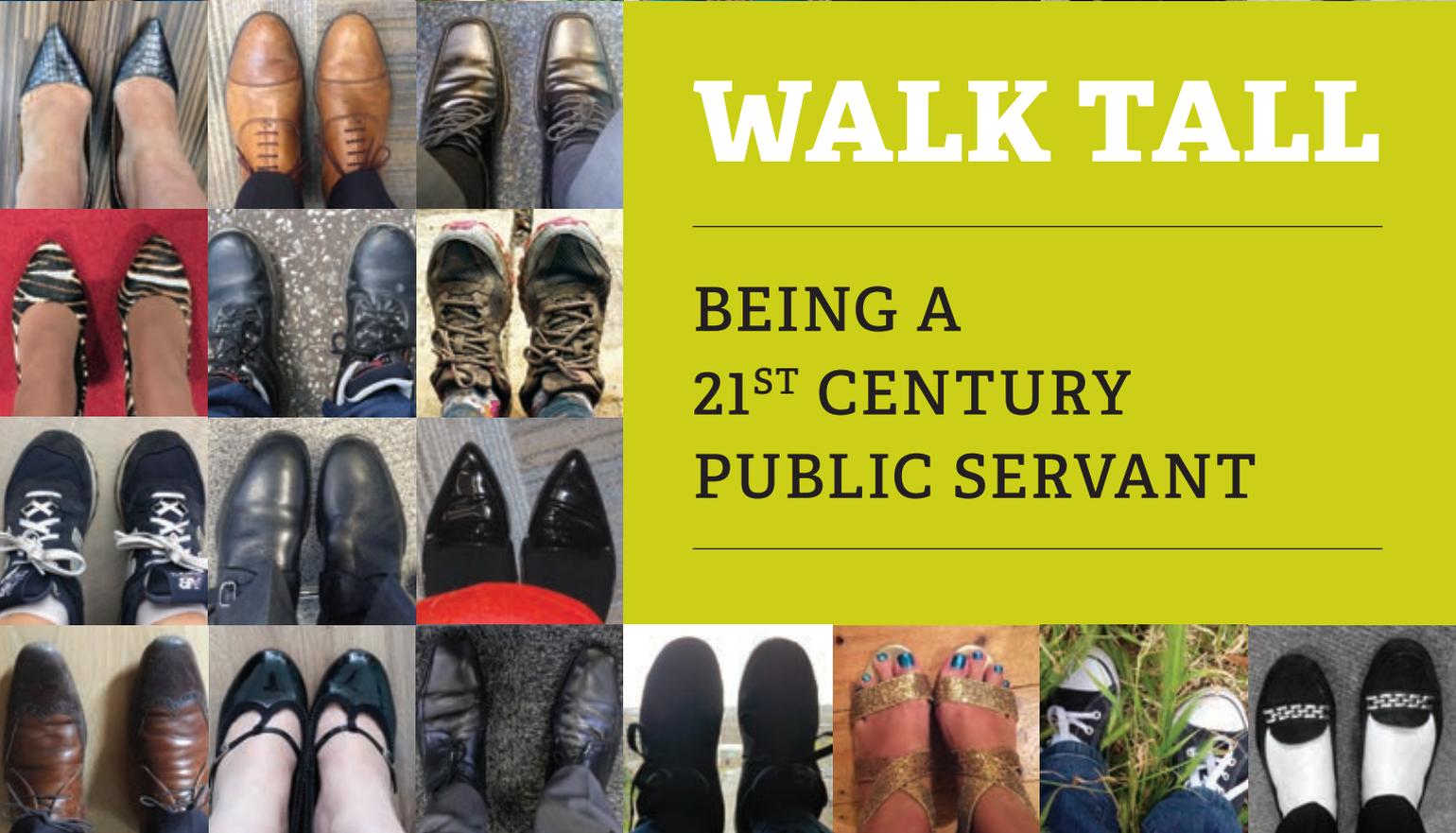




WALK TALL

BEING A
21ST CENTURY
PUBLIC SERVANT



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PUBLIC SERVANT



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FOREWORD

The idea for this storybook emerged from a conversation over lunch in a Birmingham café. Sarah from the Local Government Association (LGA) and Trudy from the Society for Local Authority Chief Executives (Solace) were there, along with Mel Wood from the Public Service People Managers' Association (PPMA). We had been working together for a couple of years with one simple goal: anything we did nationally to support councils in addressing their HR priorities had to be relevant, and had to inspire colleagues in councils to take the next step or do something different.

We loved those lunches as we threw ideas (not food!) across the table, tried to outperform each other as devil's advocate and ultimately agreed on what we were going to do next. We were all big fans of the fantastic research undertaken by the University of Birmingham, which had developed the concept of a 21st century public servant. We felt organisations would welcome practical help in bringing this to life.

21st century public servants transcend organisational structures and traditional models of employment to deliver the best possible outcomes for the people we serve, while spending public money efficiently and effectively. We wanted to show that in a way that was different. We didn't want a toolkit, a best practice guide, a set of case studies. We wanted an e-book and we wanted lots of people to read it!

We're delighted with the book that Dawn, Fran and Lisa have put together, and we really hope it does what we envisaged in that Birmingham café a year ago. We want it to make you proud of the work you do, and to inspire you to do all you can to be, and to enable others to be a 21st century public servant.

Sarah, Trudy and Karen



**Sarah Messenger,
Trudy Birtwell and
Karen Grave**



**Dawn Reeves,
Fran Collingham and
Lisa Hughes**

INTRODUCTION

The stories we tell ourselves and others can help us change the way we think, feel and act. In this unique book we have taken that well-known idea and used compelling stories to illustrate the experience of being a 21st century public servant, and to inspire colleagues to develop the characteristics of this new breed.

The public servants featured in this collection do different sorts of work, in different ways, but they all create original solutions to complex issues. Their fresh thinking, deeply held values, positive behaviours and progressive attitudes jump off the page.

You will almost certainly work with someone who has the same qualities as the public servants you'll read about here. In fact, you will almost certainly have some of the same qualities yourself. The book is honest about the challenging circumstances public servants currently find themselves in. As well as celebrating public servants, we also set out to offer some real insights into how others are coping with those challenges.

Each chapter of the book focuses on one of the characteristics identified in the research on the 21st century public servant carried out by Catherine Needham and Catherine Mangan of University of Birmingham (see appendices for further details of the research). Each story brings the characteristic to life, shining a light on what it means in practice, in real workplaces across the country. Our aim here is to add a different dimension to the research, making it accessible and recognisable.

The contents of the book are an intriguing mix of personal narratives, profiles, opinions and short stories. We wanted to reflect the diversity of what is happening across the sector and invited as many storytellers as we could into print, encouraging people to write their own stories.

Although we know we haven't even scratched the surface in terms of the range and depth of contributions public servants make, we are delighted that 65 people from 25 organisations have contributed, including colleagues in local government, the NHS, and the Fire and Rescue Service, as well as – in today's mixed economy of service provision – public servants working in voluntary and private sector providers.

WHY THIS BOOK IS IMPORTANT

Serving communities and improving people's lives is a driving force and clear motivator for all our contributors. Public service is at the heart of every story in the book, but the stories show how the relationship between public servants and citizens is changing. This is critical, because, University of Birmingham research argues, to be as effective and efficient as we possibly can be – within the resources available – a new partnership based on shared humanity and loyalty to place is needed. This concept is still relatively new and although the words may be familiar, it's hard to make the change unless you can see and feel the difference this makes to everyday practice and decision-making.

It's clear there is a continuing and vital role for locally designed and delivered services, but the contributions don't gloss over the difficulty of increasing expectations and reducing resources. There's a chapter that deals specifically with on-going austerity, but that's not the only narrative. The stories show how colleagues are reducing costs and balancing commercial skills, taking the initiative and building flexible, supportive organisations, and achieving real outcomes for citizens, often the most vulnerable in society.

Public service needs to attract and develop the brightest and the best. As some of the younger participants in the book demonstrate, working as a 21st century public servant is still an attractive proposition. This is in contrast to the negative narratives that exist in the wider press, where the good news is often hidden. This book shows why we should be proud of our public services and those who deliver them.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

To develop this book we invited people to engage with us in creative workshops and conversations. We hope that, in the same spirit, you'll use it creatively. The first step is to make sure the book is read, so please forward it to everyone you work with. The stories shout, "Read me! Talk about this! Reflect on that!" This reflection can be done as individuals or in team meetings, and can be fed into your organisation's management development.

As is common in novels, the appendices include a series of questions for reading groups to help guide your conversations about how to improve public services in the 21st century. For those who are familiar with it, the original research outlined a number of new roles





(storyteller, resource weaver, networker and so on) that the 21st century public servant might take on and we've made reference to these in the appendices. There is also more information here about the LGA, Solace and the PPMA, the organisations that commissioned the book and offer resources on a range of related issues.

This is not a how-to guide, but it is a resource for leaders at all levels, one that we hope empowers you to make sense of the context and opportunities in the wider public services landscape, and translate and embed the characteristics in the way that works best for you. It's also a gift for HR and organisational development colleagues in their work supporting managers to develop the workforce of the future and to think about organisational design.

Characteristics are distinguishing features or essential traits. They're not competencies, but they can inform them. Already some of the organisations on the 21st Century Public Servant Steering Group (local authorities that have supported and guided this work) have used the characteristics for 360-degree performance feedback, to enhance the development of organisational values, and for designing new job roles. You could also use the stories to support organisational culture change, employee engagement and recruitment.

We believe that by changing the story, you change the workforce, the organisation and the sector. This storybook is bold and the people in it are fantastic. They are like you – like all of us at our best. We hope you find it inspiring and we hope it encourages you to walk tall!

Dawn Reeves, Fran Collingham and Lisa Hughes, Shared Press Team

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank everyone who generously gave their time to this project, particularly our brilliant contributors – not only do you all embody the 21st century public servant, you all have very nice shoes too – and the bodies they work for. The original catalyst for the project was the research by the University of Birmingham’s Catherine Needham and Catherine Mangan, and we’re very grateful for their support. We also want to thank the organisations who sit on the 21st Century Public Servant Steering Group, who collectively had the great foresight to commission this important publication, and especially our client group – Sarah Messenger and Jacky Teasell from the LGA, Trudy Birtwell from Solace, and Sue Evans and Karen Grave from the PPMA – who have given us the benefit of their passion, commitment and insight throughout.



THE 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC
SERVANT **IS LOYAL**
TO THEIR LOCALITY,
UNDERSTANDS WHAT
LOCAL PEOPLE AND
COMMUNITIES NEED,
SEES THINGS FROM THEIR
PERSPECTIVE, THINKS
ABOUT PEOPLE AND PLACE
RATHER THAN FOCUSING
ON SERVICES, HAS A KIND
OF CIVIC PRIDE



IT'S A CONVERSATION

We try not to refer on. We had an example of a client who'd been referred to more than 30 different officers. They were sent round and round the system and were totally disengaged. Where some services have a 'three strikes and your case is closed' approach, we keep trying. It's hard to say exactly how long we keep trying, but it's very rare we give up on someone.

As key workers, mostly what we do is support people with mental health or drug and alcohol problems. That said, whatever the issue is we'll tackle it. Because we're not attached to one service we have flexibility to focus on what the person needs. It's true integrated neighbourhood working.

Being based in the police station really helps as we pick up and share information as much as we can. We work closely with the local surgery and the GPs listen to us, because we've got trusted relationships with the people we're supporting.

We've massively reduced the number of missed appointments and the numbers of police callouts to the same addresses.

Often we can avoid the need for specialist interventions by providing real empathy, support and building confidence, so people can do small things to help themselves. It has a big impact. We use the Chaos Index Tool to log decreased risk and behaviour changes.

People can open up to us, because we're on the ground and we're not hiding behind a uniform. We advocate and challenge services when we need to. We are 'take us as you find us' types and people recognise that we're local, too.

Using motivational interviewing skills also helps. It's a different type of conversation. When one client said, "I'm not good at anything," we were at her home and could see she'd got an interest in arts and crafts, and was actually dead good. We helped her join a group and now she's volunteering.

We're proud of the whole team. We're already growing, bringing in domestic violence workers and community health nurses who are dual-trained. For every £1 that's spent on our service we save the public purse roughly £2.50.



Lindsay Saunders and Heather Brown
Key Workers, Live Well Team,
Wigan Council

PROFILE

NAVIGATORS



Jack Barber
Recruitment Advisor,
Suffolk County Council

BORN AND BRED

Jack Barber lives and works in Ipswich, as do most of his extended family, and he's something of an evangelist for his home county Suffolk. "It's close to London, but without the intensity of life there, and it has its own busy towns along with beautiful countryside and a beautiful coastline," he says.

As a Recruitment Advisor for Suffolk County Council, his role is to support Adult Services with their recruitment needs and Home First is one of the services he works for. It helps people who have just been discharged from hospital regain their independence. "My nan and grandad have both used the service, so I've seen how it helps people first hand," says Jack.

However, it's a hard service to recruit to, because it involves working alone, there's often an element of personal care and a car is essential. "We need to be conscious that we have a limited budget and we can't break the bank, but we're really open to new ideas and we try lots of different approaches, because there's rarely one single solution that fixes the problem."

For Home First that's meant job fairs, spending time developing the right images to go with ads, creating a video to showcase the service, radio spots and paid-for Facebook advertising. Jack explains, "When we started using Facebook ads for recruitment a couple of years ago other councils weren't doing it. I feel we were being quite innovative, and it's been really successful and cost-effective. We can spend £50 and reach, say, 10,000 people targeted by where they live, which is important for Home First, because people need to be in the local area."

Local authorities are often seen as quite slow-moving, but Jack goes above and beyond, constantly looking for ways to innovate and improve the authority's practice. He recently led the development of interactive recruitment brochures using new software, is supporting colleagues working on teacher recruitment and has also been involved in developing Suffolk County Council as an 'employer brand'. "Suffolk is my home," he says, "and if my social media and marketing skills can be used elsewhere in the organisation, I'm really open to that."



Mark Jenkinson

District Public Health Development
Officer, Policy and Partnerships,
South Staffordshire Council

QUOTE

“If you’re a cleaner at NASA, your job is to put people on the moon. It’s the same for our roles in public service. Sometimes we forget that we are there to serve the public collectively. I grew up in South Staffordshire and have worked for the council for 14 years. It’s my district, the services provided affect my family and it’s important we use the resources available to maximise what can be provided. Every decision matters and needs to ensure residents’ needs are considered.”



QUOTE

Nikki Taylor

Team Leader, Regeneration,
South Staffordshire Council

“Locality matters, because when everyone has a sense of pride, everyone benefits. I’ve worked proactively with our local tourism association to really understand its needs, and help South Staffordshire develop a sense of pride and confidence. As a result, the tourism sector has grown. We have more visitors and that brings more money into the local economy. I’m passionate about this area and I want more people to enjoy it.”



CULINARY FLAIR

I'm thrilled about delivering the Holiday Kitchen Programme in Birmingham with our partners. Our goal is simple: to ensure families have access to great healthy food and local fun activities over the summer holidays.

We do this working with our 60 children's centres. Our target this year is to provide 28,000 meals. This is a big ask, but stepping up to the plate are City Serve, with Pelican Procurement and Fareshare, West Midlands, at no cost. This is a fantastic commitment and they're in it for the long haul, too!

It's an eight-day programme with lots of fun activities, food and communal eating. One of the days is a Fork to Plate Day, where the kids can pick a carrot out of the ground and prepare it for lunch – if they can wait that long. One girl ate it straightaway last year! The families visit local farms to meet the farmer and do activities in local parks. One child thought chips came from freezer bags and was surprised to learn they are made from potatoes.

It can be a challenge working with our communities; they use smart phones and

seem like they are connected, but often our families don't know what's around them in their own area.

Supporting the staff in children's centres is critical. That's where the rub is. It's easy to use up goodwill with so much change going on. We don't want this to be an initiative that becomes a burden on over-stretched colleagues working out in neighbourhoods, so we're providing lots of training, support and volunteers too.

Our next challenge is to open up school kitchens, which is logistically tricky. I don't doubt for a second we'll get there. It helps being supported by 'can do, will do' colleagues, partners and volunteers.

For myself, I'm motivated by making a difference and I love hearing the stories that come from this type of work. One mum who rarely went out of the house with her children now knows that preparing healthy food doesn't have to cost, and that she and her family can prepare the food together.



Julie Harrison
Commissioning Manager –
Complex and Prevention,
Commissioning Centre of
Excellence, Birmingham City Council

PROFILE

**Tina Ricketts**

Director of Human Resources,
Gloucestershire Care Services
NHS Trust

INTEGRATION MATTERS

Local integration is key for Tina. As a resident whose family and friends also live in Gloucestershire, and as an employee of an NHS provider that delivers county-wide community services, it's fair to say that Tina has first-hand knowledge of why health, care and support must be 'integrated', people-centred and tailored to meet local needs.

