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### **Better Public Services**

Our public services face unprecedented challenges and uncertainty about their future. Many of them were created before the internet existed and urgently require modernisation to bring them into the twenty-first century. Economic problems, Brexit uncertainty, an ageing population and growing public demand make the need for improvement ever more urgent.

If we don't rise to this challenge, our public services risk failure.

n 1941, when William Beveridge was considering the creation of the welfare state, he asked:

"How would one plan social insurance now if one had a clear field... without being hampered by vested interests of any kind?"

We are now asking:

"How would one plan a modern, internetenabled, state if one had a clear field... without being hampered by vested interests of any kind?" How would one plan a modern, internet-enabled, state if one had a clear field... without being hampered by vested interests of any kind?

How can we modernise our public sector successfully?

Before the Beveridge report, no less than seven different government departments were directly or indirectly involved in processing and providing cash benefits of one kind or another. Beveridge recognised this was inefficient and costly, as well as creating a demeaning and fragmented service for anyone trying to claim welfare. Yet today, our modern public sector duplicates many of its functions and processes in hundreds of places, repeating on a much larger and more costly scale the inefficiencies – and poor citizen experiences – that so concerned Beveridge.

At the same time, we've all seen how digital technology has been a game-changer for the way modern organisations operate and organise. They've become far more efficient than the organisations they displace, able to deliver more of their resources directly into their frontline services. They haven't achieved this by simply moving existing paper forms and processes online – but by completely rethinking and redesigning the way they operate and deliver their services.

Government needs to take and learn from the best of these new ways of doing things, and harness this for public good. In particular, we can learn how modern organisations use technology to reduce or even eliminate costly overheads, processes, functions and organisational structures.

Doing so will help us redirect resources to where they're most needed, re-empowering the frontline. It will also create the opportunity for an exciting new deal between the citizen and the state, an opportunity to renew and reinvigorate our public services.

We believe enormous benefits can be gained from such a collective modernisation of our public services. Yet if we are to improve them successfully we require a rare clarity of purpose and cross-party consensus.

This is why we want to start a much-needed national conversation about the beneficiaries of such a modernisation – citizens and frontline public employees. But we also need to discuss the significant disruption that it will cause to existing organisational structures, processes, functions and roles.

We propose a plan to enable public services to modernise by incorporating the best elements of modern, internet-enabled organisations, and to grow, learn, adapt and evolve these over time. Our purpose is to catalyse debate and action, and to persuade more people to expect and demand better.

We recognise that the improvements required will be disruptive and potentially painful at a personal level for some of those currently employed in existing organisations. It's therefore particularly important that we work together to make this journey as supportive, compassionate and successful as possible for everyone.

As citizens concerned about the current state of our public services, we believe that now is the time for the same intensity of debate, political consensus, purpose, and ambition for our public services as when the welfare state itself was created.

It's time for us all to take an active role in saving our public services – for us, and for future generations.



# The Challenge

The internet has revolutionised everything it has touched. As consumers, we've become accustomed to the unprecedented flexibility, scale, and value that internet-based services can provide.

Although we like using their services, many of us are concerned about the way in which these new internet businesses often concentrate power and wealth in the hands of the few, not the many. So can we focus the power of the internet in our public sector to deliver similarly great services that citizens love to use – whilst ensuring that we, not remote corporate organisations, remain in charge?

Public sector bodies are still generally centralised, hierarchical and organisation-centric – the way they operate internally is very old fashioned compared to modern internet businesses. Although many public sector organisations may have moved their paper forms online to a computer screen, most haven't improved the way they design, operate and deliver their underlying services. Technology has often been used simply to automate inefficient old processes and current services – and to make these look cosmetically better at the front end – rather than to rethink, redesign, modernise, and improve.

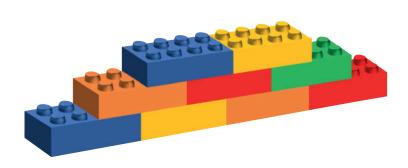
It's time for our public sector to focus on delivering better outcomes rather than using technology to paper over the cracks of existing services – time to take advantage of the flexibility, scale, and efficiency of the internet age.

