The next generation of transactional service design in Government:

The case of funding

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What we're going to talk about today



Working on a new kind of service in Government and what we think it means for the **design community** and the **civil service**

Talking points



Our project

A rollercoaster 18 months building the Funding Service in DLUHC

Our reflections

The good, the bad, the ugly!

Lessons for the human-centred designers

Let go of your process and broaden your skillset

Lessons for civil servants

Policy implementation through digital methods is not politically neutral!

Consequences for design leaders

Is it time for a new approach to quality assurance and governance?



Our goal as a team has been to transform how Government does funding: funding *as a service*



We've been doing service design in a complex environment, and it's been hard.

Complex because



Multiple user groups across organisations are involved in networks of interactions as part of the service

Complex because



Stakeholders, who are also our users, have different views about the best user experience to achieve their policy outcome, and have influence over it

Complex because



Business needs are really hard to define and contested between stakeholders

Complex because



We have to negotiate lots of political decisions taken through stringent civil service processes

Complex because



We don't have total control over design choices and prioritisation



We believe that the processes and skills that are currently used to design simple citizen-facing services don't work for a service that is as complex as this.

Introducing the...



Policyservice

Noun

1. *An interaction (or set of interactions) between the Government and organisations, businesses, groups or agencies that together represent the delivery of a defined policy.*



The design community working in Government

Civil servants

GDS and digital leaders



What is funding?



Funds you may have heard of:

- **Levelling Up Fund**
- **Community Ownership Fund**
- **Local Digital Fund**

Each fund is created to realise specific policy outcomes and they are designed differently every time.

However, all funds go through similar stages and processes, which is where we have the opportunity to simplify them for everyone.





Our journey



Discovery

Funds share a common user base, require the same digital tools and have consistent user needs



Consistent stages in the funding process

- Design and set up
- Promotion and awareness
- Application
- Assessment and Award
- Delivery, monitoring and evaluation
- Closure



Our users



Managing authority

Local institutions

Accountable body (e.g. local authority)

Fund recipient / applicant

Fund beneficiary

Fund beneficiary

Fund beneficiary

Fund beneficiary

Fund beneficiary

Fund beneficiary



Applicants (end users)

“Everyday’s essentially a learning curve. Going through each application, guidelines, notes, criteria”

“Lots of crossover into other funds applications”



Policy designers (internal users)

“People who are scarred from delivering funds quickly feel they have to pass on learning to others”



Assessors (internal users)

“We should have been involved at the start when the prospectus was drafted so we could have said ‘we can't do that’...”

“You're spending a lot of time trying to identify the material you are assessing, rather than spending your time assessing.”

“[there are] 800-page appendices sometimes”



Alpha

Reducing complexity and increasing consistency of applications



To solve the whole problem for applicants, we had to tackle the assessment process first.



What are we here to design?

DLUHC Funding Service				
Policy needs to be designed	Application forms need to be created	Applicants need a way to apply	Applications need to be assessed	Funds need to be awarded
Designing a consistent process for creating funding criteria	Designing a repeatable process to turn funding criteria into answerable questions	Designing a clear, fair and accessible application form	Designing a fit-for-purpose assessment tool that allows for fair and consistent assessment	Designing an end-to-end service that ensures the right people are awarded the money they deserve



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Quick break (5 mins) for questions



Reflections on doing the work

Designing for and with "pain"

The status of user needs



Shared product strategy

Product management in complex services

Service vision and buy-in



The "IT tool team"



Challenges and questions for...
The design (and tech) community

Adapt to this uncertain context where business needs and design constraints are contested and political



- Am I being inflexible and could I be more pragmatic?
- Do I understand policy to a level that means I can process what internal users are telling me and define 'viability'?

Loosen your attachment to process, role, and methodology



- Is this service design, or strategic consultancy?
- Am I as interested in working on complex policy as I am on complex problems?



Challenges and questions for...
Civil servants

Engage with the design process early and trust the team will respond to needs.



- What experience and expertise do I have to give the team?
- What aspects of this project or design do I have influence over?

Your idea or solution may not be the best one.



- Am I open to considering different options?
- What evidence will change my mind and approach?

How do you understand ‘digital’?



- Am I willing to involve a ‘digital’ team in my policy conversations?
- Have I asked how my policy decisions will impact delivery?



Challenges and questions for...
GDS and digital leaders

Quality assurance of design in Government is not flexible enough to certain contexts.



- Does the service standard still apply to services like this?
- How do we share and promote better processes for designing in complexity?

We need backing to prioritise internal user experience and user-centred design in complex services



- Does the service standard give us the freedom and legitimacy to do this?
- What else might be needed to provide teams with direction and support to prioritise internal needs?

Questions and discussion!