

# The motivations and barriers to seeking debt advice

Briefing paper for the Money and Pensions Service.

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# Executive summary

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## Introduction

One of the goals of The Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) is to provide better debt advice. While debt advice is available in many different forms, many people who could benefit from debt advice do not seek help. The goal of the project was to better understand the barriers and drivers to people accessing debt advice and how MaPS might assist in the development of solutions to help people, particularly the most vulnerable, overcome these barriers through future commissioning.

We used a mixed methods approach to better understand the existing evidence, the experiences of people in need of debt advice, the perceptions of debt advisers and stakeholders and what solutions might encourage people to seek debt advice. The research and this report are divided into two sections: 1) Understanding the problem and 2) Developing recommendations.

## Understanding the problem

Phase 1 involved a literature review, and a survey and discovery interviews with participants who met the MaPS criteria for needing debt advice, as well as a survey and interviews with debt advisers and stakeholders. We found an equal split of people who reported not receiving debt advice (non-seekers) and people who tried or stopped receiving debt advice (seekers). Most non-seekers did not consider themselves to be in problem debt, while most of both groups did not want to learn more about debt advice.

We identified two overarching barriers of embarrassment and being overwhelmed. We also identified low financial literacy and debt not being the priority as barriers amplified for people in vulnerable circumstances. Other barriers specific to different points in the debt advice journey included not identifying with the problem, finding other short-term solutions, misunderstanding what debt advice can do, thinking they might lose out by going through the process, being unable to share the information and wanting to take their own approach.

## Developing recommendations

Phase 2 involved consolidating the research and shortlisting four potential solutions for testing: journey map, money health checker, debt stories and document checklist. We tested the first two in a simulation experiment, and all in interviews. In the simulation experiment, people given either solution were significantly more likely to choose 'seek debt advice' and choose it at earlier points in the simulation than people who were not shown the solution.

In addition to the potential solutions, we identified nine sets of recommendations related to the different barriers and stages of debt advice. These included three overarching recommendations of reframing debt advice and the role of advisers, making the journey more flexible and radically simplifying the process. Other recommendations included creating more pre-debt advice touchpoints, increasing understanding of the impact of quick fixes, increasing visibility of services, rebuilding the relationship with debt advice, educating people on what they could gain, and giving people more control of their journey.

# Introduction

The Money and Pensions Service (MaPS) has an ambitious ten-year strategy to improve financial wellbeing across the UK. One of its five goals is to provide better debt advice.

## What’s the problem?

Debt advice is available in many different forms and provides practical and emotional support to those struggling with their debts, yet far too few seek help, wait a long time to reach out or drop out of services. Changes in the societal and economic situation are having a direct impact on the financial wellbeing of people in the UK, leading to increasing numbers of people who may benefit from debt advice.

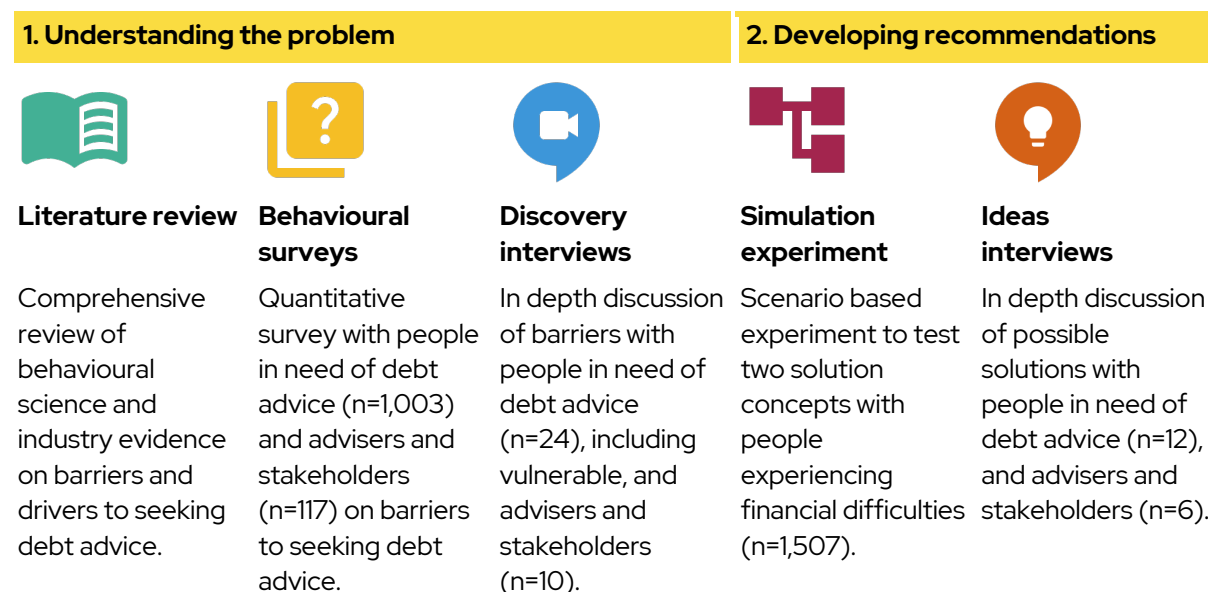
## What’s the goal for the project?

MaPS needs to better understand the barriers and drivers to people accessing debt advice and how MaPS might assist in the development of solutions to help people overcome these barriers, particularly the most vulnerable, through future commissioning. The goal of our research was to better understand the needs of possible debt advice customers, particularly the most vulnerable, and inform the requirements for future commissioning.

## What did we do?

We used a mixed methods approach (Figure 1) to better understand the circumstances of people in need of debt advice, their different experiences of debt advice, the barriers and drivers to them seeking debt advice and what solutions might encourage them to seek debt advice. We also conducted research with debt advisers and stakeholders to understand their experiences and perceptions of the barriers and drivers these people face.

Figure 1: Overview of research methods



# Phase 1: Understanding the problem

## Experiences of people in need of debt advice

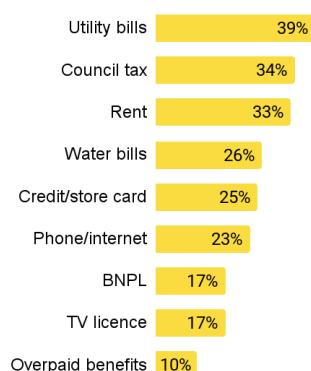
We conducted an online survey with 1,000 participants and interviewed 24 participants, of which 9 were in vulnerable circumstances<sup>1</sup>. Participants were recruited if they met the MaPS criteria for needing debt advice (groups 4-6 in the Debt Need Survey<sup>2</sup>). Participants were asked questions about their debt needs, awareness and engagement with debt advice. The survey included a set of validated statements related to the barriers to seeking debt advice.

