

PORTFOLIO 2024

# SAM VILLIS

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# 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 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 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

## Service Standards and Assurance

*Government Digital Service*

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

## 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

## 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

*Infomed 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.

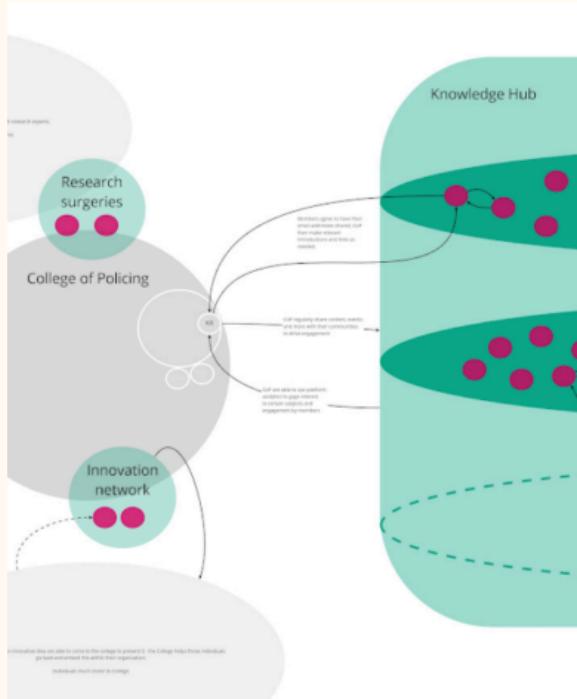
I researched best practice communities in order to compare these. I used a simple colour coding to look at elements like people, organisations and technology and arrows and annotations to show the interactions between elements.

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

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 SCW's needs. We found:

Insights:	Implications:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>No formal feedback loops to people within their network</li> <li>No single place to share insights about agendas/discussions with the rest of SCW. This means that opportunities to share resources or make community links are missed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IDMs only communicate with the communities they manage as part of formal meetings – this means communication is stopstart and existing communities are less able to respond quickly to the needs of their communities</li> <li>Email is used as the primary communication tool, which does not allow for two-way engagement or building of relationships, this in turn makes evaluation more difficult</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One IDM intentionally kept the organisation of the community 'simple'</li> <li>Two IDMs felt they should spend more time on the management of the community – and one was recruiting to do this</li> <li>CoP spoke about the need for lots of resource in establishing communities – with 3 members of staff involved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure the appropriate time and resource is committed to establishing and maintaining communities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>IDMs stated they wished they had a platform for sharing informal materials/resources</li> <li>They also saw the value in WhatsApp to connect members but did not have the time</li> <li>CoP Use Knowledge Hub and spoke positively about its functionality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We should work with target community members to understand what tools/platforms they would value</li> </ul>

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.