Of her 3000 colleagues, 95% live in the county, and she thinks strategically about the organisation and integrating locality into policy-making. "Locality matters. We need the eyes, ears and voices of our communities to make sure we achieve the Trust's ambitions," she says.

Tina is most proud of the work the trust has done to learn from patients and improve their experience, including supporting local people to come and talk directly to the board. "There is tremendous value in this approach, as we get to hear the patients' stories first hand and are able to make changes to the quality of patient care and experience as a result."

Looking at locality in relation to the trust's wider role as a corporate citizen has also meant changes in policy. The workforce actively engages with communities, increasing both the number of people who volunteer and the range of charitable fundraising activities that they participate in.

The trust has used its purchasing power to procure food from local suppliers and has reduced its electricity bills, CO₂ emissions and waste by having a locally-led sustainability strategy. "We have to be sustainable going forward. You can either be passive or use the resources you've got in proactive ways to make a difference," concludes Tina.

I HEART MY CITY

Big organisations think with their big brains. I realised that early on. They have to, of course, can't do anything else, it's got to be the head talking, but at least my job means I can add a bit of heart.

It's a tough job. It's a slog, every single day, but I was always going to be a grafter. I never took off for a high-flying executive career and because I live here – have done all my life – I know what residents really think and what they want from us.

So here I am, the lowest paid and least important person around a table, and I'm watching them getting carried away with an idea I know won't work. In fact, although they think it's the best idea anyone has ever had in the entire history of local government, I know for sure it will be front-page news for all the wrong reasons.

This time I'll have to use charm to persuade them. Sometimes I have to wrap it up in comedy. Often it involves some nifty footwork to make it seem as if it's come from someone else. Usually I have to work behind the scenes. Today I'll have a word with a councillor who I know will grasp the problem and switch sides.

No matter how hard it is, though, I always challenge things if they sound or feel wrong. Sometimes they can be changed. Sometimes they can't. That's life, I guess, but what I've discovered is that big brains really can make brave decisions and be a force for good in the city I love – as long as you have a bit of heart.



Fran Collingham

Assistant Director,
Communications, Coventry City
Council

FLASH
FICTION

**THE 21ST CENTURY
PUBLIC SERVANT
WORKS WITH CITIZENS
AS EQUALS, TREATS
PEOPLE WITH RESPECT,
VALUES AND USES
THEIR EXPERIENCE TO
INFORM, DESIGN OR
CO-PRODUCE SERVICES,
HAS A SHARED
HUMANITY**



RIPPLES IN A POND

The words ‘shared humanity’ jump off the page at me. It’s my philosophy that people are fundamentally equal and although I often work with young offenders who are either violent or have committed sexual offences, I believe most people are good. That’s not a religious belief – but it is a radical one. It’s too easy for the public – and for us as officers or workers – to define people by what they’ve done. I try not to have preconceptions: “Oh you’re the one who did X...” That gets in the way of making progress.

I believe it’s the quality of my presence that makes the biggest difference. The young people we work with are highly vigilant. If you’re judging them or deep down you’re scared of them, they will spot it a mile off. Actually, most people are like this. We give off and sense vibrations, and act accordingly.

Our service focuses on ‘person-centred qualities’ – unconditional positive regard, empathy and congruence. It’s not about hiding behind a professional mask. Humour can be really effective. I make them laugh; they make me laugh. We don’t have a huge amount in common, but we can share that.

The approach matters because these are young people with their whole lives ahead of them. We want them to become better citizens and that brings benefits to the wider community. It’s a win-win for everyone. We are all interconnected. If we make a difference, it’s never just for one individual. How can it be? My interaction with you affects your interaction with others. It’s a ripple effect.



Sue Hawkins

Psychologist, Children and Young People’s Psychology Service, Stockport Council (seconded to Youth Offending Team)

PROFILE



INDEPENDENCE DAY

PROFILE

Cynth Kerr
Wellbeing Operations
Manager, Independence Trust,
Gloucestershire

For Cynth Kerr, trust is all. She trusts her colleagues (“We don’t call them employees, they’re all colleagues,” she says) and she trusts clients who, as often as not, help her and her team come up with joint solutions to their challenges.

Cynth is Wellbeing Operations Manager for the Independence Trust, which works across Gloucestershire supporting people with a range of issues, including healthy living, weight management and exercise, mental health and well-being, drug and alcohol issues, housing support services, and help with getting back into employment. “We’re not here to do to, we’re here to work with,” she explains.

Much of this is intensely practical, like the alcohol arrest referral work that sees around 750 people a year who’ve been arrested in the county for alcohol-related offences and are referred for a minimum of two sessions with the team. Last quarter showed only six people re-referred since their last attendance.

“In all our services we support individuals to work toward independence, focusing on strengths and talents,” says Cynth.

The work is also very much outcome-focused. “It’s about learning there’s no such word as ‘can’t’ – although it’s fine to say ‘I’m not able to at the moment.’” The teams, working across the county in a variety of settings and locations, concentrate on building people’s resilience. Often existing clients mentor new people into service, benefitting both parties in a shared approach to tackling problems.

A year ago the Wellbeing Service did away with traditional assessment forms which listed medications used and clinical history. Now they ask people, “What was life like before for you?” and “What’s a good day like for you now?” – questions that help Cynth’s team develop an action plan (not a care plan) with individuals.

“In our organisation, co-production, with our colleagues and our clients, is really important. I love the organisation I work for and I love the job I do.”



Mikenda Plant

Family and Systemic Psychotherapist, independent practice (3 days), and Chrysalis Associates (private sector multi-disciplinary therapeutic service specialising in trauma and attachment therapies) (2 days)

QUOTE

“When working with parents of traumatised children, we talk about ‘collecting the diamonds’ – sparkling moments that can give us energy and hope. A parent said to me, “My child doesn’t like me,” so we replayed the session. We noticed how the child looked to his mum, copied her and echoed her words and the story began to change. Co-creating stories gives families and colleagues powerful insights. Stories allow us to make sense of ourselves in the world, to understand motivations, and they can be a great source of inspiration.”



QUOTE

Karen Grave

Interim Head of Human Resources
and Organisation Development,
Gloucestershire County Council

“I believe the fabric of society is strengthened by the existence of resilient, motivated public service organisations that are proud to shout about the achievements they deliver together with their citizens.”



IT'S ALL ABOUT...

Customers. They're a borderline obsession for Mark Burgess. "I want to make it as easy as possible for customers," he explains. "I talk with them, interact with them, put myself in their shoes, get on their level, appreciate their experiences and continually seek out and value their feedback. I do feel very strongly about that."

Mark is responsible for Suffolk County Council's public-facing presence across a range of channels. He manages the Contact Centre Team, which handles interactions via phone, email, webchat and social media for most operational areas of the council; the Customer Rights' Team, which deals with comments, compliments and complaints; and the Digital Transformation Team, which maintains, develops and continually improves the council's websites, and focuses on using technology to deliver better customer experience and drive more efficient ways of working.

"We see ourselves as the eyes and ears of the organisation. We pick up on a lot – what works well, sometimes what doesn't work well – and a key part of our role is to feed that out into the organisation and ensure that

service improvement activities are aligned with customers' needs and desires."

This is done via service dashboards, which provide management information on customer interaction volumes, behaviours, satisfaction levels and so on. Each service area also receives customer insight reports, and the team follows up by supporting departments to take action.

"One of the things we're starting to see is the Digital Transformation Team becoming a centre of digital expertise," notes Mark. "We're leading the way on adopting more modern and innovative approaches to delivery, incorporating user-centred research techniques, co-produced solution design, quick prototyping and using feedback to continually improve."

He argues that being customer-focussed inspires other positive initiatives and behaviours. For example, it encourages a commercial mindset and better partnership working, as customers cut across service, organisational and sector boundaries, and often leads to re-thinking service delivery, to make it more in tune with customers' needs.



Mark Burgess

Senior Customer Experience
Manager, Suffolk County Council

PROFILE

If done well, Mark says this will naturally eradicate waste and time-intensive bureaucratic processes in the system.

"It's very difficult for somebody to argue for one approach if you have evidence from customers that demonstrates there's a better way to do things, so it makes it easier to challenge the status quo in a compelling and persuasive way." Customers, clients, service users – call them what you like – they're all citizens and Mark is indisputably all about doing what's best for them.



TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

PROFILE

Chris Norton
Strategic Finance Manager
Warwickshire County Council

Chris thinks developing his career a bit later than others probably helped him to become the public servant he is today. He worked in admin and the post room at Birmingham City Council before becoming an accountant. “Being older and working in substantive jobs while I qualified meant I’d seen more things for real – which was good,” he says.

Now he’s a Strategic Finance Manager at Warwickshire County Council, leading two very different teams. One’s in charge of financial management support for the county’s social care budgets of over £200 million a year, the other (based many miles away) is responsible for social care financial assessments, collecting income of around £25 million a year. He likes the contrast in challenges his teams face. “In one day I can be involved in negotiations about a contract, the next I may be leading a public consultation about changes we’re proposing to make.”

Not many accountants spend time leading public consultations, but Chris thinks it’s important. “We get a lot of positive feedback about our work, because we’ve taken the

time to understand our customers. Most people in finance can add up, but those who really understand the services and customers they support can do a lot more good for the people they serve.”

Putting people first matters a lot. Chris was once involved in negotiating with partners over the transfer of a budget, when the final sign-off of the contract got delayed. “There was a worry about making a mistake, and there was much checking and rechecking and a reluctance to sign it off. This resulted in a loss of focus on customers. We needed to sign off the contract so managers could get back their focus on the people they were supporting.

“I looked to manage expectations that while details needed to be adequately checked, at some point a decision needed to be made and there would never be perfect information on which to make it. By advocating this approach and taking responsibility for the potential risks associated with it, the agreement was signed and the focus returned to service users.”

RESOURCE WEAVER

CALCULATED RISKS

Gordon Strachan works in the world of service user involvement and co-production, and for many years he has focused on enabling, empowering and training a whole range of community experts to shape services and be meaningfully involved in the whole commissioning cycle.

However, he says that problems often arise when strategists question the appropriateness of inviting ‘experts by experience’ into the world of legal frameworks and finance, particularly when it comes to tender evaluations.

“On the social inclusion contracts for the Supporting People Programme, legal advice was the sticking point. I was asked, what if a provider challenged the council through the courts with claims of bias from a community expert evaluator? What if the capacity isn’t there or they can’t complete the task in the timescales?”

The whole commissioning exercise could have been jeopardised and convincing senior managers that it was safe to go ahead was no mean feat, but that’s what Gordon

managed to do. “The solution itself was simple – focus on every area of perceived risk and take robust measures to minimise it. We provided bespoke training, constantly reinforced the need to get it right first time and we instilled self-belief that they could do it, letting them know we believed in their abilities.”

It wasn’t easy, though. The process from start to finish was exhausting and incredibly demanding for the community experts and their impartial support officers. And, asks Gordon, “How many times can you challenge without becoming a nuisance or allowing your own fears to get in the way of your best thinking?”

In the end, the community experts finished their evaluations two days prior to their commissioning officer counterparts and both camps came up with remarkably similar judgements on the suitability of providers.

Many of the community experts involved in scoring the tenders are now out in the field, delivering quality assurance mechanisms. The knowledge gained from being involved in the entire commissioning cycle has been



Gordon Strachan
Senior Intelligence Officer,
Birmingham City Council

PROFILE

of tremendous value in driving up standards of service delivery for some of the city’s most vulnerable citizens, and the learning has been shared nationally with other local authorities.

Weighing up the implications of legal advice is always going to be hard, but Gordon is undeterred. “Will we do it again? Yes – next time and every time. I’m continually humbled by just how much community experts are prepared to give.”

BROKER

**Karen Riley**

Customer Services Team Leader,
South Staffordshire Council

JUST THE TICKET

When I started in this role, there was a gentleman who came into customer services with his walking stick. He must have been in his eighties and was really upset because he'd got a parking ticket. He'd never had one in his life.

I listened to him and offered to contact the county council on his behalf. You could see a physical change in him when I told him that colleagues at county advised that if we put his case in writing there was a strong possibility that he would have the ticket revoked and that he would not get a fine. I then proceeded to write the letter on his behalf.

He couldn't thank me enough and opened up about his life. It was hard to imagine the tragedy he'd been through. I was just so glad to have helped him and was delighted when he brought me in a thank you card.

At the Customer Services Team Awards someone said about me, "She always sees the best in people." That's really important; people should be given a fair chance. My beliefs carry into this role and give me a platform to engage.

There are colleagues who have so much to do and are struggling to get the job done, but staff need opportunities to see the job differently, more positively. I know we are going to have to do more for less and still win the hearts and minds of customers, and I totally accept that if we aren't doing a job that the public value we should expect to be challenged.

People need to be supported through change. I've taken my team with me in this customer-focused approach, introducing team meetings and one-to-ones. Now they are a very vocal team and we are seen as adding value to other services. I want my colleagues to see the difference they are making to people's lives, like that elderly gentleman. We all reap rewards from that.

MARVIN AND BETTY

“You’ve drawn the short straw.”

“Whattya mean?”

“Your new client – Betty Lambert, Service User from Hell, serial complainant. Nothing goes right for *her*. Rings the *Gazette*, writes to her MP... You’ll be toast, mate.”

*

He’s plodding down the road through bucket-loads of rain; hates first visits. You make an appointment, but you can’t say, “Oh, by the way, expect me to be black.” That initial wince on opening the door, those well-meaning attempts to make up for it

If only Maggie was still around. Best boss ever. What would she say? “Treat every client like you’d treat your own mother.” He never had the chance to tell her about finding Mum dead on the bathroom floor, heart attack, no warning. He’s still not over the shock two years on. Still has that dream where he’s pushing and pushing against the bathroom door kept closed by her lifeless feet on the other side.

He’s reached Mrs Lambert’s. The bell, doesn’t work. He’ll have to see to that.

She looks him up and down... Great lump of a boy – or man, she supposes. Why do her visitors always look so cowed?

“Well, come in.”

He’s pulling out a notebook. “Tell me everything,” he says.

Everything? Blimey, where does she start? The pain? Feeling trapped? Getting upstairs? The too-wide walking frame? No one listening? But he’s listening.



Stephanie Brann

London-based writer, who formerly worked in the third sector and for several London authorities

FLASH
FICTION



MARVIN AND BETTY



They edge down the corridor towards the sitting room. He notes a mantelpiece bare of photographs. ("I've no family," she'll say one day in the future, when she's learned to trust him.) Their conversation begins...

A conversation that'll last months, years even. Later they'll use email, once he's found her a computer course and transport to get there.

"I'm glad you warned me about how long it takes," she'll write once the occupational therapy assessment's done, the frame's replaced, the ramp and stair lift are installed. "You've helped so much. Getting out certainly changes things. I'm volunteering at the library. I've joined the Starlight Club. I told them all about you – the son I never had."

“ He never had the chance to tell her about finding Mum dead on the bathroom floor, heart attack, no warning. He’s still not over the shock two years on. ”

INVISIBLE CART

He crosses the carpark towards me. His shoulders say he cocked it up. When things go badly, he gets a look like an ox dragging an invisible cart.

I lean over, open the passenger door. He gets in, slams it.

“Don’t,” he says.

I ask anyway.

He jams his seatbelt closed. “How the – how do you *think* it went?”

We’ve been exploring his swearing. He’s doing OK.

I wait.

He balls his hands tight. A prison thing. Signifying menace, rage, whatever. I’d bet the farm he didn’t do that before he went inside, but I didn’t know him then. I only get what comes out. He’ll have done the fists in the interview, when he felt it pulling away. Fists can be good for grabbing things, too. Or trying to.

He sighs, hard. “Didn’t stand a chance. They’d already interviewed six other blokes. They’ll’ve had CVs.”

“You’ve got a CV.”

A flash of his green eyes. “Ten months in HMP Bristol.”

“Studying electrical engineering.”

He forcefully suggests I leave it.

“Language.” He’s been doing so well.

His hands go under his armpits. “Sorry.” Then, “Can we go?”



Kate Simants

Bristol-based writer and contributor to *Change the Ending*, a collection of flash fiction about the future of public life

FLASH
FICTION



INVISIBLE CART



I nod towards the building. “Talking of CVs. You didn’t fill in the referees.”

“Yeah well. Who’d I put? Warders?”

“Nope.” I smile. “Mrs Usher.”

Gaping, he follows my gaze. Through the interview room window we catch a flash of her pink hair.

“What’s she saying?” His eyes are glued to the glass.

“Same as she told me last week, hopefully.”

She’d insisted on giving her reference in person, make sure they understood. How he’d been her most attentive, dedicated GCSE art student. How he’d spent every lunchtime working, sandwiches untouched, clay up to his elbows. Week after week, term after term. Years. *Tenacious* was how she described him. *Prolific*.

