Nudges for social good

Practical tips and learning from the LGA’s behavioural insights programme
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What are behavioural insights?

Understanding why a person will act in a certain way is called a behavioural insight. These insights can be used to design a temporary change or ‘nudge’ in a service in order to encourage people to act in a different way. If we are nudged to make better choices for ourselves and for society, we can improve local government service outcomes. This can help to manage demand for public services, decrease the cost of them and achieve better outcomes for residents and society. A behavioural insights trial can be run to measure the impact of the nudge. This provides an evidence base showing whether the intervention should be implemented into the service permanently.

How has the Local Government Association (LGA) helped?

Councils are increasingly looking to apply behavioural insights to improve service delivery. To support council innovation, we decided to design and deliver a behavioural insights programme to understand how behavioural science can be used to improve outcomes from local government services.

We have worked with twenty-six councils across a variety of service areas including, but not limited to, waste and recycling, children’s social services, adult social services and public health. The results are providing an evidence base of effective behavioural insights interventions to reduce demand for local public services and encourage an early intervention approach where appropriate.

Through our grant funded projects and beyond, we have been collating good practice from across local government and have learnt a variety of lessons. This enables local councils to base their approach on the success of others using the robust evidence and experience from other authorities. We want councils to use our template letters, trial designs and evaluation methods so that they don’t have to start from scratch: www.local.gov.uk/behavioural-insights

So, how did we approach each project? How did we overcome some of the challenges? As we are now working with our fourth cohort of councils, we are keen to share the key lessons and tips that we have discovered so far.

The purpose of this guide

There is a lot of behavioural insights methodology to help councils carry out a behavioural insights intervention. For example, we partnered with the Behavioural Insights Team to communicate five simple recommendations to help councils improve their revenue collection: www.local.gov.uk/supporting-councils-improve-revenue-collection-behavioural-insights

This document however is a summary of the top ten lessons that we have learnt throughout the LGA behavioural insights programme. The purpose is to provide some useful hints, reminders, challenges and examples which other councils can use when implementing their own behavioural insights projects.
Top ten lessons learnt

1. Engage your stakeholders
2. Work out your sample size
3. Be mindful of other transformational projects
4. Be aware of procurement and restructuring
5. Ensure sufficient service capacity
6. Data, data, data
7. Assess and manage risk
8. Simplify your intervention
9. Measure your results
10. Scale your intervention

Find the behavioural insights project scopes and results here:
www.local.gov.uk/behavioural-insights
@LGecomms
productivity@local.gov.uk
#1 Engage your stakeholders

Work alongside residents, councillors, senior management, your team, other council services, suppliers and partners from the very beginning to ensure buy-in to your behavioural insights (BI) project. This includes agreeing the idea in principle, the scope, an action plan, roles and timescales for the project.

Worcestershire County Council aimed to reduce the amount of money owed to the council by people receiving adult social care services. Under the Care Act 2014, anyone with assets of over £23,250 has to pay the full cost of their care. Some payments to the council were yet to be paid so a behavioural insights technique was employed to encourage service users to pay back the money they owed. Both the new joiner and reminder letters were reformatted to encourage service users who owed the council money to either pay or sign up for a direct debit. As a result of the BI intervention Worcestershire significantly increased direct debit sign ups by 61 per cent compared to the control group. Furthermore, a 33 per cent uplift for those making payments via Worcestershire’s website and the automated telephone line was achieved.

Worcestershire successfully mapped their stakeholders at the beginning of the project. The council found that by ensuring buy-in from all of their partners from the beginning was vital to their project’s success. Colleagues from across adult social care services, the debt management team, who were heavily involved, and the third party financial services supplier all needed to be kept informed. Without broad endorsement of the same end goal, it would have been a lot harder to achieve any behavioural shift because they were all pivotal to the service change.

In another example, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council increased the uptake of assistive technology amongst adult social care service users in the borough. Knowsley targeted a leaflet drop to those who held blue badges and received a council assisted bin collection service. The team also worked with social workers to ensure that they encouraged service user uptake of the assistive technology, where appropriate. Through partnership working with other teams in the council, the average installations of assistive technology increased by 23 per cent on average per month compared to before the trial began. Please find the leaflet in appendix one of this document.