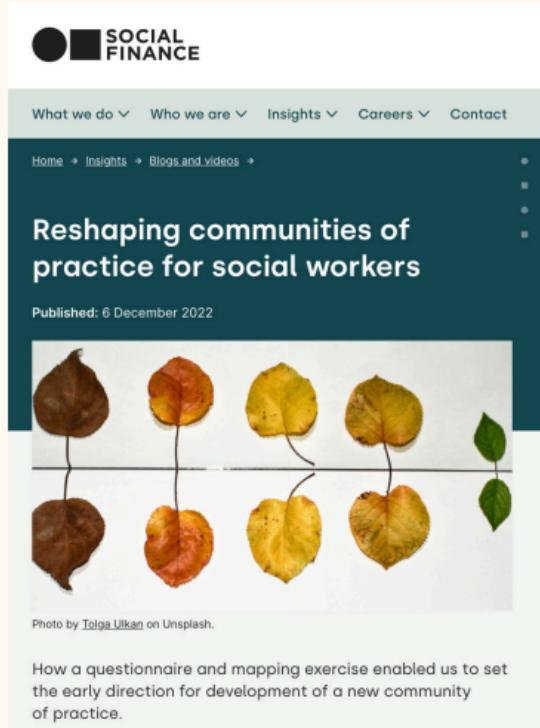
## Examples

**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](#)



The screenshot shows a blog post from the Social Finance website. The header features the Social Finance logo (a black circle and square) and navigation links: What we do, Who we are, Insights, Careers, and Contact. Below the header, a breadcrumb navigation shows Home → Insights → Blogs and videos →. The main title of the post is "Reshaping communities of practice for social workers", published on 6 December 2022. The post includes a photograph of ten leaves of different colors (brown, orange, yellow, green) arranged in two rows of five, symbolizing diversity and community. A caption below the photo credits "Photo by Tolga Uikan on Unsplash." and describes how a questionnaire and mapping exercise enabled the team to set the early direction for the development of a new community of practice.

# 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.



What we do ▾ Who we are ▾ Insights ▾ Careers ▾ Contact

Home → Insights → Blogs and videos →

## Defining the role of Community Manager for Social Care Wales

Published: 17 October 2022



The Community Manager is responsible for supporting the community to learn, but it's a role that needs thought and to be resourced properly in order to be effective.

# 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

# 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

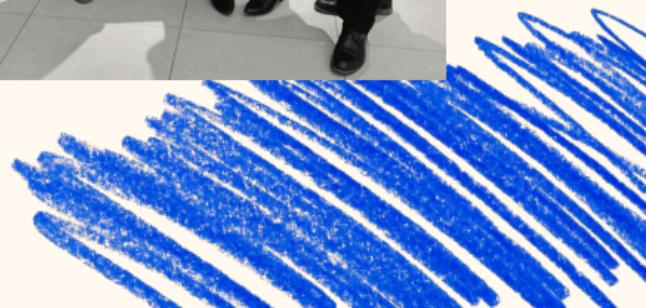


# Result

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.

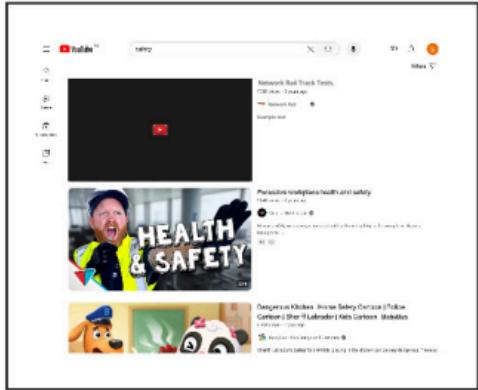
As part of this work the creative team wanted to use the functionality of YouTube to further engage the audience and enable them to experience this for themselves.

## 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)

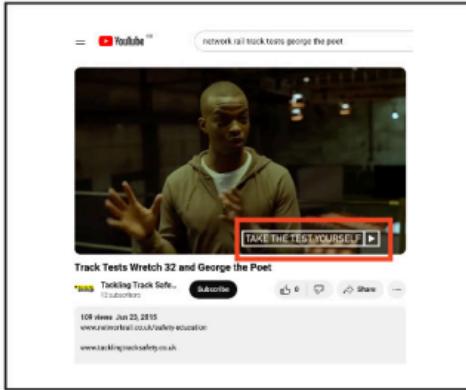
## Example

1. User discovers video



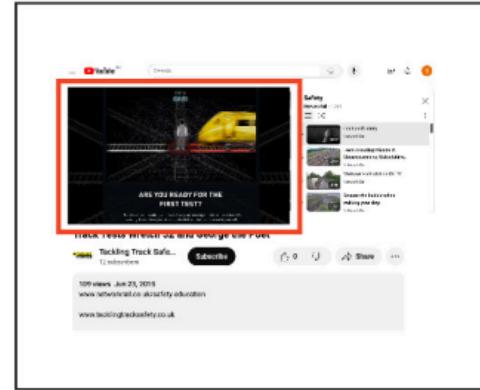
User browses YouTube and clicks on video, or navigates directly to video through social media posts or direct link via email

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>