### What were people’s debt needs?

The highest reported arrears in both the interviews and survey were utility bills, council tax and rent (Figures 2 and 3). A relatively higher proportion of interview participants reported being in arrears for phone/internet and overpaid benefits. Survey participants reported being in a very financially unstable situation (Figure 4).

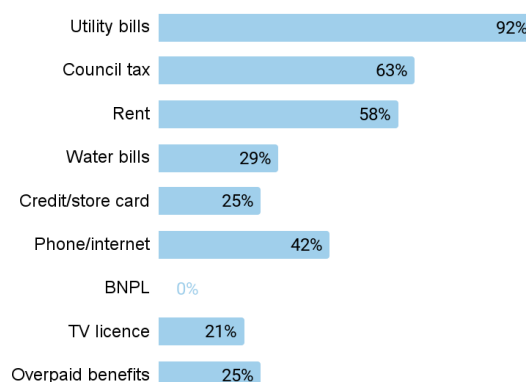
**Figure 2: Survey participant arrears**

Are you currently behind on any of the following bills or credit commitments?



**Figure 3: Interview participant arrears**

Are you currently behind on any bills or credit commitments?



**Figure 4: Financial wellbeing of survey participants**



**40%**

expressed not having enough money currently to cover all of their essential expenses.



**73%**

said they were behind on their bills in the last 6 months some, most or all of the time.



**20%**

expressed that they didn’t think they would have to worry about money in the future.



**60%**

expressed that they had fallen behind on payments for at least 3 of the last 6 months.



**21%**

said it is a constant struggle to keep up with bills and credit commitments at the moment.

<sup>1</sup> We define vulnerable people as experiencing at least two of: mental health condition, physical illness or disability, an addiction, learning difficulties, limited access to internet, limited spoken or written English, or somebody controlling their finances.

<sup>2</sup> <https://moneyandpensionservice.org.uk/2022/02/23/who-needs-debt-advice-in-2022/>

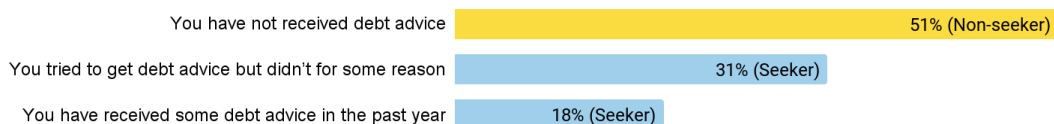


## What was their experience of debt advice?

We categorised survey participants based on their experience of debt advice.: 1) non-seekers reported not receiving any debt advice; 2) seekers reported trying or stopping before receiving a solution to pay the debt. We found an equal split of the two groups (Figure 5).

**Figure 5: Categorising seekers and non-seekers**

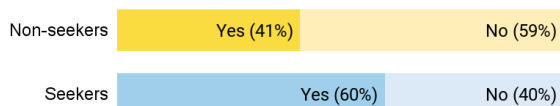
Which of these best describes your experience with debt advice in the past year?



Most non-seekers do not consider themselves to be in problem debt (Figure 6), while the majority of both groups did not want to learn more about debt advice (Figure 7).

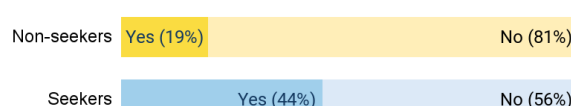
**Figure 6: Awareness of being in problem debt**

Do you consider yourself to have problem debt?



**Figure 7: Desire to learn more about debt advice**

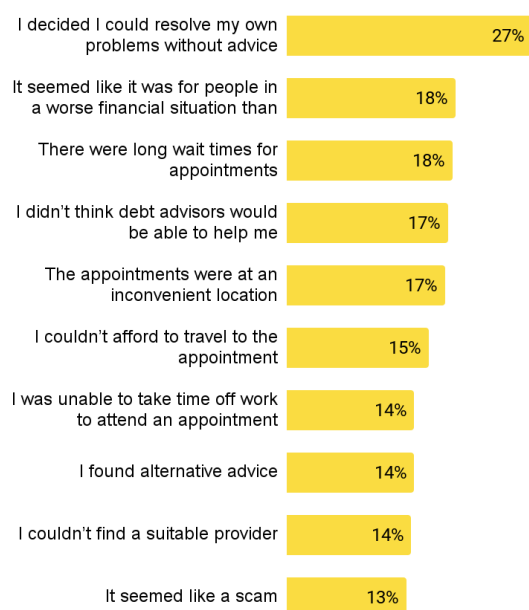
Would you like to learn more about debt advice?



We asked seekers about the reasons why they did not get or disengaged from debt advice. The most common reason for not getting debt advice was deciding to resolve the problem on their own (Figure 8). For disengaging it was finding it overwhelming (Figure 9).

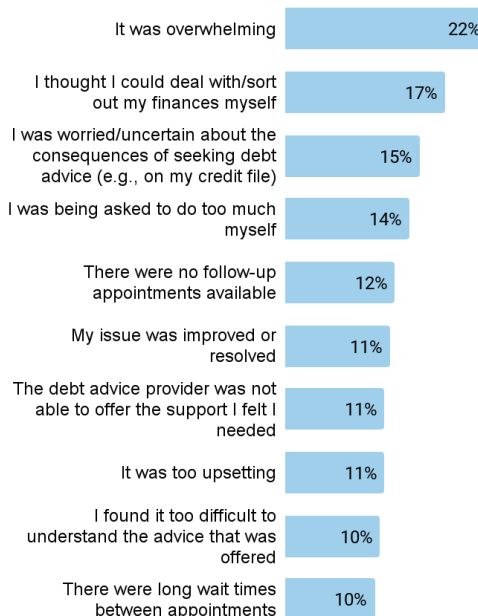
**Figure 8: Reasons seekers did not receive debt advice**

Which of the following factors led to you not receiving debt advice (tick all that apply)?