That’s got to count for something, she said.

Someone stands up, shows her out. The suits hover, then disperse. One of them picks up a phone.

My pocket buzzes.

“Great. That’s – great,” I say. “Yeah. Hold on.”

I hand him the phone. The shoulders drop.

Grinning, he mouths something colourful.

He’s doing great.

THE 21ST CENTURY
PUBLIC SERVANT **HAS**
A PUBLIC SERVICE
ETHOS AS WELL
AS COMMERCIAL
AWARENESS, BALANCES
SERVING THE PUBLIC
WITH MAKING SURE THE
PUBLIC GETS VALUE FOR
MONEY, AND **GENERATES**
INCOME AND **CREATES**
SOCIAL VALUE



WASTE NOT, WANT NOT

“**C**all me head bin man, park keeper, gravedigger and litter picker. It makes more sense to people than my actual job title!” says Andrew Walster. He runs the frontline services that all Coventry residents use and have strong opinions about. “The day I feel I’m not making a difference is the day I’ll need to leave public service,” he says.

Andrew is also in charge of two of Coventry City Council’s most profitable businesses. Between them, the commercial waste operation and the plant that generates and sells heat from burning the city’s waste deliver annual profits of nearly £5 million, so he is acutely aware of the benefits that commerciality can bring – as long as it’s the right kind of commerciality.

HGV repairs come under that heading. The council has already invested in a depot and has all the right specialist equipment, so it’s logical to use these facilities to bring in additional revenue.

“However, a bloke can use a pretty small lump sum – perhaps a redundancy payment – to buy a flatbed truck and a sit-on mower

and he’s in business as a grounds maintenance guy, providing a service locally more cheaply than we could, so it doesn’t make sense for us to commercialise the smaller stuff,” explains Andrew.

“It’s about making the right choices. There’s no point in playing at this. Some things can’t be successfully commercialised, but they can be made more efficient and effective. Then, if you can build the value of a business by doing this, you could do something different with it in the future.” An example of this, he says, could be using a council’s minibus fleet for groups to hire when vehicles aren’t being used to transport service users.

Andrew’s commercial skills have been developed as he’s risen through the ranks at the council. “And being made redundant twice before I came to the council gave me a real ability to carry on and find new opportunities, even when it feels tough,” he adds.



Andrew Walster

Assistant Director, Streetscene and Green Space, Coventry City Council

PROFILE

**Bernie Pich**

Head of Regeneration,
Wokingham Borough Council

LONG-RUNNING CAMPAIGN

I keep my eye on the endgame. I have to. Peach Place has been a major part of my job for the last ten years and probably will be for the next five. It's a large-scale, hugely politically contentious development that's also high risk financially for the council. In 2007 we started work on the project and finally we have all the consents and planning permissions we need to start on the various sites.

It's been like an epic war. I haven't got a military background, but that's the best analogy I can use. We've had our battles and minor skirmishes. We've had some really tough, dark days, had to switch tactics, and we're constantly listening, learning and re-grouping in order to bring people with us and move forward.

In this project the council acted as both the developer, which meant taking risk and making investments, and as the independent planning authority, taking on board the interests of the councillors and our communities, as well as our private sector partners. It has taken business acumen to negotiate and patience to navigate it through the tricky processes involved.

My experience working in commercial construction helped with balancing a whole range of competing demands, but what has made the difference, what's given me the stamina to see it through, is my commitment to the vision of a new town centre. I've lived in Wokingham for 22 years. I personally want to see it become the busy, vibrant market town we all need and deserve.

The whole scheme will be fantastic, but I'm particularly looking forward to seeing a neglected field become a beautiful, well-used, well-connected town centre park.



Sue Hawkins

Psychologist, Children and Young People's Psychology Service, Stockport Council (seconded to Youth Offending Team)

QUOTE

“As we became a traded service our team discussed ethics, particularly who could purchase the service. In order to meet our strategic aim to support the most vulnerable or needy, we decided we had to prioritise referrals from organisations. That way we would generate income, but be clear we were hitting our target group. If we accepted lots of requests directly from parents we couldn’t guarantee that would happen.”



QUOTE

Steve Winterflood

Chief Executive, South Staffordshire Council

“The public sector ethos is not a myth, it’s a reality and at the heart of everything we do in local government. It has created a sense of fairness, dedication, accountability and honesty. The public sector has a real opportunity to forge a new approach, something that takes the best from private sector models, but also retains the public sector ethos.”



SHARED VALUES

As deputy chief exec of a charity that delivers services to local people via contracts with public sector organisations, Dave Jones is clear that his focus is on generating social value. “If it’s all about working to a contract, we’ve got it wrong. If you have a truly person-centred approach it’s hard to write every eventuality into a delivery specification.”

Based in Cheltenham, but serving Gloucestershire, South Gloucestershire, Worcestershire, Wiltshire and Dorset, County Community Projects (CCP) is a growing organisation with 60 paid staff and over 180 volunteers. It exists to transform lives by preventing homelessness, strengthening families and promoting independence. “Our aim is to provide a gold-standard service for everyone, so I spend a lot of time thinking about how to fund the added-value services that our clients need, and putting good systems and staff in place to develop the relationships we need to make it work.”

Dave has welcomed the move to outcome-based commissioning, because it allows CCP to innovate and find better value for money solutions that benefit the

client and the public sector purse. Longer contracts are also helpful, because shorter contracts and re-tendering can mean providers are more cautious about trying out new ideas.

“We share the same ethos and we share responsibility with our public sector commissioners,” he says. “It’s not just about developing cost-effective services either. I’ve sat as a volunteer on the Gloucestershire Safeguarding Children Board for years now and see that as part of our wider commitment to support vulnerable people.”

CCP has a long history of providing trained volunteers to act as ‘appropriate adults’ for young people or adults with mental health or learning difficulties who are being held in police custody. This saves valuable social worker time and the charity has used this experience to develop a new service to support unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

“With our commissioners we’ve worked out the best way to deliver the service and it’s all under the same contract value. Our volunteers get training and qualifications,



Dave Jones

Deputy Chief Executive,
County Community Projects,
Gloucestershire

PROFILE

and there’s not the same rush-in-and-out dynamic. They listen more to the young people and can add value. It’s been a great process and really refreshing.”

**Grahame Mitchell**

Assistant Chief Fire Officer,
Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

SEEING RED

We always say in the Fire Service that we train ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Now we're training our staff to technical trauma standards so that we can attend 'red one' calls – cardiac arrest, breathing problems or catastrophic bleeding – anything that's a life risk basically. Our staff love it. Like me, they all joined the service because they wanted to make a difference and this means they're saving lives on a daily basis.

It's part of the co-responding scheme we've developed with the Ambulance Trust over the last four years. The trust has struggled with the high demand for its services and meeting its targets, but by working together citizens get a fast response. The Fire Service can get to most places in ten minutes and we stabilise the situation, which is a massive relief for families in crisis. You can't put a value on that.

One in five of our calls are for medical emergencies and we recharge our work to the Ambulance Trust on a cost-recovery, pay as you go basis. Partnerships like this do take work. There were definitely barriers to overcome, like the negotiation of the re-charge

tariff and the governance arrangements, and initially there was tension, but now we talk like friends.

I think about what would improve services for the public and what our partners need. We have to make sure any new activity is based on solid foundations, value for money and cost/benefit, and we have to measure the right things, but I'm always looking for the next opportunity to generate income – we're currently exploring how we can support people who suffer a fall.

I used to be a plumber and a heating engineer. It was OK, but there was no job satisfaction. People think of public service as giving something back to the community and it is, but it gives so much back to me, because at the end of the day I can say I've made a difference to the community I'm part of.



Martin Sadler

Programme Director – IT Shared Services, London Boroughs of Camden, Haringey and Islington

QUOTE

“If you’re going to be passionate about public services then you need to focus on working in the best interests of the public, not your own. Personal control, progression and egos need to be secondary, and it takes humility to accept that others may be right and you may be wrong. I’m an expensive resource and my general motivation is that my presence and actions should save or earn my employers more money than it costs them to employ me. When we get that right, everyone benefits.”



QUOTE

Andrew Walster

Assistant Director, Streetscene and
Green Space, Coventry City Council

*“I’m trusted to take risks
and have the freedom to
try things out – that’s really
important in delivering
commercial solutions.”*



SYSTEM ADDICT

“**N**o one actually wakes up thinking ‘When I grow up I want to work in waste management,’ but those of us who fall into it tend to stay in it, because it’s complex and fascinating, and a microcosm of the different issues the public sector is dealing with at the moment,” says Steve Palfrey.

Steve is one of those who stayed. Although Suffolk’s seven district and borough councils actually collect the waste, as Head of Waste Services he has statutory responsibility for treating or disposing of it. He also directs large infrastructure projects, such as the county’s energy-from-waste facility, which opened a couple of years ago.

It’s a private finance initiative (PFI) project run by a private contractor. As well as Suffolk’s waste, it takes in waste from local businesses and neighbouring county Norfolk. The plant not only generates energy (enough electricity to power 30,000 homes or a town the size of Lowestoft) and savings (£8 million a year on landfill fees), but income as well, which the council and contractor share.

In the 21 years Steve has worked in local

government, he’s seen a lot of change, particularly in terms of the increasing focus on commerciality and the way in which public behaviours have altered. “Back then people might have saved a few newspapers for the Scouts, but now we have doorstep recycling collections and over 30 different recycling lines at our sites, and all have a cost – or value,” he says.

Steve is excited about devolution and the potential knock-on impacts on frontline services, because it offers great opportunities for using public infrastructure to deal with waste from across the region in an even more cost-efficient and effective manner. As chair of the National Association of Waste Disposal Officers he is also involved in waste management at a national level, because he believes it’s vital that policies around fundamental public services are rooted in how those services are actually delivered.

“I do have a strong public service ethos,” he says. “I could have moved to the private sector, but we’re doing really interesting work across the public sector and providing residents with the best services within the financial constraints is what drives me.”



Steve Palfrey
Head of Waste Services,
Suffolk County Council

PROFILE

**Jayne Stephenson**

Chief Financial Officer, Office of the Greater Manchester Police and Crime Commissioner, in collaboration with Dawn Reeves, former local authority corporate director, consultant and facilitator supporting creative change in public services

DRIVE TIME

It's like her birthday party, aged eight, when everyone in the class got chickenpox and no one turned up. Toes curling inside her new purple court shoes, she's taunted by the empty chairs. She knew her workshop wasn't exactly going to be popular, but as only four of her fellow accountants slope into the room, Beverley's pulse quickens.

The one on his phone thinks he's too busy for this. Another rolls his eyes to the North Pole. It's the one hovering in the doorway that gets up her nose. He doesn't think it's going to be worth it. Underneath the grimace, she sees he's conflicted, knows he ought to be doing something, but it's in the 'too difficult' box.

Bev frowns at the intro slide titled 'Best Value and the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 – Implications and Possibilities', irritated at the hours wasted on the presentation.

"Change of plan," announces Bev. "Site visit."

Standard (awkward) man chat prevails as they pile into her people carrier, but they go along with it, glad of the escape. After parking up outside Claytons MOT and Service Centre, she shows them a CCTV image. Two young lads, hoods up, are on the roof of a community centre, bricks in hand. In the foreground is a Citroen C4 Picasso, not unlike the one they've just arrived in or the ones they drive themselves, windows smashed.

"We're here to meet Darren," she says.

The manager nods them through reception into the workshop. Darren is below a car lift, absorbed by the underbelly of a Volvo, oil like blusher on his baby face. He nods, shuffles his feet and carries on.

"Social value in action," explains Bev. "We were tendering for our police car servicing. The prices were much of a muchness, so we pushed them to see what

else they could do, whether they would help us help the community. We got eight apprenticeships for ex-offenders, work experience and a community repair bay where isolated elderly gents can tinker with the old bangers and act as mentors. Lives improved.”

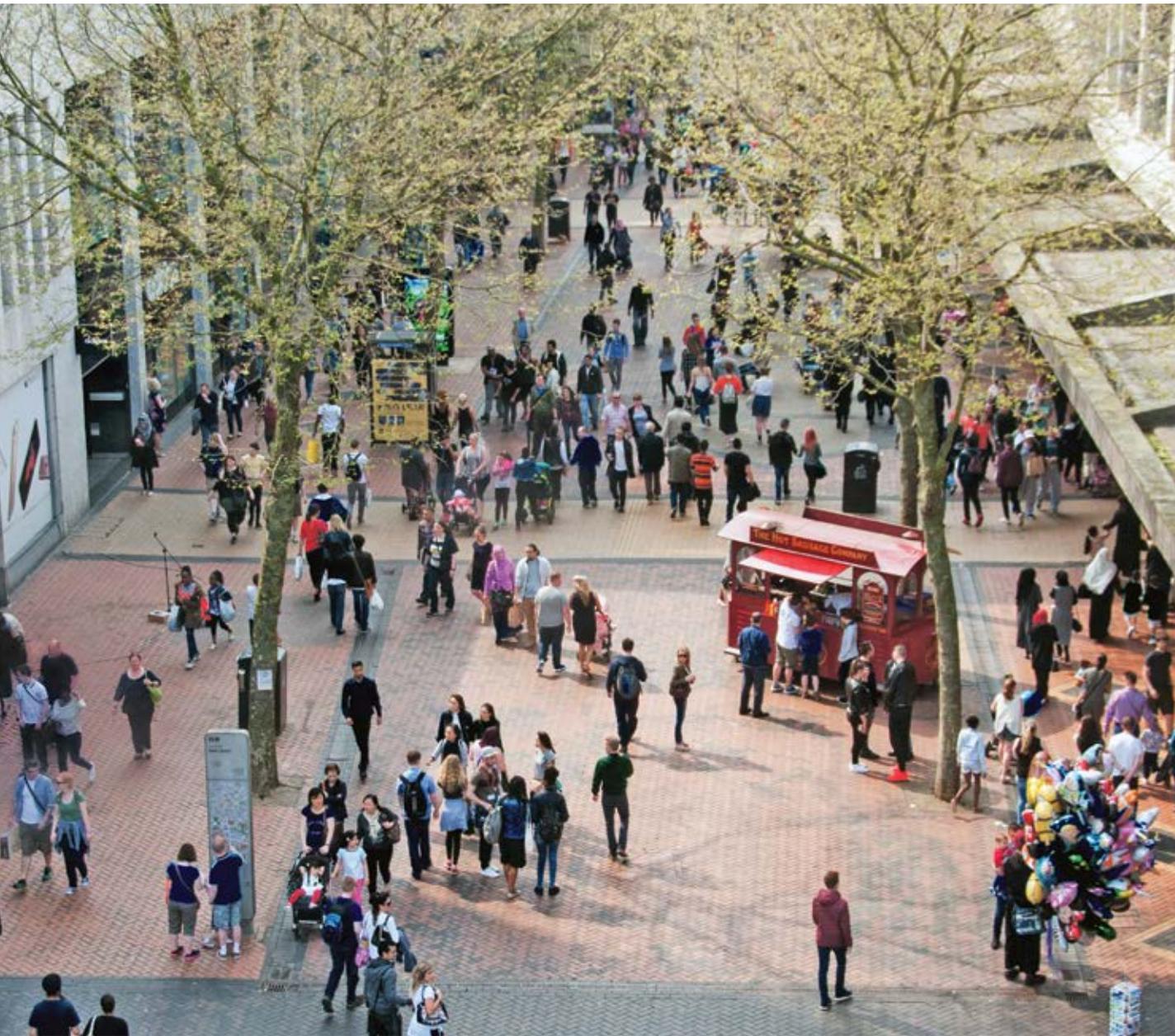
On the way back her captives are questioning, more engaged. “I bet Claytons was the most expensive,” one says.

“How did you quantify that?” asks another, impressed but with concerns. “The devil’s in the detail,” he adds.

“And the detail’s in the presentation,” mutters Bev under her breath.

“ He doesn’t think it’s going to be worth it. Underneath the grimace, she sees he’s conflicted, knows he ought to be doing something, but it’s in the ‘too difficult’ box. ”

**THE 21ST CENTURY
PUBLIC SERVANT HAS
GENERIC AS WELL AS
PROFESSIONAL SKILLS,
IS FLEXIBLE, HAS
DIFFERENT SORTS OF
SKILLS THAT MEAN THEY
DO THEIR JOB WELL,
LIVES THE VALUES AND
BEHAVIOURS OF THEIR
ORGANISATION**



ON THE MOVE

On a day-to-day basis I'm dealing with routine road maintenance, repairs and road closures. Before I worked here I didn't realise there were hundreds of different types of tarmac. What you use depends on whether the ground is shifting, what sort of cracks you might need to fill, whether there's a hill involved and how long you need it to last. I've been on lots of technical courses and am going to be studying part-time for an HNC in civil engineering.

