Reimagine Smarter Signposting
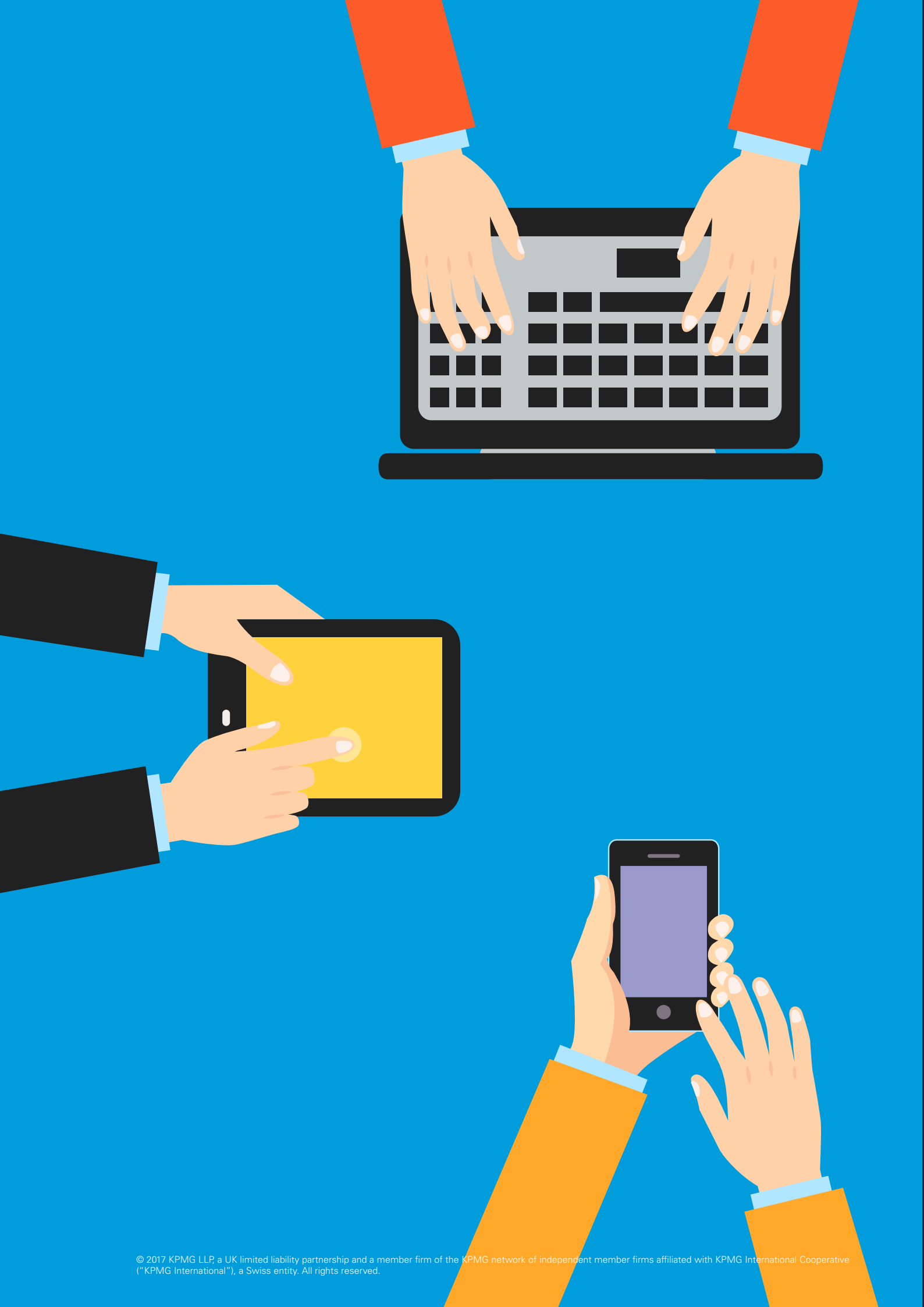
We've improved the routes through services; now let's give people a map

Let's reimagine

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This paper is one of a series of thought experiments in which KPMG staff imagine new ways for government to achieve public policy objectives.

