



PORTFOLIO 2024

SAM VILLIS



Contents

About me 3

Experience 4

Skills 5

Case Studies 6

Organisational change in Social Care

A national learning offer for Local Government

Closing a digital service

UX in game design for an Ad Campaign

Services and Rates 23

Contact 24



About

I am a multifaceted service designer with 15 years experience within the private, public and not-for-profit sectors.

I combine agile methods with design research and service design.

I focus on building effective and empowered teams and developing service-centred organisations that deliver long-term approaches to tough problems.



Experience

Associate Director (Service Design)

*Digital and Data Labs
Social Finance*

Leading multidisciplinary teams in the delivery of complex social change projects

*Clients: DfE, MHCLG,
Leeds City Council, Social Care Wales*

Service Standards and Assurance

Government Digital Service

Responsible for assurance of government services in line with the Government Service Standard. Lead Service Assessor.

Service Design and Collaboration Lead

*Local Digital Collaboration Unit, Department
for Levelling Up Housing and Communities*

Delivery of fund, training and collaboration with local government service teams

Service Delivery Front Door (Product Manager)

*Digital, Data and Technology Team, Cabinet
Office*

Supporting policy colleagues in the definition, methods and approach to the delivery of digital services

Service Owner (Head of Digital)

*National Leadership Centre
Cabinet Office*

Responsible for service delivery for Connect, website and data platform. Management of multidisciplinary team and £1m annual budget

Senior Project Manager Digital Advertising

M&C Saatchi

Delivery of user journeys and UX for National advertising campaigns

*Clients: Network Rail, RBS / NatWest,
Transport for London*

Skills

User Centered Design

- Identify users and their needs
- Plan and conduct user research
- Champion user research

Informed consent / Research ethics / Dovetail / Miro



Agile Working

- Relevant training in scrum
- Experience of agile team working
- Iterative and adaptive

Trello / MSPlan / Miro / Jira

Solution Definition

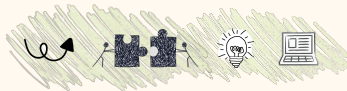
- Thematic analysis, synthesis
- Define elegant solutions
- Compelling and elegant visuals

Miro / Adobe Spark / Dovetail / PowerPoint

Prototyping

- Ideation and service concepts
- Prototype testing (selecting methods)

Sketch / Figma / Balsamiq



Organisational Design

- Understand organisational constraints to delivering services
- Negotiate within organisational power structures
- Develop cases for change

Stakeholders and Strategy

- Identify stakeholders and needs
- Make best use of stakeholder expertise
- Continual value delivery to support buy-in

Organisational change in Social Care

2023

Client: Social Care Wales

Social Care Wales wanted to reinforce their remit to improve the use of research and evidence in social care practice.

This multi-faceted research and engagement process enabled a comprehensive understanding of needs, priorities and best practice – informing the development of the client's community platform and operating model.



Requirements

Social Care Wales Research, Data and Innovation team have a remit to improve the use of research and evidence in social care practice.

They had a number of ideas about how to achieve this, but a team who were new to user-centred design and agile approaches.

I supported the team to prioritise and refine scope toward the aspects most impactful in advancing the goal of enhancing the use of research and evidence in social care practice.

Working closely with the client team I developed their understanding of service design and agile methods, and build a case for incorporation of Communities of Practice into the operating model. This enabled the client to better understand the evolving needs of the sector.

Delivered

- Tacit interviews with team
- Stakeholder identification and strategy
- Survey with small sample of social workers
- Secondary research about Communities of Practice
- System mapping
- Platform requirements gathering and selection
- Co-design of community vision with stakeholder group
- Secondary research into Community Manager role descriptions
- Development of bespoke Community Manager job spec for client

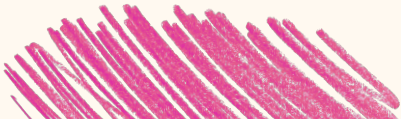
Examples

System mapping (Miro). To understand Social Care Wales' current ways of working I spoke with improvement and development managers who run groups of different kinds.

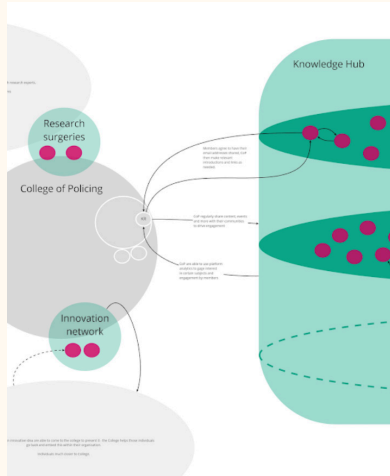
I researched best practice communities in order to compare these. I used a simple colour coding to look at elements like people, organisations and technology and arrows and annotations to show the interactions between elements.

