
The future of public services

A speech by Rt Hon Ben Gummer MP,
Minister for the Cabinet Office and Paymaster General

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Reform is an independent, non-party think tank whose mission is to set out a better way to deliver public services and economic prosperity. Our aim is to produce research of outstanding quality on the core issues of the economy, health, education, welfare, and criminal justice, and on the right balance between government and the individual. We are determinedly independent and strictly non-party in our approach.

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The public sector needs reform now more than ever before. Despite the efforts of successive administrations, the interests of providers can still trump the needs of citizens; choice and personalisation are on the rise, but they remain the exception rather than the rule. As the Minister argues in his speech, “too often the public is made to feel as though they are the servants of the government, rather than the other way around.”

To create services that genuinely put citizens at the heart of delivery, government must turn to the innovations that have disrupted the private sector so effectively. But transformation will not be achieved by simply moving existing practices onto online platforms. As the *Future of Public Services* series demonstrates, the opportunity is so much greater than this.

Wearable and app technology will engage citizens in their own health, and facilitate the delivery of more personalised care plans. The introduction of

real-time earnings data will help jobcentres gain a much better understanding of what works in welfare, paving the way for a new generation of interventions based on data rather than hunch.

In the criminal justice system, the opportunity is equally significant. Digital tools are helping police forces manage demand and spot opportunities for preventive interventions. When a case is brought to court, many administrative hearings could be carried out through video networks, reducing the logistical challenge of co-ordinating prosecutors, defendants, witnesses and judges, as well as the associated overheads of running these facilities.

Creating a smarter and more citizen-focused state will help address two modern challenges: a fractured relationship between Westminster and the public, and unsustainable public finances. To deliver a country that works for all, Theresa May’s administration must continue pushing the digital public service reform agenda.



Foreword



Emma McGuigan,
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Digital technologies are integral to balancing fiscal responsibility with best-in-class public services. No longer just a tool for efficient service delivery, digital technologies can enable large-scale transformation in UK public services. As such, public service leaders, like their peers in the private sector, have begun to embrace a fundamentally different type of government. They are driving a more digital government, and using innovative technologies like social, mobile, analytics and cloud to transform their organisations and to deliver the more inclusive and efficient public services that citizens in this digital age demand.

As such, our latest research highlights six traits of future-ready governments that can help the UK promote growth and competitiveness:

- > **Engaged citizenry.** Governments should look to engage with its citizens by creating live, online dialogue and by giving them a voice in the design and delivery of public services – along with the opportunity to provide feedback.
- > **Open and insight-driven services.** Governments should enable new digital economies, powered by open innovation and big data. They could also bring in other influencers – including developers – to shape these data-sets, design relevant applications and propose service improvements.
- > **Collaborative service ecosystem.** Governments should continue to work to provide an open platform that enables people inside and outside the government to innovate. By building a system on open-source technologies and service-oriented architectures, governments can work with various private- and third-sector providers to create innovative solutions at national and international levels.

- > **Government as a disruptor.** Future-ready governments must ramp up their risk-taking appetite, especially on the digital agenda, to create the next generation of game-changing public goods and services.
- > **Resilient, mission-critical infrastructure.** With governments handling an increased amount of sensitive personal data – from health records to tax payments – it is vital for them to handle customer information securely and transparently.
- > **Entrepreneurial and performance-driven public workforce.** Along with upskilling public workers in technical and digital skills, governments should rethink their career models – empowering HR to experiment and make decisions that lead to the best outcomes.

These traits illustrate important opportunities to improve public service performance and citizen satisfaction with government services. They point to government's significant role in shaping and enabling the commercial digital economy with infrastructure investment, digital-friendly policy and public-private partnerships that stimulate innovation.

Furthermore, disruptive trends, such as, smarter software, intelligent hardware, new technology platforms and human-machine collaboration, will continue to create vast opportunities for public service pioneers to fundamentally change the way government operates and interacts with citizens. Government cannot afford to ignore these trends, as their impact is poised to increase exponentially.

Public service leaders, therefore, need to embrace these trends and understand their impact on delivering more inclusive public services for the future whilst ensuring that digital trust is built and maintained. By observing digital innovations in the private sector, the public sector can tune in to important lessons learned, identify potential opportunities to leapfrog commercial thinking, and accelerate the benefits of digital government.

Speech by Rt Hon Ben Gummer MP

The future of public services

Thank you very much Andrew. I am delighted to be here. For fear of trashing your brand, I won't tell you how much I love *Reform* think tank.

I shall start by saying two things. First, I am going to say absolutely nothing of any significance today. Instead, I will give you an idea of the broad principles that I wish to bring to this job. Second, I would like very much to come back in the new year and give you a more extended explanation of what I think we need to do with public services, and the way government should arrange itself to produce exceptional public services for the citizens and people of this country.