Key tips

- **Project scope**: ensure that the scope of the project is clearly defined and agreed between council officers, councillors and partners involved in delivering the service.

- **Working with other council service areas**: if the project is being managed by a corporate innovation lead, it is crucial to ensure the relevant service area is fully engaged and consulted. They will be best placed to identify the art of the possible and to know where an intervention would be best targeted.

- **The importance of leadership**: it is crucial to have senior level buy-in and
this is especially true when dealing with external partners or other service areas – having someone senior in your corner can make all the difference. Leaders need to be interested in the lessons from the work, not just the results, as innovations such as this will not always be successful, but a less successful project should not put the brakes on all innovation.

Ask yourself

- Are my council senior leadership team and councillors on board with the project?
- Have I formed a multi-disciplinary project team?
- Is the good will and work of external partners and stakeholders required and have they been engaged?

Find out more

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www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Worcestershire%20County%20Council%20scope%20FINAL.pdf

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www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/KMBC%20scoping%20document%20FINAL.pdf
Think about who will be part of your trial and whether it is big enough to ensure a statistically significant result.

East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service want to change the behaviour of people in their homes to reduce accidental dwelling fires. Some behavioural insights projects have a ready-made sample because they are regular users of a service. In this example, it was slightly different. The fire and rescue service needed to recruit members of the public to take part in the trial. This had to be done without explicitly referring to the trial – or the intended outcome – in order to avoid ‘contamination’ and this added an additional layer of complexity. The service has so far recruited around 300 people.

After a tricky start, the service identified that sales skills would be very useful in recruiting people and it was harder than expected to get businesses on board with offering incentives to those taking part. The service has been trying out different innovative approaches to get residents on board. Social media activity, engaging with businesses and a town centre flash mob are just a few of the methods used to communicate with their target audience. Digital communication has been invaluable in trying to recruit the younger urban households that are most risk, who the service know are ‘digital natives’.

Calculating your sample size

At the start of your BI project you need to agree your hypothesis. What is it that you are trying to change through your intervention and by how much? Calculating the sample size is essential to prove the hypothesis effectively.

You can use a power calculator¹ to work out your sample size. Here is a guide on how to fill it out:

- Significance level (alpha) = 5 per cent
- Power (1-beta) = 80 per cent
- Percentage 'success' in control group = this is the current percentage of those who are displaying the behaviour, eg the percentage of accidental dwelling fires happening in East Sussex each year before the behavioural insights intervention. The current percentage rate of accidental dwelling fires in East Sussex is 6.5 per cent.
- Percentage 'success' in experimental group = this is the hypothesis of a successful behavioural insights intervention. The hypothesis is based on research from previous trials and the literature review, eg the percentage of accidental dwelling fires happening in East Sussex after a successful intervention will be a drop of 5 per cent. The percentage 'success' in the experimental group will then be 1.5 per cent.

The bigger the percentage difference between the control and experimental groups, the smaller the sample size will need to be. The smaller the percentage change, the bigger the sample size will need to be. This is to evidence that the intervention has caused a change, rather than it happening by chance.

¹ Such as: www.sealedenvelope.com/power/binary-superiority
Key tips

- **Who**: identify who will be part of the trial from the outset.

- **Power calculator**: you can use an online calculator to work out how many people will need to be part of your control and experimental groups for the randomised control trial.

- **Be aware of your options**: there is more than one way to do behavioural insights projects. Randomised control trials are seen as the 'gold standard' because of the robust evidence they provide, however they can be lengthy and costly to run and will only work where you can apply the intervention to a large number of people. In local government, we need to be as practical as possible and therefore other types of projects may be more appropriate if you require something quicker, cheaper or you're looking to target a small group of people with the intervention.

Ask yourself

- Do I have a readily available sample size or will I look to recruit residents to take part?
- Have I used the power calculator to work out my sample size online?
- Have I spoken to any data, research or performance officers in my council if struggling with the power calculation?

Find out more

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Be mindful of other transformational projects

Steer away from undertaking transformational projects in the same service in which the behavioural insights project is taking place. It could skew the results of the behavioural insights trial by one piece of work affecting another and in doing so, disrupt your measurements.