Generic skills are critical, though, especially good communication. I work a lot with local councillors who remember how things were back in the day and local residents who aren't engineers. You have to tailor your approach and explain the specifications or technical constraints in plain English.

I went on an inspiring course about workplace resilience. I'm the apprentice, but it fell to me to challenge a sub-contractor who wasn't delivering on a contract for a series of dropped crossings. I was slightly apprehensive, but I'd built a good working relationship with the main contractor and I was able to hold them to account against the correct specification.

The apprenticeship is fantastic and more young people should apply – I definitely bring the average age of the workforce down! I'm actually a trained chef, but was struggling to make ends meet working in London and wanted a change of direction.

The council took a chance on me. I had no experience in highways or engineering, but I've proved I'm hard-working and keen to learn. I have a vested interest in providing the best service I can, because I live in Warwick and I want it to be a great place to live. Without good roads we'd be crawling across fields. My job is to keep us moving.



James Ward

Highway Maintenance Technical
Apprentice, Warwickshire County
Council

PROFILE

**Chris Mathews**

Strategic Manager – Organisational Change and Corporate Governance, Isle of Wight Council

CUTTING EDGE

I went from public school to the university of life – my first job was in a slaughterhouse. It taught me to sharpen a knife and talk farming. Two things that have served me well in local government and life on the island!

When I worked for Committee Administration I learned a lot about services and the people that ran them, so I could help them work with the democratic processes. I found it interesting and was curious to learn, which was helpful because members assume you know it all – or can find out quickly!

I've turned my hand to everything, from licensing, registrars and elections to major property schemes like re-modelling our buildings. I have an eye for detail and can be pedantic – people know me as 'Chris Mathews – that's one T!'

If I was just a bureaucrat I'd be out of a job by now. I'm good at management, prioritising and delegating. In elections, for example, we have the biggest constituency population-wise and our performance is in the top quarter nationally. At the last general election we had 70,000 votes to count, but

I was home by 3.30am and able to watch the remaining 75% of the results come in. We manage it well, because we don't rely on any one person, and we have clear roles and good systems.

Recently I used my organisational and project management skills to work with a small charity to transfer a council-owned Grade II* listed stately home over to the trustees. There were three things that made the difference: logical, speedy decision-making; negotiating the commitment with all the stakeholders for the council to walk away; and actually walking away – that's unusual behaviour for us!



Jacky Teasell

Workforce Adviser, Local
Government Association

QUOTE

“I work across many projects, including participation in national pay negotiations and various projects that assist councils to develop a flexible and productive workforce. The wide variety of projects and fluid way of working keep my brain active and engaged, and allow me to show initiative, and I am always learning something new. I have developed a lot of new skills, including negotiating, interviewing, marketing and publishing skills and, crucially, the ability to think on my feet!”



QUOTE

Dave Etheridge

Chief Fire Officer, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

“I see myself as a broker among our partners. When I walk into a room I use my emotional intelligence to communicate my intentions. This is about making good ideas happen, it’s not predatory. I smile, I’m warm – the first seven seconds are important – and within seven days I make sure I follow up with a firm offer of what our service can contribute. It’s about positively influencing the process so that we do the right thing for the public.”



ACROSS AND UP

When I joined local government ten years ago, I was recruited for my transferable generic skills in people management and development, rather than because I had the technical skills to run a revenues and benefits service. What was valued was my expertise in making change and introducing new ways of working.

It's the generic management skills that enable me to get the best out of my teams. We work right across the organisation and a significant focus of my work is empowering people to avoid silos. It can be stressful at times, and challenging, but I love the variety and bringing different teams together for the greater good of the council and our communities.

Adaptation is vital in the current climate. We need to help people recognise what skills they may have and where they could best be used. As managers we also need to give people time to adapt.

Over the years I've taken on more functional areas of responsibility that are not my professional background than I could

have imagined. I recently had a promotion and now manage customer services and strategy, ICT, communications and business change. Taking on new areas of the business, I automatically bring different perspectives. It keeps our working arrangements fresh and fluid.



Jas Bhoghal

Customer Services and Strategy
Manager, South Staffordshire
Council

PROFILE

“ Adaptation is vital in the current climate. We need to help people recognise what skills they may have and where they could best be used. ”

**Rebecca Smith**

Communications Officer,
Buckinghamshire County Council

IN MY LINE OF SIGHT

It's a tricky job, this officer lark, and there is no special training like in the SAS (pppfft – doddle). You rock up with your lunchbox and talent under your arm, taking on matters that actually affect people – even the little things, like, really small things you wouldn't ever have foreseen but, come to think of it, yeah that's a problem that needs fixing.

I don't work in a frontline service, but I do know that I help equip them to engage with residents. My role is just a drop in a large wave of support for those who deal with our customers face-to-face. The network of go-to people I have cultivated spreads far and wide across the council and is crucial in getting stuff done.

My small but powerful *Cosa Nostra* of collective knowledge isn't the only one – whoa, no buddy. There are numerous pockets of them spreading across business units, grades and talents. I tap into them when needed and get a response that I know contains *both* experience and enterprise. It's a win/win and pretty uncommon in such a large and massively diverse organisation such as ours.

Back in the day, the 'Boss' was an authoritarian being that sat in a separate office, normally at the top of the building, with a terrifying secretary guarding the gates. Nowadays I am often found ambling across to a senior manager's desk to get an opinion straight from the horse's mouth.

Our incoming CEx was quizzed by our employee reps panel. We wanted a teammate as well as someone to spearhead the organisation, someone who will move with us and use our expertise without restraint.

With a very flat structure, the line of sight from the inner to the outer circle is pretty darned clear in Bucks. We do have leaders, but they walk among us! Actually, thinking about it, if I get three more promotions I'll be in charge of the council. (That'll keep my manager awake at night *grins smugly*.)

GLASS JAW

5pm. We're the first in the Nelson. Jeff strides to the bar, orders two pints. He's wearing a regulation Fire Service blue jumper, like we both might have worn 20 years ago.

"Cheers. I needed to have a quiet word," I say.

He fumbles in his wallet, looks uneasy.

"I've been seeing someone..."

"What?"

"No, no, not like that. It's a coach." I swallow hard. "After the accident, my life turned upside down. I'm trying to get my head together, make some changes. I want you to give it to me straight?"

"Are you sure?"

I nod. We sit at a table. "What am I really like to work with?"

Jeff plants his hand on his thigh, his elbow juts out at me accusingly. Eyes fixed on his beer, he says "You can be a grumpy sod..."

My eyebrows jump involuntarily.

He backs off. "Not all the time mind."

"I know, sorry..." My coach helped me see that.

Jeff relaxes. "It's not surprising..."

I don't want his pity. I get it now. This isn't about the accident. We all have stuff in our lives, it's what we do with it that matters.

"And...?"



Simon Furlong

Deputy Chief Fire Officer, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, in collaboration with Dawn Reeves, former local authority corporate director, consultant and facilitator supporting creative change in public services

FLASH
FICTION



GLASS JAW



**“ This
stops me.
I grip the
glass so
tight I could
crush it. ”**

“You interfere.”

At this stage of life, I suppose I know this about myself. Still...

“And you don’t listen.”

This stops me. I grip the glass so tight I could crush it.

“I, er... I always ask your opinion, don’t I?”

“You do...” Jeff snorts. Beer froths up his nose. “And then we do it your way.”

He holds my eye, daring me to contradict him. A fat silence sits between us at the small round table.

“When was the last time anyone even came to you with an idea?”

I desperately try to think of an example. Nothing comes to mind. Told you, he’s saying. Then his shoulders slump, resigned. And mine do, too. My limbs feel heavy. I want to leave right now, but I can’t. Breathe, the coach said.

I shake my head. “I don’t know what to say...”

“That’ll be a first...”

I manage a thin smile. “And there’s clearly something wrong with my hearing.”

It’s not meant as a joke, but he laughs. I stare at my worn boots.

Jeff throws me a bone. “You reflect on that while I get another round.”

THE 21ST CENTURY
PUBLIC SERVANT **BUILDS**
A CAREER ACROSS
SECTORS AND SERVICES,
HAS WORKED IN THE
PRIVATE, PUBLIC OR
VOLUNTARY SECTORS,
AND THIS HELPS THEM
TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE
IN THEIR WORK
AND MEET COMPLEX
OUTCOMES FOR CITIZENS



KEEP CALM...

Jonathon King works in a world of super-diversity. With a dizzying array of professionals and non-professionals, including parents, carers, children and young people, more agencies in more sectors than any one person ought to be able to remember, and a complex web of policies and legal requirements to navigate, his head is constantly full.

“But actually,” he says, “it feels calm. I love my job and I’m lucky to work in a well-supported and well-managed environment, where everyone wants to improve children’s lives. My managers are flexible about how I spend my time. If there’s a concern for any child, we all kick in straight away. The schools are on it. The pastoral care is excellent. I work with some amazing social workers and together we draw in the support that’s needed. We have the same purpose.”

Jonathon, whose expertise is in education and safeguarding, worked as a classroom teacher in primary schools for ten years. He has worked for three local authorities in a range of roles, as well as a virtual school, a private foster agency and a third sector adult mental health charity, where he is still a trustee.

“Some cases stay with you,” he says, giving an example of a particularly complex case where he supported a 12-year-old with a drug addiction (both the boy’s parents were deceased, having also suffered from drug addictions). Continued, co-ordinated and flexible support has meant that three years after such major trauma, the boy, now a young man, is taking GCSEs and is in a settled foster care placement.

Jonathon acknowledges that his diverse career has definitely helped him tackle such complex situations. Colleagues say he knows everyone in Trafford and, if not, it’s rarely more than one degree of separation.

“There are definitely less resources around these days,” he says. “It’s a fact of life. I’m motivated to make a difference to the lives of vulnerable young people and unfortunately I know that type of work isn’t going to go away. I’m open to where I might be working in the future.”



Jonathon King

Specialist Education Practitioner, Multi-Agency Referral Assessment Team (18.5 hours), and Education Support Officer (focusing on the education of vulnerable children), Education Standards Team (18.5 hours), Trafford Council

PROFILE

NETWORKER

**Patrick McDermott**

National Graduate Development Programme, Local Government Association

FORGET THOSE STEREOTYPES

I used to work in a consultancy firm in the private sector, where the stereotypes of the public sector still persist: it isn't cutting edge; its management practices lag behind; and you don't want to be stuck working in a town hall. I learnt useful skills, but when I made the leap and got a place on the Graduate Development Programme at the Local Government Association (LGA) I saw things very differently.

In my placement supporting a local government relationship manager, the job wasn't about being behind a desk, it was about being out there supporting councils to serve communities. I could go a week without seeing my manager. My deadlines didn't change, but I had the freedom to manage my own time and we used Skype and Facetime when we needed to talk.

As a result, I'm more self-reliant. I learnt to make the decisions I could and when to seek out a quick response on more complex matters. It was very efficient and I was willing to work harder because I was trusted. I loved the flexibility.

Local government and central government also have stereotyped views of each other, a mindset that 'We do that better than you...'. Working on placement in the LGA's public affairs department and dealing with both, it was clear we all need to understand the whole system in order to make places work better. What's been great is seeing how the devolution agenda is helping to shift attitudes. Everyone is working to unblock barriers to delivery at the local level.

Although working in the LGA can feel like being one step removed, we are all focused on helping people to have better lives. This is important to me in my career and as an individual.

As a wheelchair user I've experienced great support from health services and through my job I've developed more skills and have a great career ahead of me. We all need to value the public sector, to see it as the place to be, and to go out and sell it!



Gordon Strachan
Senior Intelligence Officer,
Birmingham City Council

QUOTE

“Having worked closely with so many people with so many difficulties or impairments, I have gained a unique insight that gives me a sort of super-empathy. I can walk in the shoes of those who need our services the most.”



QUOTE

Imre Tolgyesi

Partnership Development Manager,
Policy and Partnerships Department,
South Staffordshire Council

“The public sector has a lot to learn from other sectors. When your back is up against the wall, you come out fighting and creativity flows. Less funding can lead to a positive change.”



APPLIED PSYCHOLOGY

Benedicta Russell's career in public services has been fairly short to date, but it's already involved working in several areas and a short spell in the private sector.

In fact, that career began during the last year of her psychology degree at Brunel University when, interested in finding out how she could apply her studies in the workplace, Benedicta took a job as a part-time family support worker at a children's centre in Chesham, Buckinghamshire. She says, "Understanding people's problems and getting people's views are so important," and this gave her a real insight into the needs of families and how those needs were matched to services.

When she graduated in 2011 she spent six months working for an HR company before moving to a performance improvement assistant position within Central Bedfordshire Education Services. This role had an emphasis on data analysis and involved working closely with schools, particularly on improving outcomes for vulnerable pupils.

Always fascinated by relationships and how they develop, but increasingly interested

in applying her skills strategically as well, Benedicta went to Barnet in 2012 as a Performance and Systems Officer and, fast forward to 2016, is now a Programmes and Resources Advisor, working across a range of projects. These include the council's Development Pipeline, which is designed to deliver affordable housing across the borough in conjunction with arms-length management organisation Barnet Homes and Re, the joint venture between the authority and Capita plc.

Having worked in frontline services herself, Benedicta says, "It's vital to understand what the dynamics are for frontline staff; to understand how, for example, social workers see the corporate centre. Improving services for residents is at the heart of what we all do, so we need that shared understanding so we can work more closely together."

Benedicta is committed to public service, but doesn't rule out a future career move away from local government. "I'd like to try applying my skills to another sector, for instance central government, but it would have to be a very transformational project, because I'd have to have the same level of challenge I have at the moment."



Benedicta Russell

Programmes and Resources Advisor,
Barnet Council

PROFILE

**Carly Bain**

Early Help Co-ordinator, Children's Social Care, Isle of Wight Council

HEARING VOICES

In 2008 I was 22 and it was my first day in my first job in community development, on a tough local estate. A fantastic project, it was funded by the lottery and called Play Rangers. I was wearing a tracksuit, I had a van full of toys and I arrived to find a member of the public, fist clenched, threatening to punch my colleague for parking in what she called the 'community space'.

Listening to the angry resident it was clear that community space and the lack of services working on the estate were serious problems. There was a stigma about the area. People didn't want to work there and this included a local teacher who wouldn't let her child play there.

We did a drop in on the playground, knocked on doors, convinced housing to open up a community flat that had been closed for years and I worked closely with Children's Services. I learnt so much, and connected with a whole range of services and agencies working to improve the lives of vulnerable children and families.

When the money ran out, I worked for three years in a school as a child protection officer

and studied for a degree. Now I manage Early Help Services for the council and look after a geographical patch, the north-east part of the island. I run a monthly hub where all agencies and departments collaborate to join up services. It works!

Bringing experiences from different parts of the public service definitely helps. I'm totally committed to bringing people together to hear the voice of the parent and child, and to follow through on what they need. They know what they need and what will work best for them, and it saves resources.

There is still some resistance to working in this way. People think they haven't got time to collaborate, but it actually saves time and reduces demand. I see a new wave of people working in public service, open and collaborative, and I'm glad to be part of that.

CROSSING POINT

Level 5 of the staff underground car park is claustrophobic. Like being at the bottom of a ferry, stale air and a long way up before you see the light. Four bays along from Meera's spot, she registers a neat mattress of cardboard boxes. The rough sleeper is back.

He makes himself small, trying to hide the fact he's drinking a coffee, turns his head away. She fumbles getting the keys out of her handbag, wants to get home, sort out dinner.

While she's reversing, the young man's face becomes visible. She stops. There's a tightening in her chest. He's not that much older than her son. She gets out the car. Wary of potential aggression, she walks towards him.

"Are you ex-military?" Meera asks. It's a considered opener. It wouldn't be a surprise if he is. He doesn't reply.

"I am," she says. "Can I get you anything? A sleeping bag maybe?"

He shakes his head.

The next morning she puts one of her husband's old coats in the boot. The young man doesn't get up, but puts the coat on immediately. Meera notices a nasty cut on his hand.

"I worked in the Fire Service as well. I know first aid."

"It's alright," he says, shoving the hand deep in the pocket. "Ta."

She sits down awkwardly on the concrete, near but not next to him. Her lower back aches.

Eventually he says, "People are nice to me here. The car park attendant was supposed to move me on, but he lets me stay. Gives me a coffee now and then.



Sue Evans

Head of HR and Organisational Development, Warwickshire County Council, in collaboration with Dawn Reeves, former local authority corporate director, consultant and facilitator supporting creative change in public services

FLASH
FICTION



CROSSING POINT



Another lady gives me egg sandwiches.”

Three floors above ground in her new job in the council offices, Meera asks around. A few people have raised concerns. Three of them get a network going. He - Callum - resists a hostel at first. He refuses to see anyone officially, but talks properly to a volunteer. A job is a way off, but an apprenticeship in the council might work. At 21 he's older than most on the scheme, but they bend the rules.