This might mean building services around the user rather than the provider. Or drawing on the huge potential of data and digital technologies. Or tapping into the power of markets, new incentives, transparency, or the wisdom of crowds. In every case, it involves fresh ideas.

To channel our thinking, we imposed three rules.

1 Ideas must be designed to produce better public outcomes without increasing the burden on the taxpayer.

2 They must align with the government's philosophy and headline policies.

3 They must be realistic and deliverable.

But within these rules we want to step outside conventional thinking, and test out new ideas on how public policy goals can be achieved. We want to stretch ourselves, applying new technologies and techniques to solve old problems. We are not calling for a specific future – but we are reimagining it. **What do you think?**

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1. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/541187/proven-reoffending-2014-q3.pdf

Navigating the system

You're 21, working part-time in retail, and having a baby with your boyfriend. There's so much to organise: antenatal and postnatal care, registering the birth, maternity pay or benefits, changes to tax credits or housing benefit – and that's just the things you know about.

But how to get a handle on all this? You visit GOV.UK, but the 'having a child, parenting and adoption' page has 50 entries and no way to filter them – where to start? You search for: "I'm having a baby – what do I need to arrange?" and get 21,912 results; the first few cover visas and driving licences. If only there was a simple guide to all the things you need to arrange…

21,912 results

You're 38 and a married professional, pregnant with your second child after a gap of five years. You're familiar with the system, but a bit rusty. Now you want to know how maternity rights, benefits and tax liabilities have changed since you last gave birth. Must you research everything again just to check that your info isn't out of date? **If only there was a simple, personalised advice service…**

Whilst some public services have become far more customer-focused in recent years, many life events require people to make contact with lots of agencies – and the lack of integrated, holistic advice can make this a struggle. In the NHS, prospective parents will need to contact their clinical commissioning group, antenatal team and maternity unit. In the council, it's the postnatal team and its births, marriages and deaths department. In government, there's HMRC's child benefit operation and DWP's maternity benefit team.

Locally, there will be charities, nurseries and SureStart centres. For parents who don't know their way around the system, this is bewildering. And for public bodies bombarded with irrelevant questions, it is costly.

People need ways to navigate these systems – and digital technologies can provide them. Integrating the services themselves is complex and expensive. But a website can integrate access to those services; it only needs data from relevant agencies, and a few basic details about the service user.

Now let's reimagine our 21-year-old's experience.

On GOV.UK's 'Births' page, she's asked her age, employment and marital status, location, and whether she's a first-time mum – no need to give her name. Instantly, she's provided with a basic guide to childbirth, complete with information tailored to her circumstances and links to her local services. Now she understands the key issues, and knows how to address each one. No need to trawl through a dozen websites; no risk of missing something crucial.

Births page for mums

And let's reimagine the service for our 38-year-old.

When she enters her child's birth date, the system explains how her responsibilities and entitlements have changed since then: does she know that she can now share parental leave with her partner? It provides a check-list of tasks to refresh her memory. And it puts her back in touch with local services.

Your records are now updated

Taking it further

It's easy to imagine how we could go further. If people were happy to create accounts and approve the sharing of their data, their details could be forwarded to relevant bodies – pre-filling forms and saving time and effort on both sides. Via 'APIs', public bodies could feed information back into users' accounts; so the system could, for example, include a diary automatically populated with medical appointments.

Where other public bodies plugged their own digital services into the system, they could all be accessed through this single portal – perhaps via a check-list which ticks tasks off as they're completed. And with the approval of service users, the system could manage referrals between public bodies; so if, for example, a consultant appointment diagnosed a disability in the child, then applications for support from the DWP and local authorities could be automatically prepared for approval and despatch. As the system learned more about individuals; situations – and as their circumstances changed – it would be able to provide them with an increasingly personalised service and more targeted information, making access to services ever more simple, straightforward and intuitive.