**Figure 9: Reasons seekers disengaged from receiving debt advice**

Please tell us whether any of the factors below led to you starting and then stopping receiving help (tick all that apply)



## Perceptions of debt advisers and stakeholders

We received 117 responses to our online survey consisting of 82 debt advisers (someone who is appropriately trained or qualified to offer debt advice directly with customers<sup>3</sup>) and 25 stakeholders (someone who is in regular contact with people in problem debt). We asked them about their role and their perceptions of barriers and drivers to seeking debt advice. Both groups reported a substantial impact of the cost-of-living crisis (Figure 10).

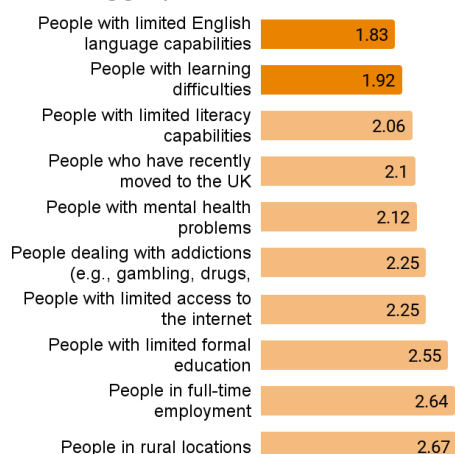
**Figure 10: Perceptions of debt advisers and stakeholders since the beginning of the cost-of-living crisis<sup>4</sup>.**



They also perceived that most groups in vulnerable circumstances have difficulty accessing debt advice (Figure 11), however advisers felt able to deliver debt advice services (Figure 12).

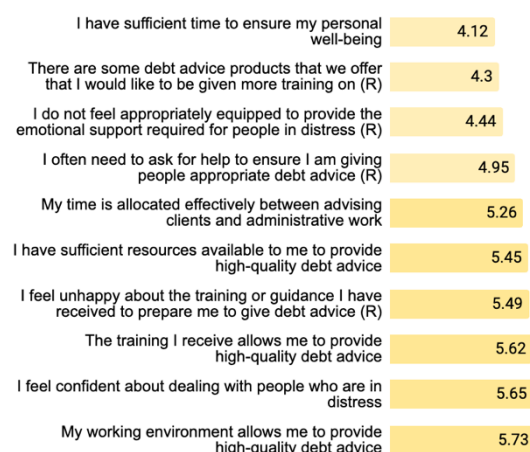
**Figure 11: Perceptions of accessibility**

In your opinion, how difficult (1) or easy (5) is it for people from the following groups to access free debt advice?



**Figure 12: Self-efficacy of advisers**

How strongly do you agree/disagree with the following statements with 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree



<sup>3</sup> The survey included people from a range of organisations, roles, and delivery approaches. Not all were funded by MaPS.

<sup>4</sup> Responses were a five-point Likert scale: Large decrease, Small decrease, No change, Small increase, Large increase.



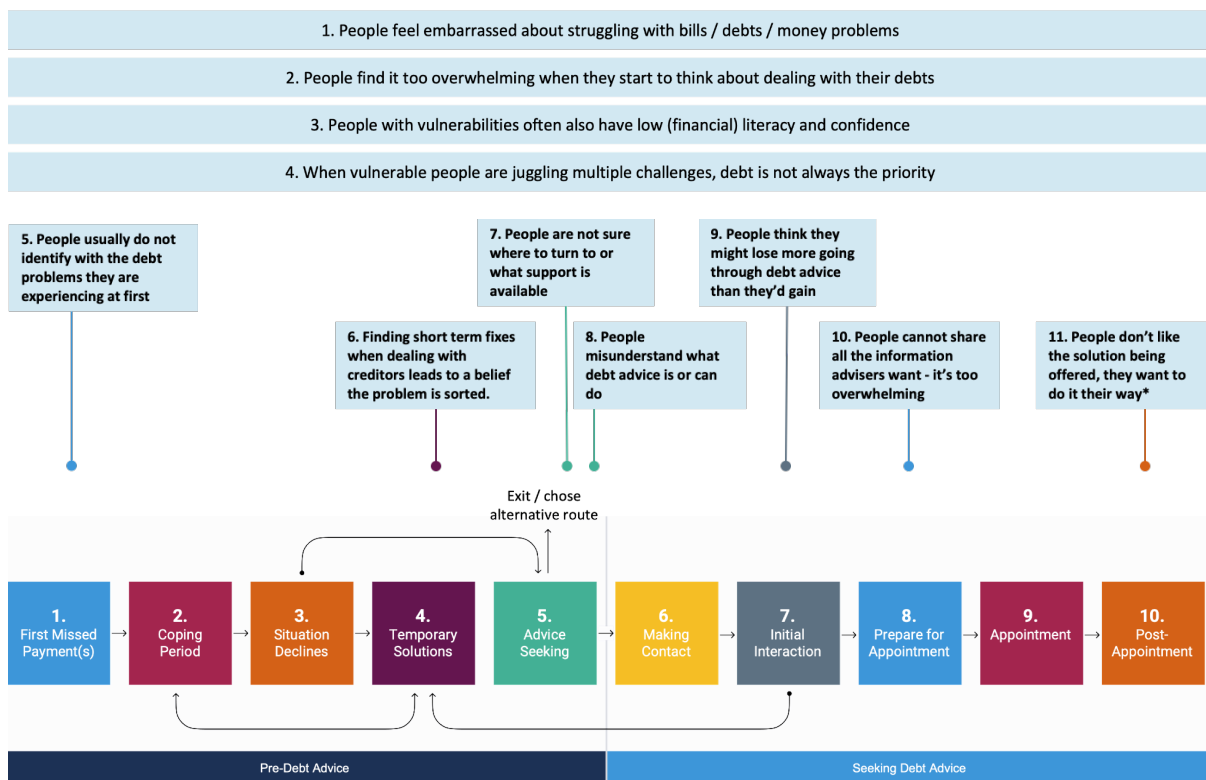
# Barriers to seeking debt advice

## User journey of people in need of debt advice

The user journey in Figure 13 shows the cycle of debt that many people in our research experienced. We found ten steps divided into two distinct stages: pre-debt advice and seeking debt advice. People regularly move up and down the steps, making progress then falling back like snakes and ladders, or dropping out altogether before seeking advice.

We identified two barriers (1 and 2) that affected every step of the debt and advice seeking journey, and two barriers (3 and 4) that are amplified for those with vulnerabilities. We identified seven other barriers that map along the debt advice journey.