Meera checks in now and again - although it's fragile, six months later he's stuck at it and the younger ones actually look up to him. He always crosses her mind as she unlocks her car and heads home.

“ A job is a way off, but an apprenticeship in the council might work. At 21 he's older than most on the scheme, but they bend the rules. ”

**THE 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC
SERVANT REFLECTS ON
PRACTICE AND LEARNS
FROM OTHERS, MAKES
TIME TO REFLECT ON
HOW THEY CAN LEARN
FROM THEIR EXPERIENCE
AND OTHERS', IS ABLE
TO APPLY NEW IDEAS
AND DOESN'T FAKE
RESILIENCE**



ESSENTIAL LUXURIES

work as a Family Therapist with children in care and adoptive families. Children are referred by Post Adoption, Social Services or Health for specialist trauma and attachment therapy.

Reflective dialogue is an integral part of this type of therapy. It's also part of the way we learn and develop our practice as individuals and as teams.

In my professional practice I've followed my interests and passions. Working in mental health you can't stand still. It's a dynamic field where we are learning more all the time about how early relationships influence neurodevelopment.

I am pragmatic and eclectic – drawing on different therapeutic approaches. What that gives me is a wide toolkit of methods and techniques, different ways to tackle problems and a clear understanding of what can work.

I love the idea that you can always learn. It's a very hopeful way of viewing the world. I try to remember mistakes may be blessings. Reflection and training help keep me open

and flexible and I'm never complacent. This helps me do my job better. Continuing development and specialisation creates career flexibility. Take ownership. It's up to us to seek out a course and make space to get on it. Or carve out time to read about our subject. I book in a Skype session with a colleague in another part of the country once a month because I believe two heads are better than one.

Time to learn and reflect can be seen as a luxury in some organisations, but for me not taking that time is a false economy. If you can't talk openly about what happens, the good and the bad, the space for creativity gets shut down. People become fearful and fall back on procedure and forget the importance of building trust and relationships. I see a lot of secondary trauma in public services at the moment. The systems are traumatised.

How can we stay resilient? I think in focusing on the lack of organisational or external resources, we can lose sight of some of our most important resources – ourselves and the relationships we can build.



Mikenda Plant

Family and Systemic Psychotherapist, independent practice (3 days), and Chrysalis Associates (private sector multi-disciplinary therapeutic service specialising in trauma and attachment therapies) (2 days)

PROFILE

STORYTELLER

**James Preston**

Information Officer Children's
Services, Birmingham City Council

DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

Fourteen years ago I was working in a residential care facility – I was a senior childcare officer – but after an assault I lost most of my sight and became visually impaired. I couldn't do my job any more and my confidence corroded away, but I found out about a fresh start mentoring scheme and was fortunate to get an excellent mentor, Andrea Burns, who was inspirational.

The mentoring was life-changing. Andrea helped build my self-esteem and taught me techniques to help me interact with people better and contribute to group discussions. Now I have enough confidence to try using some of the action-learning techniques to support others in my role as an Information Officer.

My job is very rewarding. I'm helping people who need support. Some are disabled, on benefits or have safeguarding issues. There are fewer resources for critical services and sometimes I do get frustrated that we can't do more, but we all need to speak about our feelings at work, share criticism and praise.

I was very proud to be nominated by my colleagues to be a Forward Champion for

the council. I'm able to facilitate change and help keep staff morale going in tough times. I have galvanised a sense of team spirit, becoming a mentor to colleagues myself, encouraging them to help others as well. The whole team was recently shortlisted for a Chamberlain Award for public service.

I'm very person-centred and I want to improve people's lives, so I do a lot of charity work, too. Last year I was made Volunteer of the Year at the Pride of Birmingham Awards. Of course Vince, my guide dog, who comes everywhere with me, was at the ceremony as well.

I feel I'm better able to understand where people are coming from now. I recognise I may have been too direct in the past, so I try to see others' perspectives and encourage them to do that, too. I kept a learning journal throughout the mentoring and this helped me to reflect, to note down what I had learnt and how I was going to use that learning in future. The voice inside me has moved from negative to positive, and I would say my thought processes are different now.



Sarah Messenger

Head of Workforce, Local
Government Association

QUOTE

“The process of ongoing learning is one of the main things that makes work interesting. One phrase that always stuck with me came from a line manager I respected enormously. She once said to me “Don’t tell me what you’re working on at the moment, tell me what you enjoy about what you’re working on.” It struck me that no one had asked me before what I enjoyed about work and doing that helped me better understand the parts of my job that frustrated me and to do something about it.”



QUOTE

Andrea Burns

Senior HR Practitioner, Talent and Organisational Capability, Birmingham City Council

“I’m adept at spotting talent and ability, and passionate about developing people, particularly those who have had challenges. I am highly reflective. I think a lot and consistently learn. Every day I learn something new that works – and usually something that doesn’t! I always try to see the whole person. We are all busy people, but the greatest resource we can give others is a little time to tell their story, to help them create new chapters.”



STUDY SKILLS

Despite studying part-time and building his early career, it took Tom Pike just six and a half years (and two moves, one wedding and a baby) to complete his PhD in local government structures. A PhD is by no means essential for a public services career, but for Tom, “It gave me the chance to think, and to develop my skills and knowledge, particularly in terms of access to new theories about the nature of change.”

Being reflective and open to new ideas is certainly integral to his role at Barnet, where he has responsibility for all performance reporting, and ensuring that all projects deliver to time and on budget. As Strategic Lead he supports both the commissioning and the delivery groups. He says, “Quite often what I do is fairly subtle – coaching and encouraging colleagues to look at what they do and how they do it, asking questions and connecting different teams.”

Tom acknowledges that true self-analysis and collaboration can be difficult to achieve, and notes, “If you approach it in terms of ‘I am this at this grade and I do these things’ it’s closed, restricted, harder to be

engaged with work and harder to have a wider impact.”

However, he believes that taking a more flexible and receptive approach is not only productive, but genuinely exciting. He says, “You have to recognise that the skills and knowledge of others are what get you the best results. No one person has all the right answers and colleagues at all levels can contribute... It’s about being open to exploring, reflection, being self-aware, listening, thinking creatively and recognising the skills of others, and that we can complement each other.”



Tom Pike

Strategic Lead – Programmes and Performance, Barnet Council

PROFILE

**Mark Jenkinson**

District Public Health Development
Officer, Policy and Partnerships,
South Staffordshire Council

STEP CHANGE

When he was a sports development officer, Mark Jenkinson was asked to pick up a walking project – and he wasn't happy. "I'd got it into my head that I did 'sport'," he says. "As far as I was concerned, walking was 'health', so I didn't see why I should be doing it." Grudgingly he started the project, but quickly realised that the development principles were the same, what was important was the outcomes and that his own attitudes were limiting him.

Mark believes that structures and organisations can sometimes prevent people from learning new skills, and that people often constrain themselves. "It's partly the opportunity to diversify, but change also needs an inner drive. It's better if people want to develop and learn new things for themselves."

Mark then decided that he enjoyed challenging himself, so he booked onto two workshops which weren't in his traditional area of work. By stepping out of his comfort zone, he started seeing opportunities, made new links with a wide range of organisations, and learned you don't need to be an expert in a subject area to make a difference.

Over time he's developed a reputation for being prepared to take on new initiatives and has created opportunities of his own, too. Following a three-year secondment with Public Health, he is currently on an NHS secondment with the Clinical Commissioning Group. It's been a steep learning curve, but, he says, "Working in different environments is better than attending workshops and conferences. Unless you put theory into practice you never get the chance to see what you can really do. Sometimes the opportunities find you, but sometimes you have to work hard and look for them. Most importantly, though, you've got to want to do it."

BREATHING LESSONS

Alex awoke with a plummeting sense of overwhelm. He hadn't slept well. He had a hell of a staffing meeting this afternoon and now the traffic was bad, too.

He felt the familiar temptation to retreat from his colleagues in an attempt to get on top of things. This was exactly what he, and others, had done in the trauma of the Child S investigation. It had left gaps in the workforce, new guidelines, yet another reorganisation. Kate had been appointed as the new director. By that time, Alex's existence had shrunk to a relentless cycle of panic and relief, of avoidance and reacting, or simply, aimlessly, hoping for the best.

It hadn't always been like this. Ten years ago he was a rising star in social work – passionate, effective – but his experience had led to cynicism, burnout. He'd even briefly ended up in hospital. It had taken weeks to return to full-time work.

Now he knew that hiding for the morning was the last thing he needed. Kate had instigated reflective practices. At first they had all laughed, but today he engaged them with full force. It felt like an act of faith rather than desire. Like exercise.

He started with 'tea and ten' – ten minutes, with tea, to write down his ideal outcomes for the day. Then he called his team together for a check-in. How are you? What do you need today? They shared a one-minute meditation exercise. Breathe.

He phoned a colleague in his coaching conversation circle. In a strictly timed 20 minutes, he focused on preparation for the meeting.

It was now 10am. In the old days, 90 minutes into the working day he would usually have felt that everything was spiralling out of control, but now he'd reached the point where he could see the point again. He felt calm, clear, motivated about what he would do before the meeting.

He poured a coffee and rolled his sleeves up. It was going to be a good day after all.



Sarah Dale

Nottingham-based coach and writer, who works with public sector managers and GPs

FLASH
FICTION



**Sue Hawkins**

Psychologist, Children and Young People's Psychology Service, Stockport Council (seconded to Youth Offending Team), in collaboration with Dawn Reeves, former local authority corporate director, consultant and facilitator supporting creative change in public services

(LIGHT) BULB MOMENT

"It was only a sandwich from Boots. I was hungry."

Black-varnished nails scratch the corner of the table. Slowly she lowers her cheek onto the birch-wood desk.

"Please don't tell me off."

The brash teenager disappears and a six-year-old girl looks up at me, sleepy, pleading. The file says: young offender, homeless, violent boyfriend.

"Are you hungry now?"

This morning's headache travels down the back of my neck, through my shoulders and into my chest. In her 17 years, not one agency has heard her story, a pitch-black history of neglect, physical and sexual abuse.

"We can see what they've got in the machine if you like?"

*

"In biology once, we did this experiment where we planted bulbs. One we put on a windowsill and the other stayed in a dark cupboard."

She's a visual kid.

"You were the bulb in the cupboard, weren't you?"

"Yeah I was, wasn't I?" Her surprised smile says, "You nailed it, Sue."

"And what happened?"

"Course the bulb on the window was the best."

"And the one in the dark?"

"Well," she pauses. "Just about poked its head through the soil."

“The capacity to grow is inside the bulb, even if it’s not in a good place. We all need the right environment. And a bit of watering, now and again.”

The girl tips her head back on her neck to look through the high window in the meeting room.

“Straining for the light. Wasn’t I?”

*

My fully teenage client says, “I need a job.”

“Sounds good. What sort of job?”

“Do you think I could work in a nursery?” Her eyebrows are raised, her gaze questioning.

“Tending plants?”

“Ha!” We both laugh more in the sessions now.

“No, I meant with little ones?”

The bulb has been in good, nurturing soil for a year now, watered with compassion and fed with empathy. And now she wants to pass that experience on.

“And I could buy my own sandwiches.”

I take her to a local café.

“This one’s on me.”

**“Black-
varnished nails
scratch the
corner of the
table. Slowly
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birch-wood
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THE 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC
SERVANT THINKS
CREATIVELY ABOUT
ONGOING AUSTERITY,
RECOGNISES THE
CHALLENGING FINANCIAL
PICTURE AND ACCEPTS
CONSTANT CHANGE,
SOLVES PROBLEMS
IMAGINATIVELY, AND
SEARCHES OUT OR
RECOMBINES RESOURCES



TEAM SPIRIT

I have always worked in austerity. I don't know any different, so I feel it gives me an advantage of sorts. I'm not stuck in the past. There's too much talk about the 'good old days', when the authority had the reserves and if a highways project ran out of money it wasn't a problem.

As the Network Change Manager my focus is on making sure we achieve our common goals of delivering for the public and getting value for money. For example, I created a new IT system that gives a breakdown of revenue and maintenance implications for each scheme, so as a group we can manage our budget better and forecast under- or overspends accurately. It puts the council in a better financial position, helping us understand spend profiles, proactively manage value for money and foresee any future challenges.

I've had to change the mindset of my team and the project officers across the department to really think through the revenue consequences and maintenance implications of future schemes. I think it helps that I'm good with people. I play semi-professional football and have learnt

a lot about team-building and working with people from different backgrounds. I feel I'm able to think creatively and support people to be adaptable. Just like on the pitch, we have to communicate better, work as one council and be more accepting of the 'now', because that's what teams do.



Luke Keen

Highways Network Change Manager, Place Directorate, Birmingham City Council

PROFILE

“ Just like on the pitch, we have to communicate better, work as one council and be more accepting of the ‘now’, because that’s what teams do. ”



Martin Reeves
Chief Executive,
Coventry City Council

RELATIONSHIP REDESIGN

The exciting stuff – disruptive innovation and transformative leadership – is happening because of austerity, not despite it. Six years ago I told people the tide was going out on public sector financing and would never come back. Austerity has inevitably washed up some unpleasant stuff on the shoreline, and we haven't been left with beautiful white sands, but there's a coastline to reshape, and I think that's what my job is now.

Here's the thing. Even during decades of significant growth in public sector expenditure, when we had what was, in effect, an anti-austerity programme, services did not universally deliver positive outcomes for our people.

Unintentionally (and with the best of intentions, because all of us in public service start off with the best of intentions) we created a learned helplessness, a sense of embedded dependency. And that's not only unaffordable, it's completely the wrong approach for public services.

If we're going to be really modern and progressive as public servants we've got

to reimagine, reshape and redesign the relationship between public services and the people we serve.

For me, it's about thinking about the people I serve and the place they live in first and above all. Once all of us think that way we can glue other leaders, professionals and sectors together beyond our existing systems to think in the whole, about the place. I love my council – I've loved every council I've worked for, but I've loved the people and the places I've worked for more.

I want to make sure all our places get powerful, coherent, honest storytelling and personal boldness, moving us well beyond simply being efficient organisations with sound programme management. This is organic, iterative, exciting, chaotic, but, above all, purposeful.

It's a personal, professional and political challenge, the likes of which we have never witnessed before. It's hard. I don't always get it right – none of us should. Being brave, taking risks and learning when we get it wrong has to be the best way forward.



Andy Burns

Director of Finance and Resources,
Staffordshire County Council

QUOTE

“By challenging local government to deliver Scandinavian-style public services funded by American levels of taxation the Prime Minister and Chancellor are forcing us to think differently. We’re already bringing down the cost of services through technology, but we also need to enable people to take responsibility for their own lives and avoid becoming passive service recipients. I see it as my job to set out a compelling view of an affordable future where citizens are well- educated, independent and resilient. That’s what I want for everyone, for me and my family.”



“There’s no certainty about the future now, so it’s about taking small steps and feeling your way through it.”

QUOTE

Chris Norton

Strategic Finance Manager,
Warwickshire County Council



ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

“**Y**ou have to be positive about austerity. Yes, it’s challenging, but it makes us more innovative.” Anisa Darr works for Barnet, an authority which has innovated by reviewing different delivery models. Indeed, innovation is very much a collective activity at Barnet – Anisa references the new strategic partnership with Cambridge Education, which is providing a variety of services to Barnet schools, as a good example of that.

As Director of Resources, Anisa manages the council’s overall finances, operating in an environment where back office functions are all outsourced. She is directly responsible for estates, finance, health and safety, HR, information management and IT, and also supports a number of other areas, including developing financial models for delivery of mixed tenure and affordable housing.

Anisa works particularly closely with staff from Capita plc, one of the council’s principal strategic partners. “Those relationships may not always be easy,” she says, “but they are important and beneficial, and we constantly review how we can work better with our partners.”

By 2020 Barnet aims to halve its 2010 operating budget and Anisa is adept at identifying opportunities for making savings. Community safety, for example, is an area where the activities of the council and the police currently overlap and better integration could deliver financial benefits. However, she says, “It isn’t enough just to identify those opportunities, you have to drive through those changes, which means bringing people with you.”

Cultural changes certainly go along with that, but, she says, “Just because we’ve done something a certain way in the past doesn’t mean we always have to do it that way.” Communicating these transformations to residents, staff and members clearly, in non-bureaucratic language, is something she sees as vital, though.

She also believes in focusing on the long-term picture. “We all know what the objectives are, what outcomes we want, and sometimes you have to let go of the little things, maybe a minor point, for the bigger gains.”

For Anisa, the key to thinking creatively about the pressures on council services and



Anisa Darr

Director of Resources,
Commissioning Group, Barnet
Council

PROFILE

finances is to prepare – “Or over-prepare!” She says, “It takes a lot more effort, but by looking ahead you can respond imaginatively.”