The availability of internet-based commodity services means that many activities – like building your own office productivity suite (instead of streaming one from the likes of Microsoft or Google), or developing your own online marketplace (instead of tapping into an existing service like eBay or Amazon) or bespoking your own finance or payments system, or hand-cranking your own local licensing system (instead of consuming one already available) are now no longer a productive or cost-efficient use of public resources.

We need to radically rethink our ideas about public value and where the public sector can better focus its resources. Yet this is effectively what much of the public sector is doing, in multiple places across many organisations – and all at great cost. Such large scale duplication of commodity functions and processes offers little or no value to citizens. Instead, it consumes precious resources that should be going to the frontline, and prevents services from joining up properly around the needs of citizens and public sector workers alike.

We therefore need to radically rethink our ideas about public value and start to ask the hard questions about where – and how – the public sector can better focus its resources. These common functions and processes can instead be consumed securely from the internet – just as we consume movies and online banking and retail services.

The result will be precious resources redirected to the frontline – to doctors, nurses, teachers, police, firefighters, paramedics, social workers, etc. We need to minimise the time, and duplicated energy and costs, spent on activities that add little to no value to citizens and frontline workers. But to do this we need to understand, plan, and account for public value very differently to the way we have in the past. So just how do we best redesign and improve our public sector for the internet age?



Reforming the public sector in this way... could help eventually redirect £46bn or more every year into our frontline services and public employees.

# The Opportunity

What if our public services became as flexible and easy-to-use for citizens as Uber – but with higher wages and in public ownership? As efficient as Amazon's operations, and as popular as Google – but with 100% of the money invested into ethical and trusted public services, instead of pocketed by shareholders and a small elite of businesses? And all while securing and protecting citizens' personal data, working with us in true partnership, rather than monetising and exploiting our personal information like the worst of the private sector?

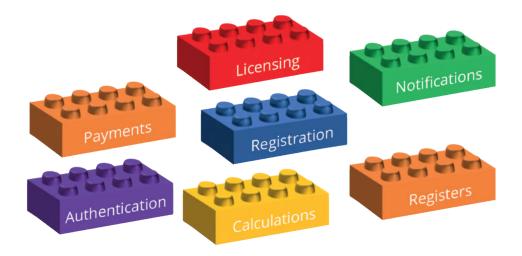
To do this, we need a new digital public infrastructure fit for the twenty-first century, supporting a community of open, effective and meaningful collaboration. A digital commons that enables the sharing, distribution and ownership of information, services and technology across the public sector.

This digital commons would be radically beneficial for frontline public employees and citizens alike. By helping expose and remove large scale duplication of processes, functions and systems across the public sector, it would help increased resources to flow into frontline services, into the human activities that matter most and which cannot – and should not – be automated. It would re-empower public servants by giving them access to the tools, information and technologies they need to develop and sustain a culture of continuous improvement.

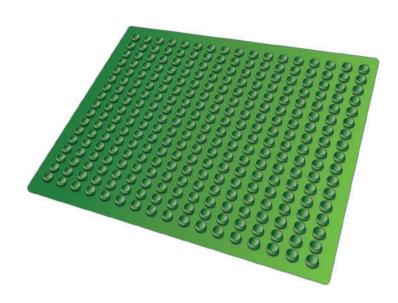
Reforming the public sector in this way – redesigning it around outcomes instead of inputs, and focusing on improvements to policy and processes – could help eventually redirect **£46bn or more every year** into our frontline services and public employees.

Some of these savings will be achieved by **standardising the common building blocks of public services** such as licensing, booking, registration, payments, and case management, even if they need a degree of configuration to meet a specific local need. But this can only happen if, like Amazon, public sector organisations become more modular, sharing and making use of common, commodity "Lego brick" components to meet their needs.

Our public services could standardise and consume many of their common administrative functions and processes by exploiting this shared digital commons – enabling it to grow into a public community of shared digital infrastructure and services. A set of shared, modular "Lego bricks" that can be used in the construction of whatever service and outcome is needed.