It is an interesting anniversary this year. It is the centenary of the foundation of the Cabinet Office. And that moment came in a typically British way. What started as perhaps a little accidental has morphed into something that is now constitutional. It came because, during the war, the Prime Minister Lloyd George felt that there was not sufficient co-ordination of government to secure the outcomes that he requested and needed on behalf of the

nation: victory over the Kaiser. On 6 December 1916, Sir Maurice Hankey, the first Cabinet Secretary, took a minute. Now if you look at that minute, it looks exactly the same as the one we produced to reflect the meeting that happened two days ago.

It is an interesting moment because what it says is something about the transmogrification of government in the early part of the last century. When faced with total war, for the first time in our history, the Government reorganised the engines of the state – from an organisation which before could be run on an informal, *ad hoc* basis, into something of an altogether different size and magnitude. This is because they were effectively making foreign policy decisions and decisions about jurisdictions, justice, principles and law. At the same time, of course, Lloyd George was introducing the fundamentals of the welfare system. This would survive after the first world war and become the mechanisms and organs of the modern state and something that has been replicated across the world. There is a bit of neat



Rt Hon Ben Gummer MP

symmetry to this. In a little over a decade's time, there will be another 100-year anniversary, one which marks the full franchise being given to women. That moment I would probably say is the founding mark of modern democracy in this country.

We are now coming to a point, as the Prime Minister Theresa May has so rightly reflected on, where there is a direct challenge to the way that government operates, in the way that it interacts with people. Faith in democracy and in the organs of government is being undermined. Much of what people said on 23 June, in addition to their view of the European Union and desire for Brexit, was a cry about what they felt about the state of government and their relationship with it.

That is why the way that we deliver public services and, most importantly, the way that we think about government and how government faces its people, subjects and citizens, is so much more than a kind of intellectual discovery of the internal workings of government. Thinking about how you get public services to work better because it is an interesting exercise in its own right has been the preserve of many. However, this role has now taken on a degree of importance which I think is new and grave. That is why I think you need to start from the position of first principles; to think about what public service actually means.

For most people, if I were to knock on their door and ask what they think of their relationship with their local council, the agents of the state, the quangos with whom they have to interact, with the websites of the government, of inland revenue; if I

said to them, "Do you feel that these organisations are at your service?", I can tell you what their response would be.

But this it is not the fault of the people running these services. The civil servants I work with every day are genuinely and profoundly the most public-spirited people I have come across in my short time as a member of Parliament. They go to work wanting to do things for the better and for the public good. That is the true principle of public service. Yet the interface, the interconnection, between them and their colleagues in the health service and in local government is failing. Because if you were to ask the public whether it feels served by government, they will tell you that it is precisely the opposite. In too many of their interactions with the state, the public is made to feel as though they are the servants of the government, rather than the other way around.

So what is it that we have to change in the next few years? It is very simple – reverse that relationship. I want to be at a place, as quickly as possible, where people will volunteer that they actually feel that government is at their service, and that it happens at every single stage and at every single moment of their interaction.

Clearly all the work we have done, including by my predecessors Matt Hancock and Francis Maude, on getting our digital interactions better has been of profound importance and has made a significant difference. When you try to get a passport or have an interaction with the DVLA, this now feels like a proper service operation, something you would expect from other good retailers – not something which is a massive problem.

But this is just the surface of what we need to change – there is so much more. If I could take you right to the other extreme and think about prison reform, you might think this is not somewhere the public should be served, where at least the customer or the prisoner should be served. But I would argue that actually this is precisely where we need to think more deeply. We have no comprehensive data on prisoners in any way that is meaningful. We have no way of understanding the throughput of prisons, and its relationship to the system and its assets, and what role this plays in prisoner transformation and rehabilitation.



Rt Hon Ben Gummer MP and Emma McGuigan

We are failing to serve prisoners and the result is we are not reducing recidivism rates in the way that we should. We are not changing their life chances but, just as important, we are not protecting the public to the extent that we should because people are reoffending when they come out. So when you take it from the ephemeral end of customer interactions with government, right the way through to the deep end of government – that historic challenge regarding public protection, punishment and the effective operation of the law – we are getting it wrong and we need to change.

I do not want to pretend in any way that we are going to manage that in three months. This is about a massive and profound change in the way that government works. We are able to do it because of digital and because of our ability to be able to change the way that we operate in the way that big commercial organisations have done over the last 30 or 40 years. But to be clear, they have not

finished that journey either. It is not as if we can spot a nirvana which we can move to, because we are all on a spectrum of delivery.

What I want to close on is what this Government is going to try to do. The referendum vote says so much about the way that people feel about government and the way it serves them. The Prime Minister has made addressing this an expressed mission of her premiership. In order to fulfil her wish to make this a country that works for everyone, we need to make government at every level live the principles of public service so that people who are at the receiving end of them actually feel that they are being served, not the other way around.



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