**Figure 13: Barriers to seeking debt advice along the user journey**







## Explanation of barriers

**1. People feel embarrassed about struggling with their bills / debts.** There is a lot of shame, perceived stigma and fear of judgement associated with being in debt.

- People spoke about the embarrassment of not having money and struggling to repay debts and the impact this had, such as not being able to afford to socialise or buy things for themselves or children.
- Shame prevents people from talking to other people about their problems. People are too embarrassed to share even with close friends and family, let alone a stranger.
- Sometimes media coverage can perpetuate debt stigma. There can be a feeling of pride which holds people back from speaking to others.

*"It seems to be not the done thing to talk about amounts of debt. It's a pride thing. Just it's not something you sometimes want to speak up about." (Male, 41, Oxfordshire)*

*"There's a lot of shame and I've had male clients in tears in the office, you know, in the meeting room because they've admitted they had problems. They, you know, feel it. It's a shaming thing." (Debt Adviser)*

**2. People find it overwhelming to think about dealing with their debts.** There is avoidance and sometimes denial around dealing with the problem.

- Thinking about the problems people are experiencing can be incredibly overwhelming. They recognise that they may not always confront issues head on and instead avoid dealing with their debts. The scale of the problem can cause stress and anxiety and they'd rather not think about it.
- We noticed that while people are sometimes forced to confront the situation due to a creditor contacting them or a major event, this can be incredibly overwhelming and they may not have the energy to maintain engagement, reverting to avoidance and denial after finding a short term fix.

*"For me, doing that first step of listing all the debts I've gotten. I don't really want to know how much I have. I don't know how much I have. I've got no idea. Yeah, and I don't really wanna know at the moment, but I know that I am going to have to face it because you can't just go through life pushing things in the carpet" (Female, 46, Nottingham)*



**3. People with vulnerabilities often have low financial literacy and confidence.** There is a lack of understanding of debts and how to manage them

- Many of the people in vulnerable circumstances had a gap in gaining general financial literacy and understanding of financial products.
- This can result in a lack of knowledge of how some debts work (e.g. not knowing that an overdraft is 'loaned money' or that a phone contract is an agreement to pay over time, even if you stop).
- It can also lead to a disconnect with finances. Over time this disconnect becomes stronger as people struggle to engage in the complexity of their debts and finances. This can be exacerbated by being around people who also don't have the knowledge.

*"As things are so complicated and not straightforward it makes it harder to know how to navigate, that's why it becomes so easy to ignore" (Male, 35, London, Depression, difficulty understanding financials)*

*"My mum was shocked that I didn't realise about overdrafts and other stuff because it was assumed that the school taught."* (Male, 27, London Mental health conditions)

**4. When vulnerable people are juggling multiple challenges, debt is not always the priority.** There are other things that are more important in their lives.

- Often people in vulnerable circumstances are juggling multiple challenges and life events and the time, resources and energy required to deal with debts is simply not available.
- Those in the middle of a crisis and dealing with anxiety find the energy and strength to find out about something they don't know anything about, it's easier to deal with the immediate (i.e calling creditors) rather than dealing with debt problems.
- Those in vulnerable circumstances often need more support through the debt advice process.

*"Obviously my biggest worry wasn't my debts when I came out of hospital, it was getting myself better. I had really bad mental health issues and PTSD and everything else that came from the coma." (Female, 28, London, Mental & physical health conditions)*



**5. People usually do not identify with the debt problems they are experiencing at first.** There is a lack of awareness around being in problem debt.

- We found that a lot of people who encounter problem debt simply do not recognise the situation as a problem that might benefit from advice or external input. They have a short term strategy for dealing with debt problems and hope that these fixes will work.
- Debt Advisers spoke of customers not identifying with the term debt and therefore not feeling like the debt advice or debt adviser was not a suitable title for them.
- Half of all participants (52%) in the survey were not aware they are in problem debt (based on the MaPS criteria).

“Most people might think that they’re not eligible as they’re not in thousands and thousands of pounds worth of debt. So they just think, oh, I’ll deal with it myself.” (Female, 45, London)

“So I’m trying to explain to somebody and they’ll say we don’t have any debts and then you look through what’s being removed. But you do have debt. It’s just that you’re not seeing it as debt because it’s being removed upfront.” (Debt Adviser)

**6. Finding short term fixes when dealing with creditors leads to a belief the problem is sorted.** There is a loss of momentum for action and a missed opportunity when the creditor agrees to a short-term fix without further support.

- The first action taken usually involves reaching out to a creditor. Often the person they speak to on the creditor’s helpline is reassuring and helps them reach a solution.
- Once the ‘fix’ is in place there is a feeling of relief, and they move on to focusing on other priorities in life. Plans to manage finances after this interaction are quite general and non-specific. The less creditors are proactive with referrals to debt advice the worse the problem becomes.
- Debt advisers spoke of clients feeling a huge sense of relief after the first session, especially when there are steps taken to stop communication.

*“It’s a good feeling to know we’re now paying it back [electricity bill in arrears] because no one wants to be in debt.” (Male, 29, London)*

*“There’s still a lot of people [who think] ‘I will sort it out on my own’. I was, you know, ‘I don’t need you. I don’t need you. I’ll sort it out’...And that sounds really easy, doesn’t it? You know, sort out your finances, make sure you’re not spending so much get on top of everything ... .You don’t know what it entails.” (Debt Adviser)*

**7. People are not sure where to turn to or what is available for them.** There isn't enough information on how debt advice works and who it is for.

- A lack of awareness and understanding of debt advice prevents people seeking advice. They may believe that help is only available for people in certain circumstances and that they are not eligible.
- Many people we spoke to were simply unaware that debt advice existed. Others were not aware that it was relevant for people in their situation - e.g., only for more serious problems.
- Specific beliefs include that they're not in enough debt, they're not eligible for support because they earn too much, the perception that it's not applicable to non-British nationals, that there would be long wait/hold times or that there would be a requirement to attend in person.

*"I don't know what support is out there as I've always had support from family and friends. I'm not sure what else is out there other than loan companies and the electricity company." (Male, 29, London)*

*"If I had that information to hand I might be more proactive, but because I don't even know where to start, I put it off. All of that to me is quite frightening. Like it's scary. Which then stops me from even starting to look into things" (Female, 36, Bristol)*

**8. People misunderstand what debt advice is and can do.** There are some negative perceptions of debt advice that prevent people engaging.