I learned that the current initiatives used by the client were based on infrequent in-person meetings with limited one-way communication with attendees. Technology or platforms weren't systemically used (shown by the green elements in the maps).

There was little to support interaction between participants outside of discrete meetings or events, which reinforced the boundaries between the organisation and the members of its groups. Similarly, one-way communication meant that there were missed opportunities to gain insight from participants and feed these back to the wider organisation.



Examples



This close up of a best practice organisation shows how they make use of a community platform to enable two-way communication between the organisation and outside. This enables closer feedback. Loops within the organisation.

INTERVIEWS: IMPLICATIONS FOR PROJECT

10

We started this research with the hypothesis that it may be better for the team to work through existing SCW communities rather than starting something new.

However, we do not believe that the other SCW communities we spoke with are setup to effectively disseminate information about research and evidence or facilitate communication between practitioners and leaders or academics and researchers on general research/evidence topics. That's not because the communities currently being run aren't effective, they are appropriate for their members and SCWs's needs. We found:

Insights:	Implications:
<p>No formal feedback loops to SCW</p>	<p>Creating internal feedback loops would allow for insights generated to be shared with wider SCW and may increase opportunities for dissemination of research and evidence over time</p>
<p>Community is a thing you 'do' not a thing you 'are'</p>	<p>Work should be done to enable two-way communication. Simply, this could be done through sharing email addresses, but could also be addressed by introduction of a new platform.</p>
<p>Communities take effort</p>	<p>Ensure the appropriate time and resource is committed to establishing and maintaining communities.</p>
<p>The right tools / technologies are not in place</p>	<p>We should work with target community members to understand what tools/platforms they would value</p>

Research with parts of the organisation, as well as synthesis and mapping enabled me to deliver a set of insights for the project work Using the structure of Insights and Implications I was able to support the client team to make decisions about the direction of project work.

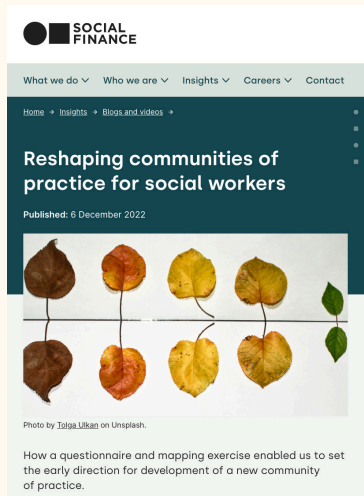
Examples

Clear, engaging and well facilitated workshop sessions enabled me to extract key information from the client team and stakeholders.

Documenting facilitator notes enabled the client to reuse these workshop assets in the development of further communities

Working in the open has enabled me to share the story of the work and invite discussion about the approaches. Read more:

- [Defining the role of community manager for Social Care Wales](#)
- [Reshaping communities of practice for social workers](#)



Results

The client described the ways of working as 'enjoyable agile' and praised the approach to coaching the team through human centred design practices, and also described this project as a 'step change' in how they saw themselves as stewards of the sector.



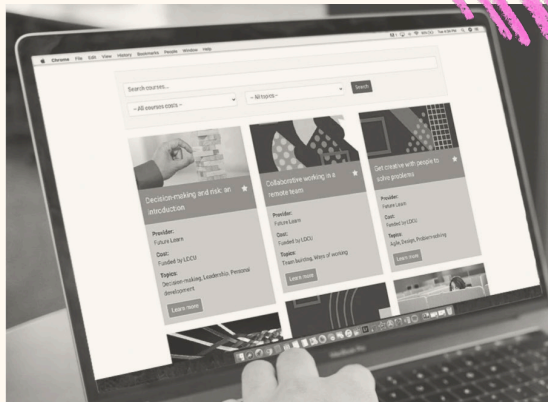
A National Learning offer for Local Government

2021

DLUHC

The Local Digital Collaboration Unit at Department for Levelling up Housing and Communities provided a training offer to local authorities run by the GDS Digital Academy. However, Covid-19 meant that these in-person trainings could no longer operate, and an interim solution was needed.

Using a design-research approach, I delivered a cost-effective end-to-end implementation that supported local government colleagues to find and access training.