COMMISSIONER

**Ian Lloyd**

Transformation Manager, and
Strategic Revenues and Benefits
Lead, Isle of Wight Council

MEETING EVERYONE'S EXPECTATIONS

We are having to make difficult decisions all the time and the biggest challenge is to bring people with us. Members of the public have expectations about services – that's what they pay council tax for. Elected councillors get voted in on a specific mandate. They care about delivering services and resist what they see as reductions. In our case, we have had to change the one-stop shop from an open-access, face-to-face approach to a centralised 'digital by default' system.

All organisations are in moving in the same direction on this, but it's far from easy. It feels as though we are stuck in the middle. As middle managers we are at the sharp end of trying to balance the budget and provide services, and that can feel a lonely place to be sometimes. We've had to think creatively about what we provide and how, and show leadership for our colleagues.

Our new approach, SWISH (Strategic Wight Island Support Hub), still allows for people to book an appointment one-to-one when it's needed, and that's been important politically, but if the platform we've created works, it's more efficient

and cheaper to maximise the use of digital transactions.

I concentrate on the positives. We've got good relationships with Isle Help (organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureau and Age UK IW) and the Job Centre, and one of the three badges/hats/job roles I now wear is an NHS one. We're aiming to bring the telephony of all the agencies on the island together through the My Life a Full Life initiative.

I'm constantly telling the story, sharing how and why the changes are happening, linking what we're doing to the future. You can't be aloof or hide behind the legislation. Elected councillors of all sides have a difficult role and can be frustrated with the choices presented, and we have to help them through this to move difficult decisions forward. The amount of change in the last six years has been unbelievable. I have to put my own feelings to one side and stay professional. I came into public service to try to achieve a difference. I intend to continue trying, despite the many challenges faced by local government.

“Adapt and accept change. The good old days are gone. Let’s work hard to create a brighter future for generations to come.”



Luke Keen

Highways Network Change
Manager, Place Directorate,
Birmingham City Council

QUOTE



**Andy Burns**

Director of Finance and Resources, Staffordshire County Council, in collaboration with Dawn Reeves, former local authority corporate director, consultant and facilitator supporting creative change in public services

THE MOTHER OF INVENTION

Necessity sits at the kitchen table, head unusually heavy, shoulders slumped. If she's said it once, she's said it a hundred times: "It's time to leave home." In the lounge sits the daughter, headphones in, finger flicking across a tablet. The son, a grown man, football kit dumped on the floor, sprawls half-asleep, half-watching TV.

Am I a bad mother? All I want is for them to be happy, healthy, do their own thing, whatever that turns out to be. They've seen what it's been like the last few years. We've got by, but it hasn't been easy. "Treat us like adults," they say. Well that's all I'm trying to do now.

They're just like me those kids. Creative and resourceful, they don't want to be dependent on their parents. But then again, maybe I haven't exactly helped matters, always being there for them, happy to be the provider. Necessity bends down to pick up a smelly sock, wondering why she's still doing that.

No good reminding them they're clinging to something they don't actually want anymore. It's in one ear, out the other. Yeah, yeah, whatever. Better to remind them how they felt coming back from that festival, confident, walking taller somehow. And maybe take a leaf out their gran's book. She wanted to be in her home right to the end, independent – and she was.

It's scary to fly the nest, she knows that. Life's hard and expensive. It would be good to wrap the parental arm around and say everything will be OK, but realistically they aren't going to have their own bedroom to come back to anymore. At least not permanently. When they are in a jam, yes, of course, always. But still it weighs heavily.

Necessity puts the kettle on. The strong tea revives her. Let them complain it's not fair, she thinks. We live in a democracy. That's the way it is. Deep down they

know it's time to stand on their own two feet and do things differently. And I need to sort myself out as much as they do, so I can help them when they really need me, not just because it's what I've always done.

Switching off the TV, Necessity stands before them. "Look kids," she says, "it's time to get real."

“ Creative and resourceful, they don’t want to be dependent on their parents. But then again, maybe I haven’t exactly helped matters, always being there for them, happy to be the provider. Necessity bends down to pick up a smelly sock, wondering why she’s still doing that. ”



QUOTE

Martin Reeves
Chief Executive,
Coventry City Council

“Optimistic realism will need to pervade our leadership – so let’s not accept pessimism!”

THE 21ST CENTURY
PUBLIC SERVANT
TAKES THE INITIATIVE,
ACTS AS A MUNICIPAL
ENTREPRENEUR, COMES
UP WITH THE IDEAS AND
MAKES THEM HAPPEN,
IS FLEXIBLE AND OPEN
TO DOING NEW THINGS
IN DIFFERENT WAYS,
IS READY TO TAKE ON
DIFFERENT ROLES

J. STAPLES FAMILY BUTCHER

ALL MEAT
Freshly Cut

DEEP FREEZE MEAT SUPPLIED
High in quality. Low in price

WARNING
CLOSURE OF
TELEVISION

Pork
Draft
per lb
1.75

Lamb
Chop
2lb
1.40

Kohabs any four £2.50	FRESH Chicken legs £2.95	CHICKEN DRUMSTICKS 2lb £2.60	£15 MEAT PACK Lamb chops Chicken Drumsticks Pork chops Steak	£18 MEAT PACK Pork chops Chicken Drumsticks Pork chops Steak	£28 MEAT PACK Mixed meat Chicken Portions Lamb chops Pork chops Steak
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**TODAY'S
SPECIAL
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STEAK
£2.95^P
1¹/₂ LB

RIB EYE
STEAK
£3.40^P
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STEAK
£3.75^P
1¹/₂ LB

**TODAY'S
SPECIAL
OFFER**



MARKET VALUE

At 13 I was working on Wolverhampton Market, a fantastic place and time for a young lad to learn about becoming an entrepreneur. However, there was more to life than selling toilet rolls, so I chose to work hard at school as well, but from that early age I developed a passion for business. From selling T-shirts for school plays, to running my own music rehearsal studio, as a growing teenager and into my early twenties, I always had a number of jobs in the go.

So why am I telling you this? Because most people in local government don't have an entrepreneurial background. They came into local government to deliver a public service and the word 'profit' isn't part of their vocabulary, but with the right mindset councils have the opportunity to generate income and use it for the public good.

I now lead the South Staffordshire Business Hub, and I love thinking creatively and turning ideas into action. I'm allowed to think commercially, actively encouraged to do so, and we make a profit. I feel in control and have autonomy at work.

We start by listening to our customers and businesses, and begin building services based on what they want. Our Business Hub now provides an Entrepreneurs' Club, a call management service and Brilliant Leadership seminars. It's smart and dynamic. We've developed a Good Life Deals App that helps residents save money and connects local businesses with local people. There's also on-site managed accommodation where businesses can grow.

When we looked to see how we could generate more income we came up with lots of small ways that didn't really seem to add up, but as we've grown, we've branded and packaged things together and it does make a significant difference. It's about becoming self-sufficient and not dependent on grants – that's our council's target for 2020.

I have self-belief and confidence, a just-do-it kind of attitude. I'm always scanning for opportunities – that's me – but it's also what I think will make a cultural shift in local authorities in future. I can see all sorts of untapped resources and, with a supportive organisation behind me, I know I can make a difference for all our communities.



Imre Tolgyesi

Partnership Development Manager,
Policy and Partnerships Department,
South Staffordshire Council

PROFILE

MUNICIPAL ENTREPRENEUR



EASY AS A B C

PROFILE

Karen Grave

Interim Head of Human Resources
and Organisation Development,
Gloucestershire County Council

My story is a small but beautiful piece of operational improvement work in the HR team, which had massive benefits to our schools and our staff. The work was done when I was on assignment at Buckinghamshire County Council.

Team members used to look after a number of schools based on an alphabetical list system. The team were always busy, but there are peak busy periods with schools. The challenge was that most people in the team worked part-time, which meant that if they were off, schools had to wait far too long for a response, and we had backlogs. We clearly needed to change, so we decided a new way of working was key.

I'm flexible and open to doing things in new ways, but at the start the team were hugely resistant to this because they believed that having a known advisor was really critical. We realised that was important, but knew we had to provide a better service, so, taking the initiative, we piloted allocating work across the team, irrespective of what letter the school's name began with.

To facilitate this we designed a new role that focused on checking all queries so that we had all the information needed to answer the query first-time around. Where we knew we had an ongoing query or a complex new query arose, we would give the work to a team member who really knew the school well.

That way we balanced using existing relationships and knowledge with starting to build knowledge about the schools across the team. We ran this approach over six weeks and team productivity increased by an average of 150%. What really helped was that the team were directly involved in designing the approach. I provided the challenge and got things going, but once we had an agreed approach the team ran with implementing the change.

At the end of the pilot every member of the team said that they would recommend this way of working across the council. We built resilience, capability and capacity for more change, and it was a brilliant result.



Jo Panther

Organisational Development
Consultant, Workforce Strategy
and Organisational Development,
Warwickshire County Council

QUOTE

“I have challenged the traditional approach to supporting managers through change. We have reduced the number of face-to-face workshops focused on skills and content, and introduced peer learning. We gave managers a room, a safe space and an important topic, facilitated with good, open coaching questions and stood back. We are encouraging creativity, personal responsibility and at the same time building confidence. It’s a journey of self-discovery, but we’re finding new ways of working in complex times.”



Ayub Khan MBE
Customer Service Manager,
One Stop Shop, Registration and
Library Service, Warwickshire
County Council

OVER TO YOU

Relecting on the three years it took to transform library services in Warwickshire, Ayub Khan wonders how he and his team found time to do it all – particularly the extensive consultations, for which they won a number of awards.

Cuts to library services have been contested in many areas across the country, so the county decided to invest the time up front in a grown-up conversation with communities. “We didn’t say the service would be improved. It was about making our contribution to council savings targets. We told people we just couldn’t afford 34 libraries. It was a tough message, especially when our jobs were at risk,” explains Ayub.

The data supported the changes. Research showed that 90% of visits were to just 18 of the 34 branches, so 16 libraries were designated as no longer sustainable. “We said to local groups, we need you to become social enterprises – community-managed libraries – and we’ll support you to do it.

“It was an emotional rollercoaster, but what made it work was being flexible and open to all options. We said no one size fits all

– and meant it. In one community a dance school came forward and said if you put in a new spring floor for us, we’ll run the library. That was unusual, but we found a one-off grant and three years later the library is still thriving.”

In all, 12 libraries were transferred to community management. Subsequently only two closed and those communities now receive a weekly mobile service. While many transformation initiatives start off by cutting staff and management, Warwickshire did the opposite and Ayub considers this a key success factor.

“We kept the capacity to make the change. We invested in retraining and upskilling, and restructured the workforce with not one single compulsory redundancy, because we had time to plan. Three years on it’s going strong, there’s been no drop off in volunteers and relationships have really improved. We are proud of what we’ve achieved. Looking back, community-managed libraries have become the strongest advocates for the library profession and county-run libraries. We now have a vibrant and more sustainable service.”

ROAD SAFETY

Colin Parr describes how the mother of a 13-year-old girl complained to police about a taxi driver who, she alleged, had made advances to her daughter. After much pestering the girl gave him a phone number – but it was her mother’s rather than her own. Within minutes of dropping the girl off, the driver sent a text.

The Jay Report into child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham found that taxi drivers had played a central role in transporting abused children around town. In Wolverhampton, where Colin lead the licensing team, in order to ensure drivers suspected of inappropriate behaviour are taken off the road as quickly as possible, councillors have passed on the ground decision-making to licensing officers. “We have in-depth knowledge, know what needs to be done and we’re trusted to make the decisions,” says Colin.

In the case of the 13-year-old girl, these devolved powers meant the licensing team could respond immediately. They obtained a screenshot of the text, brought the driver in for questioning within two hours and, as a result, his licence was revoked. When he

subsequently reapplied for his licence his application was refused, and when he went to court to appeal, he lost again. As Colin explains, not only do licensing officers have the experience to deal with situations like this one, but they also make highly credible witnesses.

Of course, only a small minority of taxi drivers are involved with CSE, but their work puts them in a prime position to spot possible offenders and identify vulnerable people, so Wolverhampton’s training programme for new drivers now has a strong focus on CSE awareness and local reporting processes. The council and the local taxi trade have agreed that this training will shortly be mandatory for all the city’s 1,200 taxi drivers.

Home Office guidance states that drivers must have been free of serious offences for five years to obtain a taxi licence. However, Wolverhampton has taken that further and won’t normally grant a licence to someone with a sexual offences conviction, regardless of how long ago it was. Every new applicant or driver under review is also screened by the Local Authority Designated



Colin Parr
Head of Governance,
Wolverhampton City Council

PROFILE

Officer for Children’s Safeguarding before a decision is made on their suitability.

It’s a source of pride to Colin that, since these changes were introduced, every single safeguarding issue involving taxi drivers has been dealt with within one working day. “We’re always trying to be innovative, to push it further,” he says. “If it’s in the public interest I’m prepared to take risks. I see that as doing my job.”

**Peter Smith**

Group Manager, Adult Social Care
Short Term Services, Isle Of Wight

BODY OF EVIDENCE

I came from a private sector retail background. The economy was dire and my CV said 'Redundant... redundant... redundant...' I got a part-time job in adult social care and never looked back.

It was clear when I first arrived that the service wasn't up to scratch. I wanted to understand the numbers, what the data was telling us about how we were working, so I looked at it like a business. What was productivity like? What was the return on investment?

A lot of our services – re-ablement, adaptations, telecare and the community alarm system – lend themselves to being traded. We've developed joint ventures. Some services are partly commissioned by the Clinical Commissioning Group, and some are purchased by individuals. We've got a specific segment of the adult care support market – we concentrate on short-term services – so we're not a threat to other providers. It's a complementary approach.

In the last three years, with the same budget and the same staff group, we have increased efficiency by over 100%. Our services are

regulated by the Care Quality Commission, so we have to do a lot of work with our customers to make sure that the quality of our services is there, whatever changes we make. The regulation helps keep the focus on quality, but we also want to make sure the services support people to live independently, and if we don't have the quality, people come back into the system.

My teams have responded really well to this. We've all taken initiative. We've used the evidence to change shift patterns and referral processes. One of the good things is that we've been able to demonstrate where we are performing above the national average. The demand is there and the business case for additional staff is writing itself.

Don't get me wrong, the circumstances we operate in are seriously challenging, but the enthusiasm to do a good job for the public is there. You could talk to any of my management team and you'd hear a similar message.

GOLD MINING

Soft and stylish, Yuki's natural shoes glide along the corridor towards the finance director's office. Unseen, she places a bright, white copy of the document on her boss' desk. She's marked the signature boxes with small yellow tags. It's a ritual she enjoys. Six months of detailed financial analysis and planning is complete. The deal can be signed and they – the council – will have bought its fourth airport.

Also this year, on the strength of their balance sheet, Yuki has quietly negotiated the borrowing to build a new motorway junction, opening up development land and creating jobs and revenue. In an ordinary office, at a standard computer, she's been running financial models that just might shape a sustainable future. In her mind, the budget savings are the rock in a stream. The income she helps to generate is the water that gradually erodes the immovable object.

"It's not enough." The director taps the top of the screen, onto the next thing already. "We need to start mining – think big, go prospecting."

Yuki shudders at the thought of men panning for gold in muddy trenches, sweating backs out in the blazing sun.

"The government says big data is a minable commodity. You young people seem to be able to make money out of apps and the like. I want you to take the lead, get your hands dirty and see if you can dig up some nuggets."

Behind the computer Yuki freezes, her stomach drops. Buying assets, investing long-term, that's what I'm good at, she thinks. The boss gives a thin smile that Yuki chooses to read as 'rather you than me'.