- For those who were aware or who had engaged with debt advice previously there was often a lack of trust and bad experiences that made them reluctant to reach out for help. These perceptions were often confounded by a lack of awareness or understanding of the debt advice sector.
- There was a particular lack of trust amongst those who have been scammed or confused by debt management firms or loan companies and even their own banks and utilities/energy companies getting bills wrong.
- An issue some debt advisers mentioned was overpromises by some of the services who signposted to them. This leads to a break in trust when they talk to a potential client who expects them to be able to resolve all their debts easily.

*"They're just big companies doing it off a script, not really interested in you" (Female, 63, Manchester)*

*"Handovers with clear expectations are important. Sometimes the clients are promised that they will get rid of the debt, but it is not always possible. After the initial appointment when they explain it is not possible, they feel short changed. It's hard to get them back in if the trust is broken. Happens around 30% of the time." (Debt Adviser)*

**9. People think they might lose more going through debt advice than they'd gain.**

There is a fear / distrust of advice and what I'll lose - what I have already.

- There is a fear of losing control by going through debt advice. Although people at this point may be aware that they need help, they worry that a repayment plan or the debt advice will be too restrictive. This situation is getting worse with the cost of living crisis.
- Debt advisers shared stories about clients being afraid to lose access to credit, with some potential customers even choosing to leave debt advice instead of letting go of their line of credit.
- Debt Advisers pointed out it is difficult for them to find solutions for people who are not in debt due to being in arrears or budgeting problems but who cannot afford essentials due to the cost-of-living crisis.

*"I'm worried that they're going to turn around and say, well, why are you spending this on this and why don't you buy the cheap foods. I feel like they're going to tell me things that I know I won't do, which sounds awful. I sound like a blooming spoiled child." (Female, 63, Manchester)*

*"It's scary to think that people are living off credit as well, just to get by with their essentials. It's a strange, very strange time for doing that advice compared to what it's been like in the past, I feel." (Debt Adviser)*

**10. People cannot share all the information advisers want - it's too overwhelming.**

There isn't enough flexibility around documentation to accommodate people, especially those with vulnerabilities.

- When people enter into debt advice it can often feel overwhelming to share the information requested and this can be a point when people drop out.
- People often lack the confidence or financial literacy to deal with the paperwork and it can be very stressful to go through this. There can also sometimes be a reluctance to share this information due to mistrust or privacy concerns.
- Advisers also confirmed that a key barrier for people dropping out is the effort and stress involved in finding financial information. This was a very strong theme emerging amongst almost all the debt advisers and stakeholders.

*"I felt like I was back at secondary school again. Like dates. And what sort of debts do I think I have? I went through all the ones I knew about and they did an assessment or something. And then like I hung up on them after that because they were asking me too complicated questions to do with dates and stuff like that. They wanted to know about how much money I had coming in and then what I'm spending my money on, which is. Very like, I don't know, like intrusive. And I just thought like, no." (Male, 27, London, Mental health conditions)*



**11. People don't like the solution being offered, they want to do it their way.** There is a desire for a more tailored solution and to stay in control

- Sometimes the solution that is offered feels restrictive or inflexible. It's a lot for people to hand over control of the plan to someone else, no matter how bad things are.
- Some people said they didn't think repayment plans seem like a fair deal or they offer limited flexibility. They thought there was not enough flexibility or fairness in debt solutions. This can lead to drop out because people don't want the debt advice solution they are offered and return to a desire to fix the problem themselves, without help.
- Not wanting to deal with the effect on credit score by going through debt advice plan (such as bankruptcy, debt relief order).

*"I don't relish the thought of somebody saying to me how to deal with my affairs and things"*  
(Female, 63, Manchester)

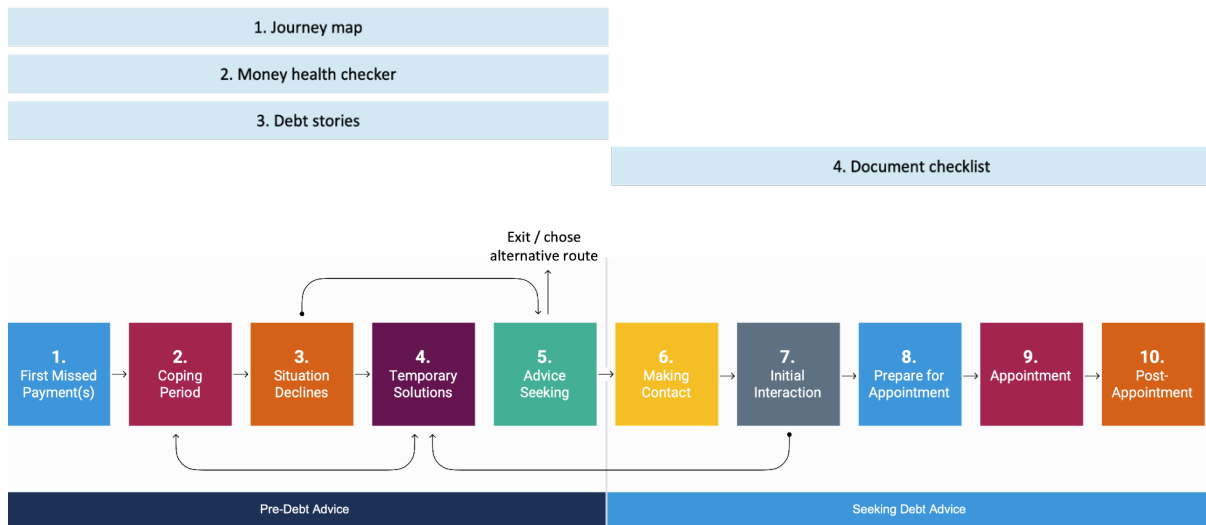
*"I once did debt consolidation about 5 or 6 years ago. I did a couple of payments with them, but I was really struggling, I had no money for myself or for my house and stuff, so I kind of gave that up."* (Female, 28, London, Mental & physical health conditions)

# Phase 2: Developing recommendations

## Solution concepts

We consolidated the research from Phase 1 and developed a long list of solutions. We then shortlisted four potential solutions for testing, which map to the different stages of the user journey (Figure 14). We tested two (journey map and money health checker) in the simulation experiment, and all the ideas in the interviews.