Users happy to create accounts and approve the sharing of their data. Forward to relevant bodies

Personalised service with targeted information

Via 'APIs', public bodies could feed information back into users' accounts

"If people were happy to create accounts and approve the sharing of their data, their details could be forwarded to relevant bodies – pre-filling forms and saving time and effort on both sides"
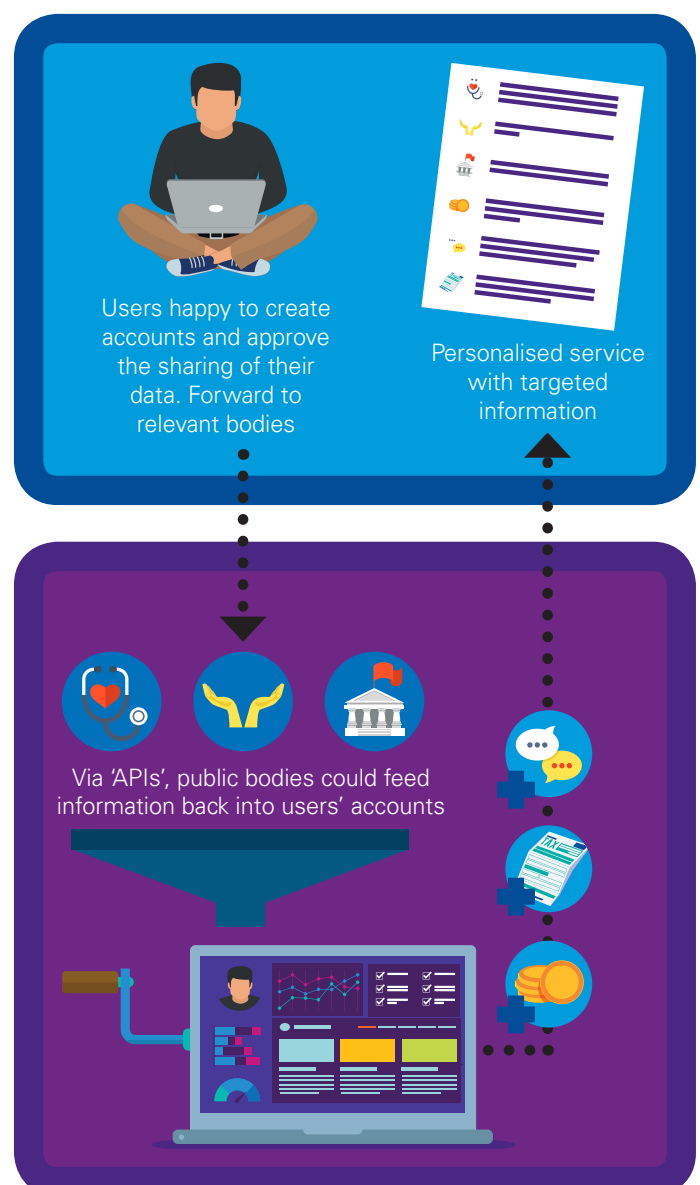
Potential benefits

For government, the ability to identify logged-in service users and to track their journeys – both around the Births section, and through the services connected to those pages – would prove invaluable data on people's interests, preferences and behaviour. Digital staff would be able to see where different demographic groups are struggling to navigate the site; where they're dropping out of transactions; what information they're searching for – and thus to address these weaknesses in the system, improving it for future generations. So this data could be used to improve user experience over time; ultimately, the system could even gather and aggregate data on outcomes, supporting public health research – and feeding back into the advice given to service users.

Childbirth is, of course, only one example of a big life event. In New Zealand, the government is creating digital hubs built around five such key moments: having a child; getting a job; renting a home; witnessing or being the victim of a crime; and reaching retirement age. And that's a much smaller country, with a system that's both less sprawling and more stable. Britain's many layers of government make it all the more important to provide guidance. To name just a few organisations, every citizen is covered by a local authority, a clinical commissioning group, various health trusts, a local enterprise partnership, a police and crime commissioner and a probation trust – and no two of them have coterminous boundaries.

This intelligent portal system would help people overcome the divides between government departments, and the gaps between public bodies at the local, sub-regional, regional and national levels. It would reduce the demands on call centres, cut duplication and strengthen referrals across the public sector. Above all, it would make life far easier for citizens facing a major life event – providing explanations and contacts tailored to their needs. We've come a long way in improving individual services; now we have the tools to make the whole system easy to navigate.

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Contact us

To discuss this piece in more detail feel free to contact.

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Learn more about KPMG's Reimagine programme or join in the debate:

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