Leeds City Council introduced a new process to reduce the number of inappropriate referrals to adult social care. As a result of the research, a behaviourally informed intervention was created in which social workers were given training and a prompt sheet to help them implement a new process whilst handling adult social care calls. This was known as the ‘OAT’ process and it has three stages:

1. at the start of the call, social workers were asked to set out the potential outcomes
2. before beginning a referral, social workers asked themselves some key questions about the case
3. if social workers were unsure about whether to make a referral, they could offer the caller the opportunity to try a signposted service for two weeks.

A fall in inappropriate referrals was identified compared to the same period in the previous year, though this number of referrals was equally large before and after receiving the training. The reduction in calls by 2.4 per cent from one year to the next could have been down to the behavioural insights intervention, or other transformational activity. It is however difficult to pin point given the amount of change taking place in the service.

As local authorities find themselves in ever trickier financial situations, councils are trying new and innovative techniques for service delivery. For a behavioural insights trial however, the conditions need to be kept constant and consistent whilst the measurement of data and the trial take place.

Key tips

- **Other transformational activity**: be mindful of other changes happening in the service as this can significantly impact your ability to run a measurable behavioural insights trial. This includes introducing a new service provider and/or new systems. In order to be confident in the results of the trial, ideally you want to be able to collect baseline data against which you can measure the impact.

- **Information technology**: be aware that new systems can change the way in which data is monitored.

- **New legislation**: it is certainly worth thinking about if potential new laws have or will affect your project and its data. In particular, how will changes affect service demand?
Ask yourself

- Am I planning other transformational activity in the service at the same time as carrying out the trial?
- Are new systems being put in place and how will this affect my trial?
- Has a new law come into force recently or is it coming soon?

Find out more

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#4

Be aware of procurement and restructuring

Before embarking on a behavioural insights project, check whether the service will be procured, re-procured or restructured. Any changes could disrupt the trial, and in turn, influence the results.

Hartlepool Borough Council are working to increase service user take up of their drug and alcohol support services. When they finish their trial and have obtained their results, they are looking to re-structure the service. They will be well placed to include any new activity in future programme plans.

Similarly, district councils in Kent were re-procuring parts of their housing service at the same time as their trial to reduce demand in council housing services. They made sure to keep the trial and measurement of it separate to the procurement. Kent district councils used behavioural insights techniques to rewrite a letter about housing provision, increasing service user understanding of council communications by 43 per cent. Please find the letter in appendix 2 of this document.

Key tips

- **Check out the supplier status**: if you do not already know, check who delivers the service currently, if there is a contract and when the contract ends.

- **Future plans**: if the service is currently delivered in house, have you checked with senior officers about if there are plans to procure the service in the future? This will help you to plan whether a behavioural insights trial can take place and the timescales for it. It might also enable you to think further about which stakeholders to engage.

- **Specification**: if a procured service changes half-way through a project or even after it is finished, be aware that this could change the way in which the trial is being run. If you are looking to re-procure the service soon, make sure that the behavioural insights project is in the specification to deliver any results from the project.

**Ask yourself**

- Who currently delivers the service?
- Is a procured service involved in the project and/or will I be re-procuring during the lifecycle of the project?
- Can I include any learnings from the project in a future service plan or specification?

**Find out more**

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#5

Ensure sufficient service capacity

Ensure that you are nudging service users into a service which is ready to respond to increased (or decreased) demand.

Croydon Council wanted to reduce the demand for council provided special educational needs (SEN) direct transport. The project aimed to do this by increasing uptake of independent travel training (ITT) by:

- nudging schools to increase referrals of students suitable for ITT with an email invitation campaign
- applying behavioural insights to ITT communications, marketing materials and the application process
- up-skilling service staff to apply behavioural insights in their day-to-day work.

As well as producing cost savings for the council, ITT has many benefits for students and their families, such as helping students to become more confident and independent, which in turn should improve their job prospects and life chances.

Croydon Council has a specialist Behaviour Change Hub which works with services to apply behavioural insights to their challenges. This involves co-designing behaviourally informed improvements to services which are tested, ideally through a randomised control trial, before being rolled out at scale.

In this case, the SEN travel service experienced an unexpectedly high volume of requests for ITT during the project, which required a change to the objectives and design of the trial. This demonstrates the importance of flexibility/agility and contingency planning in order to cope with an unanticipated surge in demand that successful interventions sometimes generate.