**Figure 14: Solution concepts across the user journey**



## Explanation of solution concepts

**1. Journey Map**

**What is it?**

- Participants are guided through a simple overview of the journey through debt advice.
- The customer’s autonomy in choosing solutions is made clear.

**Supporting insights**

- Worry about what will happen during debt advice is an important barrier.
- People don’t want to relinquish control of their finances.
- People worry that they will have solutions forced on them by the debt adviser.

## 2. Money Health Checker

### What is it?

- Participants answer a few quick and simple questions about their 'money health'.
- They are then signposted to appropriate sources of support or information.

### Supporting insights

- Many people think that debt advice is for people 'worse off' than them.
- Many people lack awareness of the availability of free debt advice.
- Many people lack insight into their own financial situation, and fail to connect their own circumstances with 'debt'.



## 3. Debt Stories

### What is it?

- A real-life story showing how life circumstances and financial issues can result in a person finding themselves in debt (we used an example from StepChange).
- Demonstrates the challenges they faced and the events which led to their decision to seek advice.
- We shared one example to illustrate how stories could work

### Supporting insights

- People do not identify with their debt problems at first, stories can help people self-identify
- Embarrassment could be reduced by feeling less alone in their problems

*"Because money was tight, Matt turned to payday loans to pay for essentials, but soon he was unable to keep up to date with his rent, falling into arrears. 'I want people to know that there's help out there and that taking out extra credit isn't the only option.' Matt's job made it harder to budget or plan ahead 'Before switching to my current job, I worked at a coffee shop chain as a barista for around 8 years. Due to the nature of my job, my hours were variable, meaning that it was very hard to budget or plan ahead for big purchases..."*

Full story on [StepChange](#)



## 4. Document Checklist

### What is it?

- A letter from a free debt advice organisation.
- Includes a checklist of documents and materials that a participant would need to prepare for a debt advice appointment.

### Supporting insights

- When people enter into debt advice it can often feel overwhelming to share the information requested and this can be a point when people drop out.
- People often lack the confidence or financial literacy to deal with the paperwork and it can be very stressful to go through this.

Dear Client,

Thank you for setting up your appointment with us. We look forward to welcoming you to the ABC Debt Advice centre. Before you come in, it would be helpful if you could put together some information to help your debt advisor give you the best advice. To help you put it together, we've added a checklist below. You don't have to have it all ready before your first appointment. Bring in what you can, and we can work on the rest.

#### INCOME

- Wage slips
- Benefits
- Tax credits letters
- Pension statement

#### FINANCIAL PAPERWORK

- Latest Bank Statement
- Loan agreements
- Credit agreements

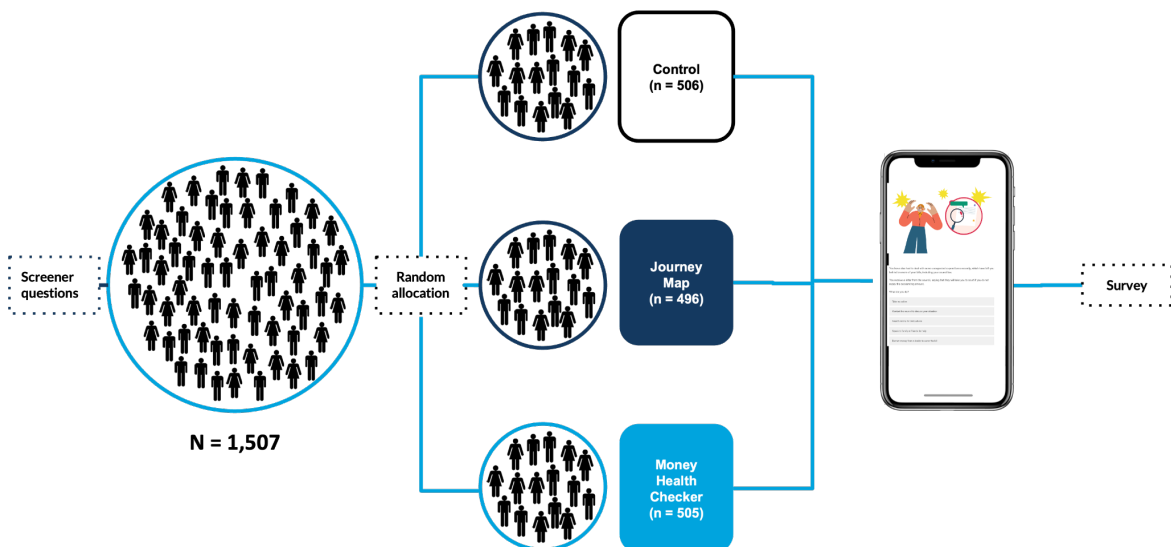
#### LEGAL DOCUMENTS

- Court papers
- Enforcement action papers

## Findings from the simulation experiment

To test the journey map and money health checker, we conducted a simulation experiment with 1,507 participants and interviewed 12 participants, of which 4 were in vulnerable circumstances. We only tested two solutions in the experiment due to sample size limitations. Participants were recruited into the experiment if they were experiencing some subjective 'money problems', but who were currently getting by. Participants were randomly allocated to one of three different paths in the simulation experiment (Figure 15).