Alone, she begins her research, exploring the landscape. It's not the risks Yuki minds. They can be calculated and mitigated. Nor is it the fact that she'll have



Dawn Reeves

Former local authority corporate director, consultant and facilitator supporting creative change in public services

FLASH
FICTION



GOLD MINING

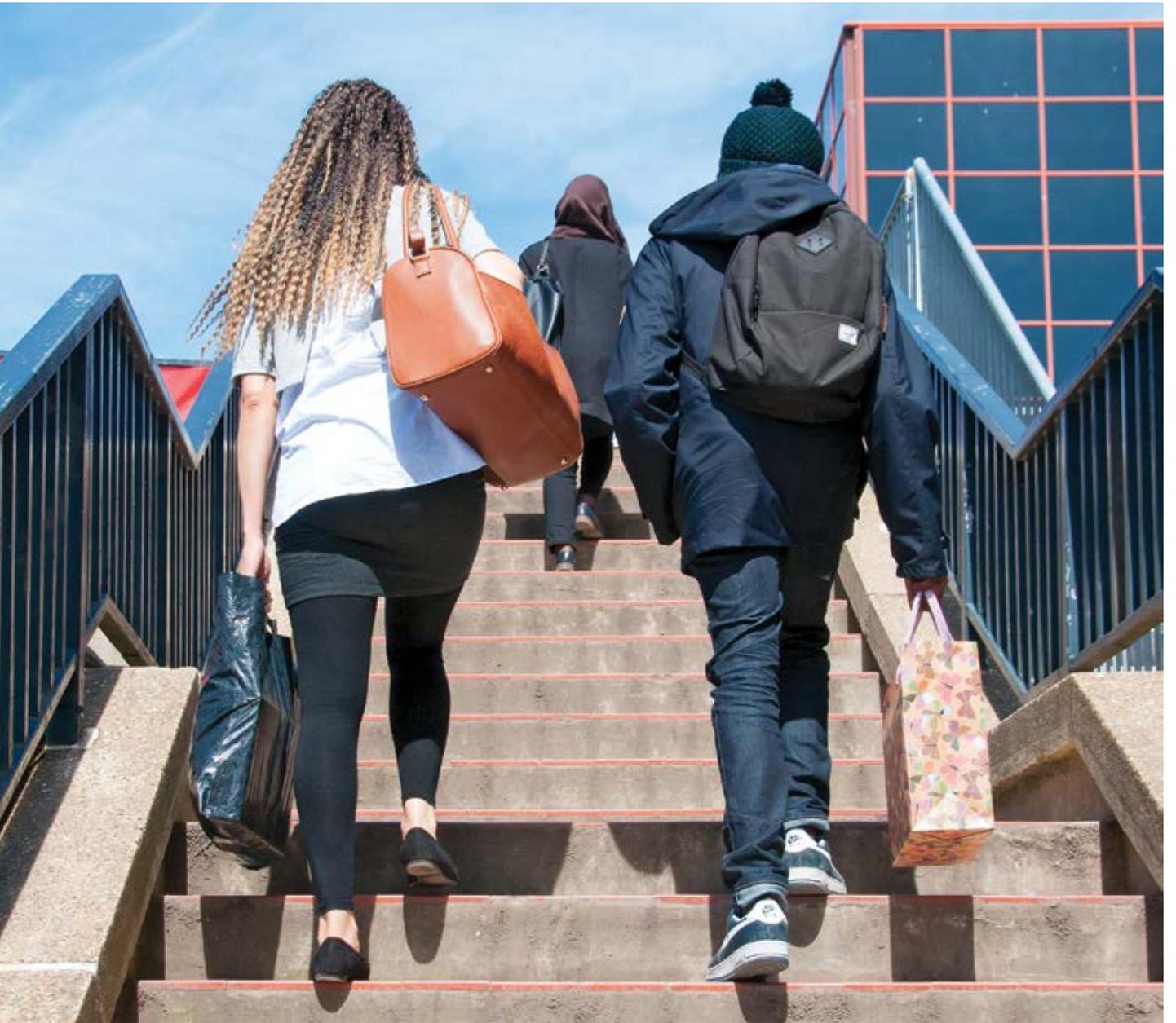


to learn the tangled legalese of data protection. What she fears is the exposure. Mouth dry, she realises she'll have to step into the spotlight.

By the end of the week Yuki is more comfortable with the idea of exploiting information. It's early days, but other councils are starting to make progress, to see returns. It might be a new resource stream, a new way of wearing down the savings target. The boss' smile, she decides, was actually a vote of confidence and she knows that she – they – can do this.

“ In her mind, the budget savings are the rock in a stream. The income she helps to generate is the water that gradually erodes the immovable object. ”

THE 21ST CENTURY
PUBLIC SERVANT
**EMBRACES DISTRIBUTED
AND COLLABORATIVE
LEADERSHIP, REJECTS
TRADITIONAL HEROIC
LEADERSHIP, TRUSTS
AND EMPOWERS PEOPLE
TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY,
SUPPORTS LEADERS AT
ALL LEVELS FOR THE
BENEFIT OF THE PLACE**



TOOTH AND NAIL

I cut my leadership and management teeth in a leisure centre. You deal with all walks of life and I learnt what makes people tick. As my career progressed, I suppose what people have recognised in me is that I'm prepared to grasp the nettle; to deal with the difficult stuff rather than just talking about it. I'm practical. I like to see things delivered.

We needed a solution for the Countryside Service. It's discretionary and the team were at risk of redundancy. My approach is about not giving up, so I wanted to find a solution for the staff and Countryside manager. I listened and encouraged, and I supported the manager to come up with his own solution. The result is a great partnership with a voluntary organisation. We give them a small grant on a sliding scale while they become self-sustaining. The manager was transferred across and left with a smile on his face, optimistic about the opportunity to do what he loved in a new environment.

As the number of managers in the council has reduced, a range of services have been bolted onto my department. I now manage 787 out of 3,500 council staff. I enjoy the

variety, but I've taken on some under-performing services and have struggled to get the technical knowledge to really understand the detail of the services in the way I'd normally do. It's out of my comfort zone and I worry about the sustainability of it. I'm always open to seeking help, but I have to live with serious risk while we sort things out.

I know I tend to soak up responsibility, to take the weight off my managers, but that's not because I see myself as a heroic leader. As I say, I fight on, I don't give up on services. There are people who can find new solutions, they just need the space and the support to do it.



Alex Minns

Head of Commercial Services,
Isle of Wight Council

PROFILE



QUOTE

Tom Pike

Strategic Lead – Programmes and Performance, Barnet Council

“Collaborative leadership is definitely something you can cultivate, and as organisations become more complex I can’t see how public servants can succeed in the future by working in silos.”



STANDING FOR SOMETHING

People in this country value public services and, although they complain sometimes, they, like me, see them as what holds our society together.

When you get the job as chief executive people want to know what you stand for, and I stand for public services. I don't stand for 'one council'. Although I'm conscious of the need to present as 'one council', I'm more interested in how local residents see us and experience our services.

These views inform our version of distributed leadership. The way we work is to get the right people together around a problem and use a deliberate 'solution-focused approach' to solve it for the public.

The behaviours we model are about really opening up, talking to staff without agendas, getting straight to what matters. And we're big on coaching. I took a Level 7 coaching qualification and now more than 350 managers are being trained in the basic tools and techniques of coaching with 30 of these qualifying to Level 5. This is part of a wider leadership development programme.

I think a lot about the psychological contract, about staff perceptions. We can all come to work saying, "I don't agree with the government's agenda – it's frustrating." But actually this is a great place to work. We understand our colleagues' motivations and we make sure we share the tools and techniques, provide training in new skills like commissioning or building resilience, with the aim of achieving our shared priorities and serving the public.

Back in 2010, these were the principles that got us out of government intervention in Children's Services faster than any other authority in the country. Today it's meant that we've had the relationships in place to negotiate three major alternative ventures with no industrial relations problems.

What I do personally is tell stories. I keep painting pictures of success. I constantly ask colleagues, "Is this still the right thing to do?" and if they say, "Yes," we carry on. It's important to have a vision of the future. That vision is never going to be perfect, but the process of trying to get a grip on the future is really energising.



Anthony May
Chief Executive,
Nottinghamshire County Council

PROFILE



Simon Furlong
Deputy Chief Fire Officer,
Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

RANK INSUBORDINATION

In an emergency environment I need my officers to do what I say. We don't have time to collaborate. We're drilled and prepared, and we have to respond. But we bring this command-and-control approach into the organisation and it's become a problem for us. We only have one way of operating and this type of heroic leadership doesn't lead to innovation or facilitate solutions from the people who are in the best position to provide them.

I'm ex-military and it's been as much a challenge to me as it has to the organisation. In my journey over the last 18 months it's been hard to admit I don't know everything. In a uniformed service it goes against expectations. In the past, when 'things have been said' – code for 'you've disagreed with a superior' – there have been consequences. Culturally, there's deference to the hierarchy and not as much questioning to get to the best possible solution as we'd like.

A good test of this came up recently. I'd just given a presentation about the way forward on an important regional project I was leading on. A member of staff told the whole room that, although my idea looked good

on paper, technically it wouldn't work. I took a deep breath and said, "Ok, let's talk this through." I could have pushed it through, but after listening and properly engaging it was clear the member of staff was right, and we got a better product.

The idea of 'good to great' resonates with me. We are already a good organisation, but I want to leave behind an absolutely fantastic one. We've been working on this as a management team and with our heads of departments on the budget – giving managers the ownership of a transformation programme that's about doing the right thing, not just making savings. And not seeking permission all the time. It's a work in progress.



Colin Parr

Head of Governance,
Wolverhampton City Council

QUOTE

“I believe in allowing the people who know the most about the service to crack on and manage it, whatever level they’re at. I look after a range of services, but I can’t be expert in all of them. I know my own strengths and weaknesses, and I’m good at managing. I always ask my colleagues what I can do to help them deliver.”



QUOTE

Karen Riley

Customer Services Team Leader,
South Staffordshire Council

“Encourage your team’s voice, share their success, promote their ideas and give praise. Break down barriers by encouraging face-to-face engagement with colleagues, and unite services to achieve a seamless experience for your customers.”





Trudy Birtwell

Head of Leadership and
Organisational Development,
Solace Group

QUOTE

“These are uncertain times for the public sector and sometimes the issues are so complex that the only way to tackle them is by collaborating with others. However, it’s essential to identify a common language and a common purpose. If that doesn’t happen, people can have very different expectations, which can potentially lead to conflict. Finding a common language and a common purpose can be a challenge, but it’s vital.”



Rebecca Smith

Communications Officer,
Buckinghamshire County Council

QUO VADIS? OR WHAT HAVE THE ROMANS EVER DONE FOR US?

Scipio Africanus, general of Rome and champion of heroic campaigns against the great Hannibal, spots an advert in the local paper and smiles like a smug cat.

“Are you someone who puts the population’s needs first, has a long-term strategic view for the region, but isn’t risk-averse, and could spearhead innovation and change?”

*

Local council officer: Well, Mr Africanus, basically the job involves overseeing education, health, social care, roads, as part of a wider transport strategy of course, business and innovation, plus fulfilling our councillors’ priorities...

Scipio: Let me stop you right there – did you just say roads? [does Brian Blessed guffaw] Consider that done! I shall raise taxes to pay for improvements.

LCO: I’m afraid you can’t do that. There is a limit to tax increases, otherwise it involves a costly referendum, never mind potential local resistance. You would need to find the money from somewhere else.

S: [coughs in annoyance] Right, OK, well what about education? I can guarantee you all young people will speak Latin.

LCO: Yes, perhaps, but they may not all want to speak Latin. We take into account the needs of all our children, young people and adults here. Some will have special needs and require extra help, while others will want to look at different ways of training until they are 18.

S: Can’t we just stick them in the army?

LCO: No, we can’t. We do need to offer a wider choice of career options.

S: [muttering] This isn't going as I expected. [Booming again] Your demands are more complex and standards are far higher than I first imagined. Are you sure I can't just fix the roads and let the rest sort itself out?

LCO: [rolls eyes] No, you can't. Our objective is to improve the lives of our residents, while delivering more for less. Look, to be honest I don't think you're really up to the task.

S: [spluttering] What you're describing is an impossible undertaking! I have looked despair in the eye and stared down death. I have marched soldiers to every far-flung corner of the empire and returned triumphant. I am a great military strategist and a decorated hero. How do I not get the job?

LCO: Because, Mr Africanus, it's not all about the roads.

“ I have marched soldiers to every far-flung corner of the empire and returned triumphant. I am a great military strategist and a decorated hero. How do I not get the job? ”

**Mark Rogers**

Chief Executive, Birmingham
City Council, and President,
Solace Group

BLANK 93/LOOK DAD, NO TUNES

“Play one the drummer knows!” So goes the cliched riposte from the disgruntled punters.

Back in the beginning the band was full of youthful vim, vigour, oestrogen and testosterone. Different backgrounds each, but bound by a common cause – an excoriating and unifying scorn for the soporific and complacent noodlings, musings and multi-orifice diarrhoea of the previous generation – and all obsessed by building a (new) year zero.

Of course, the egos were there from the start, but the passion to be different in an effort to make a difference imposed a discipline and orthodoxy that contained the individualism. They were all frontwomen and men, taunting, cajoling, provoking and mobilising in their own way, but with a shared sense of purpose – to make the old look ridiculous and the future exciting.

And, as upstarts, they were embraced and scorned in equal measure. They basked in the adoration and fed off the negative energy. Their art (this was so much more than music) erupted and the world stood at their feet.

With time, the adrenalin subsided and something of a rhythm emerged. They could still be edgy, but now with a calculated view to holding onto their original ideals and support, while also drawing in a new, more mainstream audience. Sniff it cautiously, but there was a whiff of compromise in the air.

And therein lay the trouble. The freneticism that had held them together was superseded by a slower pace that allowed for reflection, and reflection allowed for the differences, as opposed to the similarities, to be unleashed. So, where once everyone had enjoyed that initial collective importance, individually they now nurtured their own sense of self-importance.

Soon they were all leading from the front in turn, not together. Soon, there were solo tours, one-off collaborations and all the rest. And, inevitably, one of them rose above the others. The PR machine vomited out the beautiful lies about “exploring new avenues”, “working with those who originally inspired me” (oh what irony) and all the other contrived self-justifications that come with delusions of importance and grandeur.

And so it all ended in tears. Fear and loathing dressed up in the emperor’s new clothes of “musical differences”.

And what of the fans? Taunted, abused and treated with consumerist indifference by repeated comeback tours, endless reissues (*Lost Demos Volumes 1-4* anyone?) and, worst of all, a scarcely concealed contempt for the audience that made them.

But, fear not, for here come the new puritans with their righteous maelstrom.

THE 21ST CENTURY
PUBLIC SERVANT NEEDS
**FLEXIBLE, SUPPORTIVE
ORGANISATIONS THAT
MAKE SURE HIERARCHY
OR PROCESSES DON'T GET
IN THE WAY OF BEING
EFFECTIVE, THAT ENABLE
WORKING BEYOND
SILOS, THAT ARE MORE
AGILE AND USE NEW
TECHNOLOGY**



SHOW OF STRENGTHS

I'm excited about the power of the people who work for public sector bodies and I want to harness that energy. We're developing whole-system leadership that enables frontline staff to solve problems together, without our organisational processes getting in the way.

And by the way, we recognise our officers might not have all the answers. A strengths-based approach rather than 'we'll fix it for you' thinking is the way forward. We don't assume we have all the answers. The public often know more about what they need, and have skills and resources in their networks to find solutions. We work with their strengths and build on them.

To achieve our aims for Greater Manchester and deliver on devolution, we have to work in a flexible, fluid and supportive way so that we share our expertise across and within sectors. We've got real ambition in Salford and Greater Manchester, but the strength of our partnerships is crucial.

We're lucky that we're working from a good base, but what's different in the new landscape is the quality of the relationships

needed to underpin how we work. We've had to look through different lenses to really understand what life is like for our partners, their motivations and constraints.

Data sharing, for example, is a really big nut to crack for the public sector. Data protection legislation means some partners can't share data and looking through a different lens, if you like, enabled us to focus on what we can share rather than what we can't.

We are also meeting outcomes for children in new ways. When we ran a 'service hack' recently to raise aspirations of young people in one of our deprived areas where involvement is low, businesses were queuing up to get involved. Coming out of that event are five potential business ideas for the young people themselves to develop with mentoring by local business people.

In another part of the city there were more examples of entrepreneurial spirit – someone who had dropped out of school taught himself oil painting from the internet and is now selling his paintings online.

We're also working with larger businesses to



Debbie Brown

Director of Service Reform and Development, Salford City Council

PROFILE

create greater social connections between their outlets and our adult services. I think what we're creating is a 21st century version of social responsibility in communities.

SYSTEM ARCHITECT

**Martin Sadler**

Programme Director – IT Shared Services, London Boroughs of Camden, Haringey and Islington

CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION

Local government often looks at its neighbours' services with scorn or envy. Add this to members' passion for protecting their own territory and the need to merge different 'cultures' (often a shorthand for 'Let's not bother, it just won't work, we've tried that before') – and sharing services can look like a difficult prospect.

I've been brought in as an independent to build a shared IT and digital service, merging three council IT departments into one. The ambition is to save money for all the organisations and, more importantly, to deliver top-class services to all the citizens and to the frontline working services. It's an exciting opportunity to radically change how IT is delivered and almost re-build an IT department from the ground up. And already it's changing relationships.

Happily, the members (so far) are all extremely supportive. They all have reasons to share services and, although there may be slightly different motivations, they are closely enough aligned for the project to be workable.

We are creating something flexible and responsive that takes the best of what we

have and shares it. It's great to be removing duplication and automating all the transactions where human activity and interaction don't add value. Staff are being encouraged to work across borders, to learn and share their expertise, to seize the opportunities that are about to emerge and to help build their own service.

Getting over the ego and accepting cultural difference is a small part of the work we have to do together. We can and should be sharing services, staff and knowledge a lot more than we have in the past. This way of working is more efficient, so it delivers better quality frontline services to the public and saves all three councils money.