Learnings

Through interviews with local government colleagues and attendance at community events I defined user needs for training, not only based on skills but based on motivators and constraints experienced by those in need of training.

I learned that a major concern of colleagues was confidence in digital, agile and human centred design. This suggested a need for not only skills training but general awareness and fast-paced learning.

I also learned that there was variance in the provision of digital training across Local Authorities. Often colleagues would need to learn 'on the job' and required training that would enable them to solve a problem for themselves as they encountered it. This meant that providing an offer that enabled users to self-serve would be a beneficial approach for the sector.

Delivered

- Developed understanding of government procurement
- Interviewed 7 Local Government colleagues and research at relevant meetups
- Review of 3 Local Authority self-developed training offers
- Learning platform content research
- Mapping user stories to available training
- Negotiated favourable pricing with FutureLearn
- Collaborated with communications team to develop online 'learning library'
- Developed back-office processes
- Developed metrics and Google sites dashboard to enable ongoing improvement

Examples

Delivery included **working closely with the comms team** to deliver an online 'learning library' that would enable users to easily find recommended courses as well as to deliver email and online communications to promote the offer to those working within local government.

I also developed **back-office tracking processes** in line with the speed of delivery required. This included setting up tracking in Google Sheets, and using this to populate a Google sites dashboard which would enable an ongoing view of the service offer in close to real time.

Working in the open has enabled me to share the story of the work and invite discussion about the approaches. Read more:

- [Announcing our new digital skills training offer](#)
- [What our training offer is teaching us about the needs of local government](#)

Sign up for a fully funded digital skills training course
Local Digital Collaboration Unit, 23 September

Choose from our list of recommended courses or pick any short course that will benefit you and your organisation

Earlier this year we launched a new training offer, inviting local authorities to apply for a funded place on a course with the online learning platform, FutureLearn.

We only have a limited number of funded places left, so don't miss out on this opportunity to brush-up on your digital skills or learn something new!

How to apply for a funded course
Visit the Local Digital training library and browse for FutureLearn courses using the 'LDCU funded' filter.
Select one that interests you, then complete the application form to tell us more about why you would like to take the course.

[Browse training courses](#)

Course feedback

We've had some great feedback about the courses
Over 100 local government colleagues have now taken a training course via the library. Here's what our previous course attendees had to say:
"I have already shared some of the knowledge that I learnt on this course and will continue to apply what I have learnt in my day to day work"
- Claire Accessibility Services course attendee
"I am just starting out with service design, user-centred design and agile methods, so this course is really timely"
- Get Creative with People to Solve Problems course attendee

Featured courses

Collaborative working in a remote team
When 66.6% of people in employment avoided home last year, it's no surprise that 'Collaborative working in a remote team' has become a key skill for many local government teams.

Training

FutureLearn Courses - Feb 2023 - present
Reports the number of courses completed by local government staff on FutureLearn courses, and the number of courses completed by local government staff on FutureLearn courses.

Courses Completed

152

Local Government

Courses Recommended

315

Local Government

Courses Available

Local Government

Number of applications per month

Local Government

How did you purchase about the training?

Local Government

Applications to 'Digital' are most

Local Government

Applications at 'Digital' are most

Local Government

Share of Teams of - Digital and Better Leadership

Local Government

Applications at 'Digital' are most

Local Government

Result

In 4 months the team received applications from 100 colleagues across 68 Local Authorities.

Over a year the team delivered 350 FutureLearn licenses. The offer was well received by the sector and individuals said that it had helped them to address a challenge they were facing in their role in a timely way and had increased their confidence.



Closing a digital service

2020

National Leadership Centre

This Cabinet Office team was set up to connect public service leaders and support them in the development of solutions to the country's toughest challenges. I was responsible for overseeing the digital aspects of the team's work including the website, a digital service 'Connect' and the underlying data platform.

Thorough investigation I identified core issues and made data-driven recommendations that enabled me to deliver substantial cost savings and better resource allocation.



Learnings

I quickly identified that the data set of public service leaders, which was core to NLC's operational aspects and 'Connect' service was significantly out of date. Additionally, the Salesforce platform required specialized knowledge, and there was no designated person responsible for data quality.

By commissioning a short discovery to highlight the data quality issues and their potential impact I was able to deliver a report outlining recommendations to improve data quality management.

By synthesizing user research, conducting additional research and monitoring service metrics, I determined that the Connect service was not effectively meeting user needs. Leaders expressed a stronger preference for using more common channels like email, LinkedIn, Twitter, and WhatsApp to connect, rather than a specialized service.