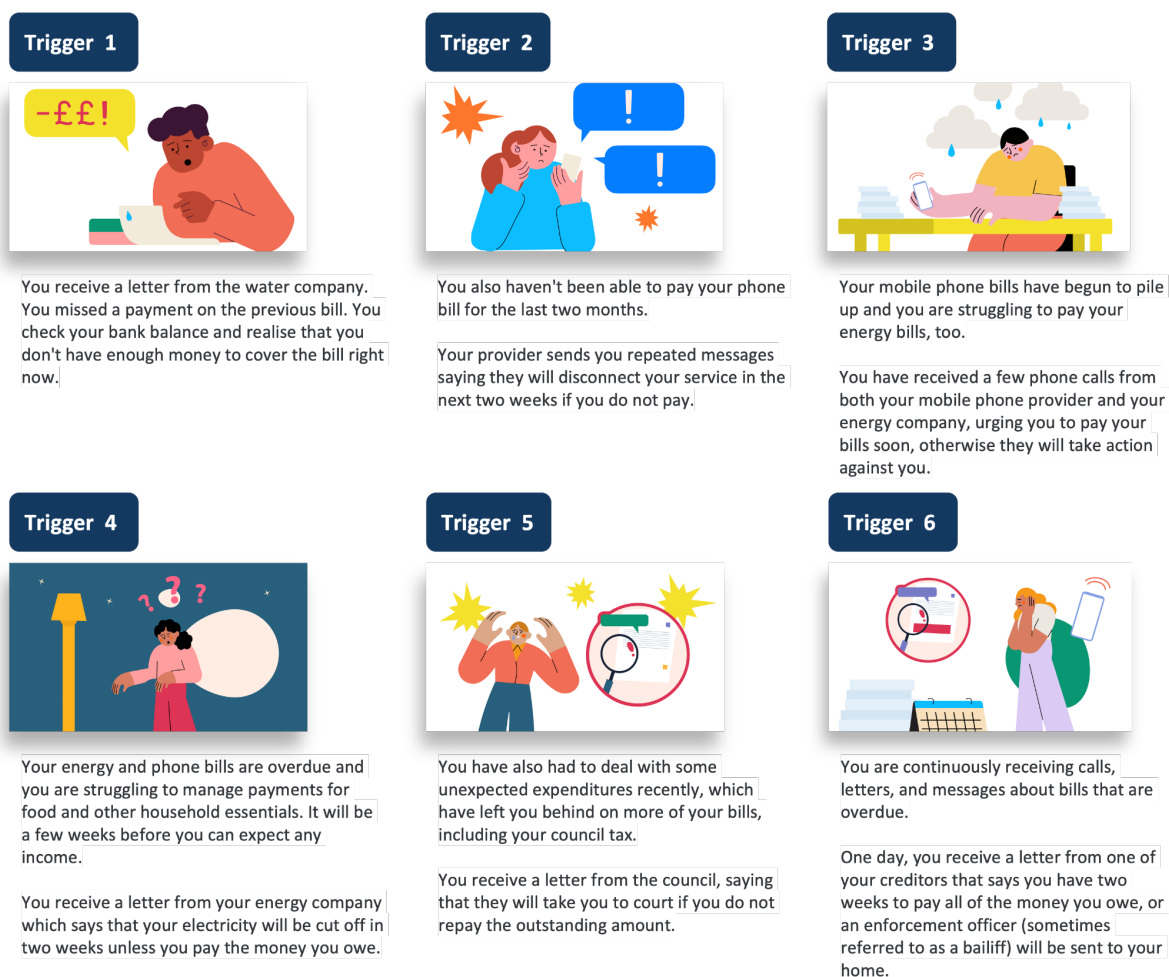
Figure 15: Experimental design for the simulation experiment



## The scenario

A “simulation experiment” is when participants are given a hypothetical scenario and asked to make choices. They are asked how they would behave if they experienced the situation depicted in real life. The scenario for this study was one in which they experience financial difficulties of increasing severity. At key points throughout the scenario called ‘triggers’ (Figure 16), participants are given behavioural options. They choose the option that best fits with what they would do if they were really experiencing the described situation. One of the options is the target behaviour – seeking debt advice. This is embedded amongst a list of plausible alternative behaviours.

Figure 16: Trigger points in the simulation experiment



You can try a demo of the simulation experiment here:

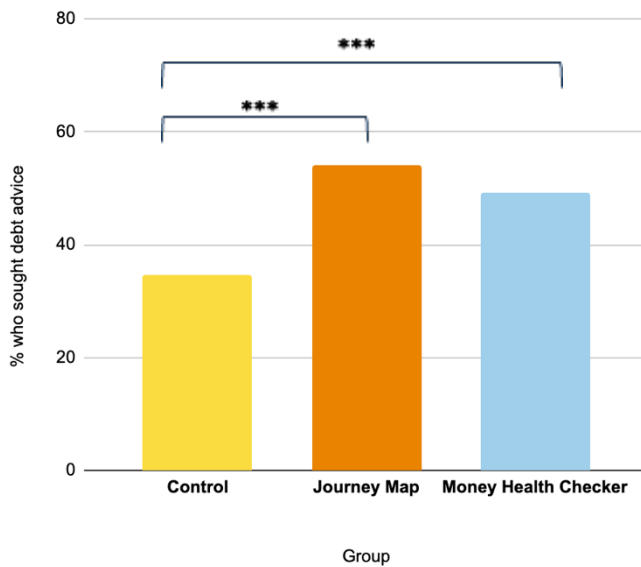
[https://coqco.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_cUDIqJNjDOUIq8m](https://coqco.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cUDIqJNjDOUIq8m)



## Did the solutions increase the likelihood of seeking debt advice within the scenario?

People in the two test groups were significantly more likely to choose 'seek debt advice' than people in the control group.

**Figure 17: Differences in proportion of people seeking debt advice by group**

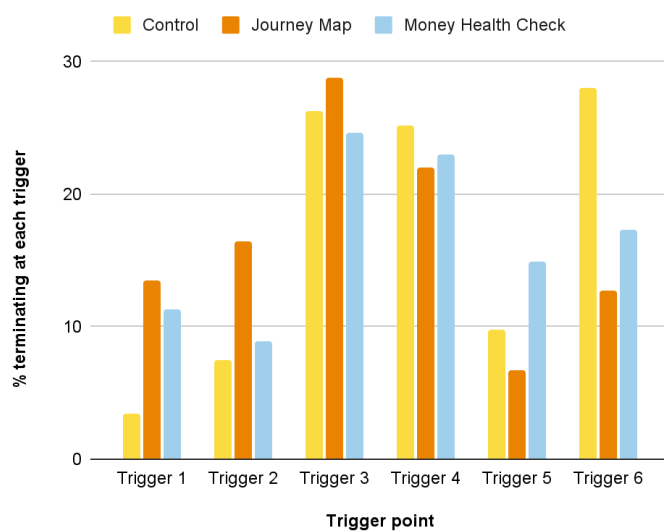


- In the Control group, just 34.6% of participants sought debt advice by the end of the simulated scenario
- This increased sharply to 54.0% of participants who saw the Journey Map, and 49.1% of participants who interacted with the Money Health Checker
- Both of these differences were large and statistically significant
- \*\*\* indicates the difference is statistically significant to the  $p < .001$  level

## Did the solutions encourage participants to seek debt advice earlier in the scenario?

People in the two test groups were significantly more likely to 'seek debt advice' at earlier trigger points than people in the control group.