Grahame Mitchell

Assistant Chief Fire Officer,
Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

QUOTE

“The Fire and Rescue Services have a reputation for being can-do. We are task- and resolution-focused, but we have to adapt, so I go to meetings with an open mind. At the moment we’re thinking about the bigger picture – all ‘blue light’ services coming together and sharing accommodation, for example. That willingness to be flexible and to talk brings us closer to our aim of maximum public safety and maximum value for the public purse.”



*“New approaches are born from purpose,
fluidity and structure.”*

QUOTE

Jo Panther

Organisational Development
Consultant, Workforce Strategy
and Organisational Development,
Warwickshire County Council



NEW BUILD

We've got an operational need for a base in the Carterton area so we're building a community safety centre. We don't want it to be a fire station, we want it to be a community asset where the lights are never off. It's being designed to be a local home for the Fire Service, police and the Royal Air Force family liaison (it's close to RAF Brize Norton), and we want health, the voluntary sector and the district and parish councils to be part of it, too.

It's the sort of project that could easily be in the 'too hard' box. The money comes through so many different government departments and it's hard not getting hung up on who's going to pay what. It's also hard getting the design right, so that it pleases everyone, but this is exactly what public sector organisations need to be doing. If it's the right thing to do for our citizens, if it brings better outcomes, we can't let our organisational processes or structures get in the way.

As individuals and organisations we need to be less precious. If we're not careful we can spend too much time discussing

governance arrangements, the systems have to work for us. If someone starts querying the percentage of the electricity bill, I think that's the state speaking, they're not speaking on behalf of the citizen.

We're being as open as we can. As long as we can demonstrate we're improving results for the public and reducing overheads, we can be flexible about the Ts and Cs in year one. Our attitude is we're at the crossroads of an exciting brand new offer across the public service, so let's see how it goes. Let's build confidence and generate interest so that local agencies actively want to move in and we have collective ownership of it.

The plans have been really welcomed by the community. One of the phrases I use most at the moment is, "Let's make common sense into common practice." That's what this is about.



Dave Etheridge

Chief Fire Officer, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service

PROFILE



QUOTE

Tina Ricketts

Director of Human Resources,
Gloucestershire Care Services
NHS Trust

“A clear organisational development strategy is key to the success of integrated working. We have developed a set of shared values and behaviours, but found that differing funding and commissioning frameworks across health and social care meant that these were sometimes in conflict. A sustainability and transformation plan is currently being developed for the Gloucestershire health and social care economy, and this is centred around flexible and supportive organisations.”

PLS RT

@Southdondc

Morning! Bright and sunny day Wednesday in town centre today – send us your pictures of Southdon in the sun and we'll retweet!

@Jacksdad

Want a picture? I'll send you one of my 80-year-old mum in tears because of the louts outside her house. Need action now!

@Southdondc

Sorry to hear that @Jacksdad. What's happening exactly? Is it a police issue?

@Jacksdad

Louts kicking ball against wall of her house. Giving her lip when she tells them to stop. Chucking rubbish in garden now (1/2)

@Jacksdad

Housing association, police don't want to know. Say not their issue. Louts bullying an old lady apparently not crime (2/2)

@Southdondc

Hi @Jacksdad. Can you DM me the address? I can check if community safety team are aware

@Southdondc

Morning! It's Friday! Are you looking forward to the weekend? Plenty to do in Southdon – check out events on www.southdon.gov.uk

@Jacksdad

Are you same council tweeter from Wednesday?

@Southdondc

Yes! Hi @Jacksdad. How's your mum? Did Tina from community safety get in touch?



Fran Collingham

Assistant Director,
Communications, Coventry City
Council

FLASH
FICTION



PLS RT



@Jacksdad

Yep. And copper went to mum's who called housing while he was there. And now someone from youth team involved (1/2)

@Jacksdad

Gather you made quite a few calls for me and my mum. And seemed to know right people to talk to who could do something (2/2)

@Southdondc

Good. Hope we've been able to help

@Jacksdad

At least right people are taking an interest now. Impressed that your Twitter account is run by real human, too. Thanks

@Southdondc

That's great! We do what we can

@Jacksdad

Just about to send you a picture of a giant pothole in my street now. It needs fixing – sure you will know what to do

@Southdondc

Look forward to that @jacksdad. Thanks

CHALK AND CHEESE

Mike and Sally. Chalk and cheese. Not necessarily good and bad. Each helpful in their own way.

Take yesterday's 'Emerging Issues' to staff and partners. I scanned the list and pinged it out to a few likely collaborators, with 'Witchcraft and Child Protection' highlighted and 'Community-needed low skill/living wage jobs' as a query. There were several pings back, so I might get a thinking group around those.

Then the two usual responses.

Mike: Sure you can take on two more strands? You already have a lot to complete. New things might pop up. Wouldn't want our capacity stretched too thin. We need to be seen to be able to step up. Just saying...

Sally: Enthusiastic as ever. Keep me in the loop. I know a residents' group who are keen on the community-jobs stuff. And where are we with thoughts around arts for civic values?

Chalk and cheese.

Mike tries. It's as if he has read the manual, but doesn't believe it. He still has an eye on being prized by senior staff and members. He'll get there. It's good to have his checks and balances, I suppose.

Sally is into linking everything together. Sometimes, with her, it's a case of more is better.

I couldn't go back to having a single manager, meeting just for catch-ups, appraisals to check that plans on paper are relentlessly trundling along in spite of any shifting realities.



Geoff Bateson

Birmingham-based writer, who spent more than 40 years working in local authorities

FLASH
FICTION



CHALK AND CHEESE



I prefer this continuous contact – up, down and across – and the capacity to move quickly. The support from peers is great. There are strong challenges, but at least there is some understanding around the messiness of our work.

I used to feel like a crew member on a large ship steaming ahead. Now it's more like being a little speedboat, zooming in and out as needed.

Maybe Mike is right, telling me to switch the engine off sometimes, to get a sense of the bigger picture.

Sally is pleased that I can be trusted, that I deliver. I just hope it's appreciated. Sally tells me it is – but she would, wouldn't she?

“ It’s as if he has read the manual, but doesn’t believe it. He still has an eye on being prized by senior staff and members. He’ll get there. It’s good to have his checks and balances, I suppose. ”

THE 21ST CENTURY PUBLIC SERVANT BOOK CLUB

FOR INDIVIDUALS

Understanding where you are on the path to being a 21st century public servant is critical to making sense of your working world, the opportunities and challenges ahead. We hope these questions help you to think through what might be most beneficial to you personally in moving forward...

- **What stories stand out** or are most surprising? Notice your own reactions to the pieces – which ones **resonate**, which ones make you think I/we could do that (or more of that)? What are the key themes in the book? **What inspires you?**
- Which characteristics most reflect how you see yourself and others at work? Where are your **strengths**? Where might you need to **make a shift** to become a 21st century public servant?
- How could you develop the **shared humanity and empathy** needed to meet the outcomes for people in **your locality**? And make sure we all walk tall?
- What **leadership shoes** are you wearing? We don't need traditional heroic leaders, but society and our organisations seem addicted to them.

What leadership behaviours are you modelling? How can you help show that other ways are possible?

- How will you **make sure** you continue to **reflect and learn**, not get more information, but **personally develop and grow**, so that you know yourself, your personality profile, values and behaviours, and you are open to hearing and engaging with feedback from others.
- What are **the stories you tell yourself** about your work, how you do it and **why it's important**? What stories could you tell your colleagues, your friends, family and communities that **build momentum** towards a positive future for 21st century public services?
- What **next steps** do you want to take? What if anything is stopping you from getting started? What can you do to change this?

To find out more about any of the stories, go to Knowledge Hub: <https://khub.net/group/developing-21st-century-public-servants>

FOR ORGANISATIONS

To gain the benefits of becoming 21st century public service organisations, our organisations also need to stand back and reflect. The stories have implications for managers at all levels, for long-term strategy and specific policy development. By sharing and discussing the stories collectively, you'll be able to see where there is most potential to make improvements and become a breeding ground for more 21st century public servants.

- What are your organisation's most important **mindsets, behaviours, culture, structures** or powerful groups? Can you map them objectively? What sits behind these stories that impacts – positively or negatively – on people's ability to become 21st century public servants? How honest and open are you about this?
- How can you **set the expectation** that everyone in the organisation needs to walk tall, to develop themselves for the good of the organisation and the communities we serve. And how can you support colleagues to do this?
- How does your **senior management team lead**? What's its style and culture? Is it clear about what being a 21st century public servant means for

them and for your **organisation and means locally**? Where does it want to get to and how does it intend to get there?

- What are the stories about financial challenges and opportunities in your organisation? How do they compare with the stories in this book?
- What conversations take place about financial challenges and the **ethos of public service**. How do you deal with potential **commercialisation** going forward?
- How do **your organisation's values fit** with or support the 21st century public servant ambitions?
- How creative and courageous is your organisation in **working with its partners**, those that it collaborates with, commissions, influences and consults?
- How could you use the stories and characteristics of the 21st century public servant to help develop **leadership at all levels**?

To find out more about the public sector organisations already using the 21st century public servant ideas and characteristics, go to Knowledge Hub: <https://khub.net/group/developing-21st-century-public-servants>

FOR HUMAN RESOURCES AND ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS

We hope this book will be a gift for you in your work to support all managers to develop the workforce of the future. You will be used to writing and updating policies, and implementing changes in all aspects of your work. We hope the questions here will help you reflect on and strengthen your own practice, existing approaches and organisation's ambition.

- **Changing organisational cultures** is a nuanced business that means changing underlying beliefs and assumptions. We know there's always more than one culture in any organisation. Many of our stories deliberately get under the skin of thorny issues. How are citizens really viewed? How do we feel about democracy and the results it throws up? How do we view ourselves at work – as 'professionals' providing 'professional' standards? What beliefs need challenging and what helps us to make and accept change?
- How can we introduce the use of storytelling into our HR and OD practice?
- Characteristics aren't competencies, but they can inform them and provide examples of **behaviours or attitudes**. What do the stories tell you about essential qualities or traits that will be useful to your organisation? How could you use these examples to **improve your competency framework**?
- What's your recipe for **improving performance**? There are many inspiring stories in the book that illustrate how organisational and individual barriers were overcome. What are the dominant narratives in your organisation about what works toward making improvements?
- Already some of the organisations on the 21st Century Public Servant Steering Group have used the characteristics to underpin **360-degree performance feedback**. Could you explore this idea to add something new into the mix?



- Are there clear incentives that encourage people across your organisation to become **more reflective**? How common is **coaching, mentoring and peer support**? How might you use the stories to support ongoing development?
- How could you **design jobs** that allow and support colleagues to work in the ways that will help transform and future-proof your organisations? Many of the stories describe working towards outcomes, can we link job design and job descriptions to outcomes and performance more concretely?
- The stories feature newly recruited colleagues at all levels. How might you use the stories of apprentices and graduates to **enhance recruitment and induction**? And promote your organisation to future candidates?
- How could you tap into the **creativity in your workforce**, build skills of creative thinking **and storytelling** to change conversations and generate new solutions?

To find out more about the public sector organisations already using the 21st century public servant ideas and characteristics, go to Knowledge Hub: <https://khub.net/group/developing-21st-century-public-servants>

INVITATION TO WRITE OR TELL YOUR OWN STORY

We want to hear more stories about being a 21st century public servant. This book isn't about creating heroes out of our contributors and we definitely don't want to suggest that all you have to do is be like them. We are clear: we can all be like this and we can all work in these ways, so why not add your voice and tell your story?

In developing the stories in this book, we used simple creative writing and storytelling techniques that anyone can use. And like the stories in this book, the stories can be fiction or written from your own point of view or you can interview a colleague and write it up using the interview questions below. Stories come in all shapes and sizes. Some are best told out loud, others are for reading, enjoying and reflecting on.

We hope you'll share your stories with colleagues across your organisation and on Knowledge Hub. To access this, go to Knowledge Hub: <https://khub.net/group/developing-21st-century-public-servants>

STORY EXERCISE

Work in pairs. Interview your partner. Take it in turns and don't rush. Give yourselves around 20 minutes each.

1. **If you don't already know each other, make sure you introduce yourselves:** What do you do? What do you like about it? How do you feel about it? Give us a detail or two that's unusual, interesting or important to you? (Engage your senses...)
2. Choose a characteristic. Share **why you chose this characteristic? What's your take on it?** (Your thoughts?)
3. **Give an example of something that happened at work that illustrates the characteristic.** It can be something small, but something that's stayed with you and stands out. (Try focusing on one action, project or event.)
4. **Why does this matter? What's important about this for public servants in the future?** (What was the result? What changed or changes when you act like this?)
5. **How can we help others get up to speed on this? What are your tips?**

MORE RESOURCES

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION

The Local Government Association is the national voice of local government, working with councils to support, promote and improve local government. We are a politically-led, cross-party organisation that works on behalf of councils to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government. We aim to influence and set the political agenda on issues that matter to councils to enable delivery of local solutions to national problems.

The Workforce Team at the LGA works with councils and their partners to help create a workforce able to respond to major changes within the sector. This includes helping councils to develop a flexible and productive workforce, ensuring affordable and flexible pay and conditions for local government employees, and working with different public sector organisations to develop innovative ways to deliver services to local people.

To find out more, go to: **<http://www.local.gov.uk/>**

Or contact us via: **info@local.gov.uk**

THE SOLACE GROUP – SOCIETY FOR LOCAL AUTHORITY CHIEF EXECUTIVES

The Solace Group is the home of public service leadership. We can help you find the exact mix of ability and experience you need to building teams that can build the future. Great leadership never happens in a vacuum. The most successful teams and organisations focus on the effectiveness of all of their members, and continually reassess how well they're working to achieve shared goals. We're regularly retained by senior team leaders and those with corporate responsibility for change and organisational development, and our experience spans the full range of settings and contexts.

To find out more, go to: **<http://www.solace.org.uk/>**

PUBLIC SECTOR PEOPLE MANAGERS' ASSOCIATION

The Public Sector People Managers' Association (PPMA) is the voice and association for human resources and organisational development professionals working within the public sector. It is an energetic and committed association of human resources





professionals from across the public sector in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Building on over 30 years of experience, PPMA's main aims are to inform, advise and support members of the association in their work and encourage ever higher professional standards in HR. It works to raise the profile of HR and its importance at the heart of the UK's public services and be an influential voice for the HR community through effective lobbying of local and central government.

To find out more, go to: <http://www.ppma.org.uk/>

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

The original research that supports the characteristics of the 21st century public servant was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) as part of a Knowledge Exchange project with Birmingham City Council. To read the full report, go to: <https://21stcenturypublicservant.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/21-century-report-281014.pdf>

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A NOTE ON 21ST CENTURY ROLES

This book intentionally focuses on the characteristics of the 21st century public servant. The original research also identified a number of roles that might be developed in the future and we have also highlighted the stories that we think best illustrate these roles. More information about the roles is included in this literature review: <https://21stcenturypublicservant.wordpress.com/2014/05/23/a-literature-review-on-21st-century-public-servants/>

ABOUT SHARED PRESS

Shared Press is an independent publisher with a remit to share stories that engage with the sharp edges and messy boundaries of modern life; to give voice to new writers who care about ideas and innovation; and to inspire new creative conversations with readers.

ABOUT DAWN REEVES – DIRECTOR AND PROJECT LEAD FOR WALK TALL

Dawn is a successful facilitator, creativity and leadership trainer and writer. A former director in a large public sector organisation, she now works with a range of clients looking for creative approaches to making change happen. Her energy and enthusiasm for this work come from a deep curiosity about the world and a drive to collaborate with the people she works with. For Walk Tall she ran creative thinking and writing workshops, collaborated on creative conversations and curated this publication. *Contact her via:* dawn@dawnreeves.com

MORE FROM SHARED PRESS

It's a small list, but it's perfectly formed and it's growing...

Making Our Mark

The world of work is a place where we play out the stories of our lives, where we learn

and grow, earn our living, contribute to the economy and realise hopes and dreams. This creative book, commissioned by the University of Greenwich, focuses on student stories and experiences and is an invaluable resource for the university. (Published in 2015)

Change the Ending

What can fiction offer the public sector? A new perspective? An alternative way of working? Inspiration for the future? In *Change the Ending*, an intriguing collection of 350-word stories, senior local government officers, accountants, people in public health, social workers and many others rise to the challenge. The results are amazing – imaginative, forward-thinking, often celebratory, always stimulating. These are stories that matter. (Published in 2014)

Hard Change

Dawn Reeves' novel *Hard Change* is set in and around the local council of a medium-sized Midlands city and centres on the compelling ramifications of the murder of a young girl. Neither a traditional political thriller nor a conventional crime novel, it focuses on strategy rather than procedure and examines whether – and how – individual and collective action can make a difference. (Published in 2013)

For updates on new projects and titles, see sharedpress.co.uk