Delivered

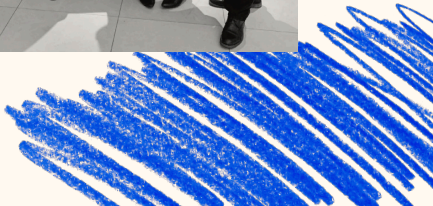
- Informal conversations with NLC team
- Collaborated with contracted digital team to review roadmaps, research, and identify existing blockers
- Commissioned a short-run discovery project into data quality issues
- Monitoring service metrics
- Synthesising user research and conducting additional research at the organisation's national forum event

Result

I recommended the closure of the 'Connect' service.

Budget was repurposed to hire a Data Assistant responsible for data quality.

This immediately **made a saving of £40,000 per month.**



UX in game design for an advertising campaign

2012

CLIENT: NETWORK RAIL

At M&C Saatchi I was responsible for developing user journeys to support advertising campaigns. As part of this I was responsible for defining the user experience for a number of online games including this game to support a safety campaign for Network Rail, using binaural sound.

Using a UX design and testing approach, I delivered an innovative approach to using YouTube and social media which enabled increased engagement with the key message.



Requirements

The creative team at M&C Saatchi were commissioned to deliver a safety campaign for Network Rail, this was to raise awareness of the dangers of trespassing on the tracks. The team planned to use binaural sound to demonstrate how difficult it is to hear the direction of oncoming trains, and developed a short film helping to explain this using a dramatic simulation with rappers Wretch 32 and George the Poet.

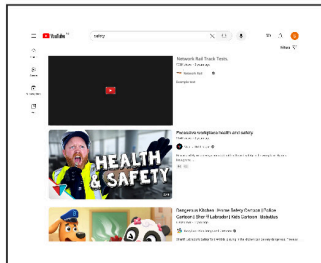
As part of this work the creative team wanted to use the functionality of YouTube to further engage the audience and enable them to experience this for themselves.

Delivered

- Understood and broke down client brief, proposed audience, concept and creative
- Collaboration with creative team (designer and copywriter)
- Developed outline user journey through YouTube
- Developed wireframes (Axure)
- Wireframe testing with users
- Delivery of final game (project managing development team)

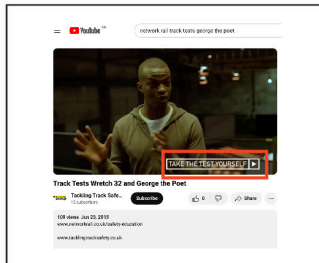
Example

1. User discovers video



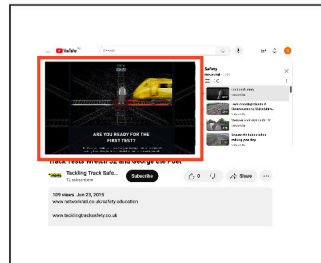
User browses YouTube and clicks on video, or navigates directly to video through social media posts or direct link via email

2. User watches video and clicks the CTA



User watches the video, a call to action with a YouTube overlay will enable users to click to play the game.

3. User plays game in iframe on Network Rail Youtube channel



User is taken through to the Network Rail page where an iframe enables them to play the flash game in screen (though this is hosted separately)

I used simple storyboards to explain the user journey through the video to the game so that creative teams could understand how this would work and to show what the media would look like in situ. I used simple red callout boxes to make it clear where functional elements existed on the page.

Result

"It's one thing showing people how difficult it is to tell where a train is coming from, but it's quite another giving them the chance to try it for themselves. The combination of the film and the game will engage the public, help them to understand through their own (virtual) experience how hard it is to recognise the direction of moving sounds, and demonstrate how dangerous it is to walk on railway lines."

Camilla Harrison, CEO at M&C Saatchi



Services and rates

Service Design

£850 per day (rates available for third sector)

- Design research (user research, synthesis, mapping)
- Ideation and prototyping
- Service concept development and testing

Speaking

From £500 • travel

- Online or in-person
- Lightning talks to keynote
- Training delivery
- Podcasts
- Panel chairing

Facilitation

£250 - £500 PER DAY

- Design and develop workshop materials
- Expert facilitation of group workshops
- Online or in-person



Contact

Let's work together!

Bring a comprehensive perspective to the table, I'll work with your team to seamlessly integrate user research, design thinking, and strategic planning. Working with your team to identify pain points, uncover opportunities, and craft innovative solutions that elevate the entire service experience.

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<https://samvillis.me>