**Figure 18: Proportion of people in each group terminating at each trigger point**

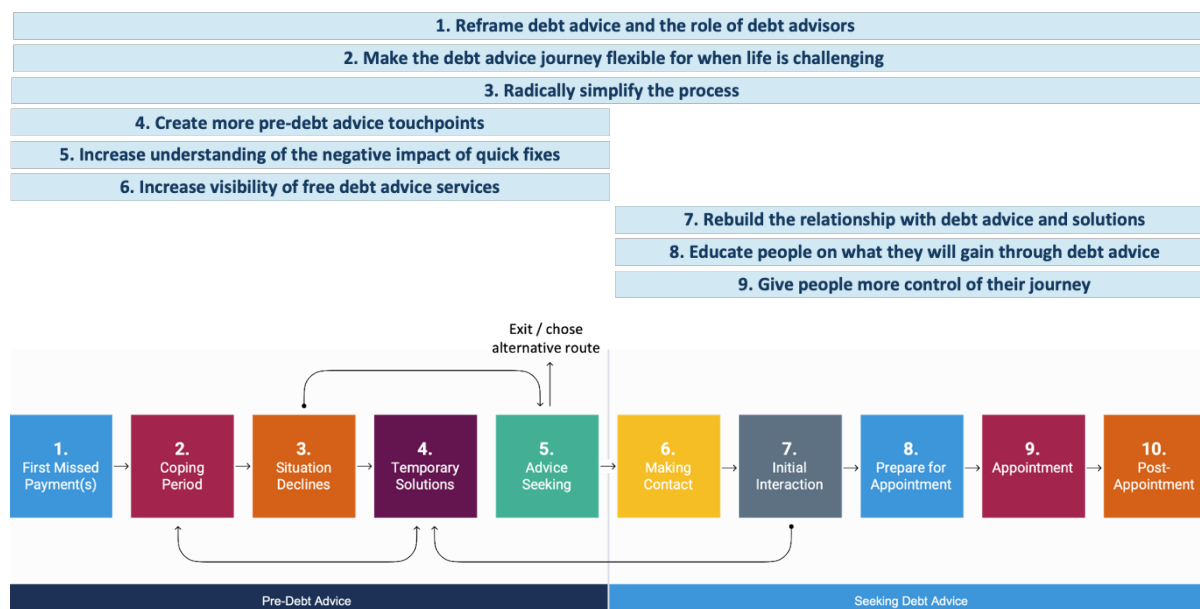


- There was a statistically significant association between group and time-to-debt advice ( $p < .001$ )
- Participants in the Journey Map group sought debt advice earlier than participants in the Control group; they were more likely to seek debt advice at triggers 1 and 2, and less likely to at trigger 6.
- Participants in the Money Health Checker group also sought debt advice more quickly than Control participants, though this effect was less pronounced.

## Overarching recommendations

In addition to the solution concepts, we consolidated evidence from the literature review<sup>5</sup>, best practice from behavioural science and the findings from Phase 1 to identify nine recommendations related to the different barriers and stages of debt advice (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Overarching recommendations across the user journey



### Explanation of overarching recommendations

#### 1. Reframe debt advice and the role of debt advisers to encourage a cultural shift

- Reframe the language used to talk about debt advice in relation to improving financial wellbeing.
- Position community based debt advisers as “financial doctors” who need to see the warts and have seen it all before (like community healthcare professionals).
- Train advisers to not use language that implies debtor wrongdoing (go along with the narrative of circumstance rather than character).

#### 2. Make the debt advice journey flexible for when life becomes more challenging

- Increase awareness of debt advice among community healthcare providers so they can refer to community based debt advisers with experience of working with vulnerabilities.
- Train all debt advisers on how to interact with and handle customers who have differing

<sup>5</sup> We conducted a comprehensive review of behavioural science and debt advice research across six themes: 1) Awareness of the problem and the subjective understanding of ‘problem debt’, 2) Trust, 3) Awareness of debt advice services, 4) Desperation / no other choice, 5) Self-esteem / self-efficacy and 6) Stigma.



needs.

- Create opportunities to pause the journey and make time for personal challenges that arise.

### 3. Radically simplify the process

- Simplify the first steps of the debt advice journey so people aren't overwhelmed by the effort they put in before getting advice (e.g. by requiring less paperwork from people or using less stressful ways of getting it).
- Do more to triage and direct people to the correct service upfront, e.g. community vs national providers.
- Design a simplified journey for people to switch to if they become overwhelmed.

### 4. Create more pre-advice touchpoints to help people realise their situation

- Create more awareness of community debt advice among other community based services, and provide simple ways of referring people between the different services.
- Develop a way of quickly alerting people to their situation or helping them signal a need for help, for example in routine situations such as the GP.
- Help people understand the early financial and psychological signs of problem debt.

### 5. Increase awareness and understanding of the detrimental impacts of quick fixes

- Prompt people to keep up the momentum and seek debt advice after talking to their creditor.
- Myth busting on social media to challenge common short-term fixes such as borrowing money from family or using temping debt packaging firms.
- Ask friends and family to identify early signs and act as a referrer to debt advice rather than fixer.

### 6. Increase online visibility of free debt advice services

- Help people better differentiate between free debt advice, showcasing what is 'government approved', and other providers who often offer a single paid-for solution.
- Identify trusted messengers in communities - people who can learn about and signpost those in need to community debt advice.
- Use targeted advertising for people who search and click through to paid-for services.



### **7. Rebuild their relationship with debt advice and solutions**

- Build feedback mechanisms into the debt advice process. Proactively reach out to those who have disengaged, find out the reason and allay concerns.
- Signpost to a new adviser if the relationship is irreparable and encourage them to continue the journey.
- Use a sympathetic tone of voice and mitigate blame rather than passing judgement.

### **8. Educate people on what they will gain through debt advice**

- Positively frame advice, e.g., clearer view of their finances, health benefits and reductions in stress anxiety.
- Align the positive outcomes of debt advice with other comparable services (e.g., going to the GP to get better).
- Emphasise that they will remain in control - debt advisers will work with them to make sure they have everything they need.

### **9. Give people more control of their journey**

- Offer three tiers of support. Ask the person to share how much control they would like of the process, and adjust support offered accordingly.
- Highlight the options for a more self-driven approach upfront, which emphasises the person can have as much control of the process as they would like.
- Start sessions with goal setting, where the customer sets what they want to achieve and by when.



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