NHS Jobs, DVLA's vehicle excise duty renewal service and the Dutch community nursing organisation Buurtzorg show us how this could be done. Life would become significantly better for frontline public employees and citizens alike in this new world.



# First Steps

To make a start on implementing these improvements, we need to identify and remove the significant duplication and unnecessary costs and overheads that currently exist in the public sector. This includes functions, systems, and processes – and even organisational structures.

But will managing change on such a large scale ever be possible? We believe it is: the UK has made just such a significant change at least once before in living memory – when it created the welfare state.

There are clear parallels between Beveridge's welfare proposals and the case we are making for adopting the improved organisational models made possible by the internet – and scope for similarly dramatic and high public value improvements that flowed from Beveridge's work.

The political will was found once before to identify wasteful duplication and fragmentation in our public services and to simplify, streamline and improve the system around the needs of citizens. If it was done then, it can be done again now. The time is right for our political parties to apply this same determination and shared cause to reduce the amount of duplication and poor service experiences. And to do so by bringing into play in the public sector the best practices of modern, digital organisations.

Our government and political class need to respond much more effectively than they have done so far in leading a proactive adoption of the open standards, 'shared plumbing', and service-oriented culture of the internet. Our public sector organisations need to be prepared to act more socially and co-operatively – to share and consume a new digital commons of shared information and technology as an open community of common interest.

To do this, the public sector needs to simplify and standardise. And to standardise, it needs to open up, analyse and organise itself far more effectively around the needs of citizens and frontline employees.



### Government will need to:

## STANDARDISE AND CONSUME

Share insight into the current operational data, needs, roles, functions, processes, systems and costs of public sector organisations, replacing complexity with standardisation and consistency, exposing the scale of the current duplication and inefficiencies within and across organisations, creating new service opportunities, and ensuring organisations implement internet era technologies of shared ecosystems that support better and more sustainable public services.

**REFOCUS** 

Adopt and use common capabilities and components ("Lego blocks"), accelerating the design and delivery of new and improved services into practice – services redesigned around citizens and frontline employees, not old organisational structures.

**EMPOWER** 

Implement practices and principles that support the rapid evolution and responsiveness of UK public services in the context of unpredictable change and increasing demand, reducing overheads and enabling more money to flow to the frontline.

Making these changes won't be easy. Our public sector is big and complex: change needs to be carefully cultivated, nurtured and grown. These improvements won't work if they're imposed from above as some kind of "grand plan" or blueprint.

We suggest starting small, with a pioneer group of public sector bodies keen to become more efficient and transfer value to the frontline. We can see what works, what problems arise, what value it brings, whether it helps. The transition to "Lego government" and ways of working needs to be grown, tested, iterated and

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improved in the open. And this transition needs to be owned and led by those in the public sector who best understand the very real and essential opportunities now possible.

These improvements will involve a series of changes:

Distinguish everywhere between frontline and overheads

So we can see clearly where improvements can be made

Publish everything in a digital commons

So we can identify and remove duplication of overheads and costs and move towards responsive and adaptable "Lego government"

**Establish a Public Value Index** 

So we can understand and monitor what "good services" and outcomes look like from the perspective of citizens and frontline workers

Support a major shift of public sector activity into the frontline

So we can ensure the right skills are in the right place, supporting frontline workers as they innovate and improve our services

Look after people and services as the changes are made

So we act with compassion to all those in roles and functions no longer required, reallocating from administrative and management roles to the frontline

This is an ideal time to re-empower the frontline. Reinventing our public services for the internet age will be a significant undertaking. It will be as big a challenge as when the UK created the welfare state, often in the face of fierce opposition from vested interests.

Modernising our public services for the twenty-first century will require similar political vision and courage.

### #LegoGovernment

This Manifesto is a brief summary of a more detailed background Green Paper which can be downloaded free of charge from:

http://www.digitizinggovernment.org/manifesto

By Jerry Fishenden, Mark Thompson and Will Venters.

With valuable insights, critiques, pushback, feedback and improvements contributed by Andy Beale, Alan Brown, James Duncan, James Findlay, Sally Howes, Renate Samson and Simon Wardley. And some others who prefer to remain anonymous.



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