Issues raised in usability testing - implications for beta.newzealand.govt.nz

We reviewed each of the issues raised through the most recent round of usability testing, and we've grouped each of the findings in to two broad categories:

- Features to keep and things to fix

- Things we've decided not to do, because there isn't enough evidence it's what users need

Features we will keep and design issues we will attempt to fix on the beta site

#	Issue raised by testing	What we need to do
1	People had trouble working out who owned the site.	Given that the site was basically a wireframe prototype we're not too worried by this, we will make the homepage say more clearly "Welcome to govt.nz" and include an appropriate tag line. Haven't quite worked out the best phrase to try yet.
2	Nearly everyone we tested loved the auto-complete feature of the search box	We will make sure the beta version of the site includes the same feature, but we will also improve it's design and make the suggestions easier to read.
4	Populate featured links based on the most frequently visited content	It's possible the heading on this section of the page didn't explain the feature in the right way, but this is exactly what was already happening. The homepage of the beta site will keep this feature.
5 and 6	Keep the search simple	Metadata and facets can be exposed to users in other ways, not just on the search results page. For the beta site we will focus on making the search results more meaningful and keep the look and feel of the page more like a Google search result. Users like it, they know how to use it.

#	Issue raised by testing	What we need to do
7	The prototype design was a bit inconsistent in how it presented page elements, fonts and form fields were a bit small	Browsers have a default font size of 16px. This was done for a reason. People can read the text easily. We've got some tweaks planned. Go big or go home!
10 and 11	Sometimes we're not linking to the best places, doesn't help users complete the task they are working through	This is going to be an ongoing task. We're going to need to fine-tune our content, assess the best sources of content on a page-by-page basis and actively seek feedback. This is something our ongoing programme of user testing will help evaluate too.
12	We need to ask for feedback in the right way	Do we try and capture feedback directly from the site or do we use a third-party tool to manage a conversation with our users? We're not sure right now, we'll probably try a few different things until we find an approach that works and users are comfortable engaging with.
14	Step-by-step links need to link users to further content or necessary forms	This is a challenge for our content editors. Some of the content we loaded into to the prototype early in the project wasn't updated, so there were some inconsistencies. We also need to formalise our publishing workflow. Making sure we're linking up the complete user journey is one of the pre-publishing quality checks we will build in to the process.
15	Relationships between content need to be clearer	We experimented with a couple of layouts, this has helped us work out what not to do. As we move through the life of the beta site we're going to need to try other design approaches. The key takeaways here are make sure the links are relevant, and make the relationship obvious.
16	The "fat footer" concept works, users were able to use it to find their way into other sections of the site when they got stuck.	Lock it in. The beta is going to have a "fat footer" too.

#	Issue raised by testing	What we need to do
17, 21 and 22	In addition to the normal hierarchical structure for navigation, users quickly learned that keywords enabled them to discover collections of content through alternative pathways.	Great so we'll continue to use keywords and tag content with terms to help people find services. Exactly how we let people interact with the list of keywords is less-clear. The A-Z style index page didn't test very well. There might be other ways we can show the list of keywords to users and let them filter it down. This has "test me" written all over it.
18	Users loved the consistent layout and content model, but finding contact details was still a problem	This is great news for our beta design as consistency is one area where we've already put in a lot of thought in order to ensure the site is easy to use. This is the second time users have told us that finding contact details was hard, the first was on agency sites themselves.

We've made some improvements to our design already, and on our beta site the basic contact details for each service will be part of the main content of the page. |
| 20 | Contact details – make them more relevant not just easy to find | We're going to start with the data we already have in the Public Sector Directory, but clearly this isn't going to cover all services, and some of the key contact points won't be listed in the existing database. We will add more information about the right phone numbers to call, the right email addresses to use as we start loading more content.

The Public Sector Directory eventually will become a core component of the new govt.nz site. Currently it's a separate site and its in desperate need of some love.

Something we need to think about, is the growing use of social media by government departments and agencies and how we connect users with these emerging channels. An authoritative list of government's social media accounts might be a useful feature. We've got that on the project backlog, it's not an immediate priority for the beta site. |

#	Issue raised by testing	What we need to do
23	Hide details, but let users see it when they want it	We tried a few different techniques to keep the pages looking simple and to help navigation. As long as we make the choices more obvious, hiding away some of the detail on pages is something we will do on the beta site too. I think we're going to try a few different things until we find the right balance.
25	Some parts of the prototype site were "a bit messy"	This is honest feedback that we anticipated we'd get. We never intended the prototype site would ever look like a finished site. It's a different story on the beta site. We've already started work on the first set of templates for the beta site. We think it looks stunning. I can't wait to show you more about what we're building.
26	Users loved our "Quick answer" pages – they got just enough information to help them choose the next step on their overall user journey	We see this as the biggest opportunity for the beta site. We're going to make this style of page the priority content while we're getting the beta ready. Identifying the most common tasks and services users have and making sure we're guiding them to the right collection of services will help to reduce the amount of 'pogo sticking' people currently need to do after they've done their Google search.

Google is the homepage for most users, but we can help them find the full range of services available for a topic, not just individual services. We think this will be most effective when groups of related services are provided by a range of agencies and it's more likely to direct traffic into agency sites. |

Features we're dropping due to lack of evidence supporting a user need

#	Issue raised by testing	Why we're not doing this on the beta site
3	The search field should be in focus	If there was strong evidence proving that this was what people wante4d to do, and it was the only real function of the page, then setting the focus on the search box when the page loaded would be OK. It works great for Google, but on Google you're expected to start typing a search query. 93.7% of the users we tested **didn't** expect this behaviour, so we won't be implementing this suggestion right now.
8 and 24	Trying to leverage Google search from inside the site	The current newzealand.govt.nz uses a Google Custom Search engine, this is great if you want to search across all of government, but not so effective if you only want to search local content. We might keep the custom search engine in some way, but until we've got a clear use for it in the new site, we won't mix it up with the local search engine. 100% of users we tested said they would start their search for information using Google. Even though our slice of the Google index will help them narrow down their results, the benefit is only small.