Key tips

- **Engage stakeholders**: ensure stakeholders at all levels are engaged with the project from the beginning; conduct post-mortems and work with the service to develop contingency plans for handling sudden unexpected increases in demand during the trial as a result of the interventions.
- **Agile approach required**: be open to modifying goals/objectives as new intelligence and/or obstacles come to light. Plan projects over short time periods (as service priorities can change rapidly) and ensure stakeholders are kept informed.

Ask yourself

- Do I have a contingency plan for different eventualities?
- Am I able to adopt an agile project management approach to adapt to different needs and demands?

Find out more

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www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/LGA%20SEN%20Travel%20Assistance%20Plan%20scope%20FINAL.pdf
Identify the most appropriate data to collate to measure the effectiveness of your BI trial. Consider where the data will come from, how much data you will collect, what type and over what time period.

We have worked with Kent County Council, Kent Police and their commissioned support services to increase the number of domestic abuse victims that seek and receive support. The commissioned support service successfully contacted a further 2.3 per cent of domestic violence victims which saw a 0.6 per cent increase of uptake in support received. This was done by increasing the effectiveness of the first contact which victims have with commissioned services.

In order to carry out this trial, data needed to be gathered from all partners before identifying an intervention. The partners working on the project drew up a data sharing agreement amongst themselves to ensure that the trial’s success could be measured.

Key tips

- **Time**: spending enough time on the gathering of data and therefore insights is crucial. Do not assume that data is readily available. You may need to build in contingency for collection and be pragmatic when designing trials.

- **The root of the problem**: this can only be properly understood to a ‘good enough’ extent with research and hard evidence.

- **Confidence in your results**: the more (good) data you have, the more robustly and thoroughly you can measure the change in behaviour that you are looking to encourage, the more confident you will be in your results and the more detailed analysis you will be able to carry out on your results.

- **Quantitative and qualitative data**: quantitative data is helpful to identify trends and predictions of future behaviours. Qualitative data provides an answer to the ‘why’ behind the quantitative data which assists with an identification of the intervention.

- **Partnerships**: if you are relying on a partner or supplier to provide you with the results of your trial, you will need to draw up a data sharing agreement. This will ensure that you understand whether the intervention was successful and should be rolled out or not.

**Ask yourself**

- Have I factored in enough time to gather evidence into my project timeline?
- Have I identified the root of the problem in order to decide on an intervention?
- Have I tested assumptions in the data?
- Have I looked into collating both types of data – quantitative and qualitative?
- Is a data sharing agreement needed and have I included this in my project plan?

**Find out more**

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#7
Assess and manage risk

Explore whether a risk assessment must be written, ethical clearance sought and/or whether research committees need to approve the potential BI trial.

In local government, we work with vulnerable members of the local community. Therefore, certain clearances need to be made before undertaking a behavioural insights trial. For example, Hartlepool Borough Council are using behavioural insights to improve the uptake of support services for drug and alcohol misuse. Importantly, a risk assessment needed to be carried out for anyone new needing to work in the council or partner organisation to ensure that it was a safe place for colleagues to work.

Similarly, North East Lincolnshire's project on increasing the take up of cancer screening needed ethical clearance. When working with the NHS or other health bodies, you may need to gain ethical approval to run a trial.

Ask yourself

- Will the project require ethical clearance from any local and or national bodies?
- Who will I need to apply to? How long will it take?

Find out more

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Key tips

- Research: ask partners whether any ethical clearance or risk assessment is required for your project to go ahead. It is good to understand local and national expectations at the beginning of the project.
- Apply in a timely way: gather all the paperwork and partnership buy-in so as not to hold up your project unnecessarily.
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Be aware of how much control you have over the environment you are looking to implement the nudge in. If the intervention takes place in an area outside your control, you need to be mindful of how much time the intervention will take to set up and sustain.

Liverpool City Council approached national supermarkets to implement nudges to reduce the sales of sugary drinks. Because of the size of the decision-making chains in these organisations this turned into a lengthy process to gain approval. An opportunity arose to work with NHS partners in the hospitals in Liverpool. The BI project therefore focused on the cafes in local hospitals to reduce the amount of sugary drinks bought in a retail environment.

The council tested how they could encourage hospital cafe customers to choose low sugar drinks instead of high sugar alternatives by making simple changes to the food environment in three cafes across two hospitals in Liverpool. The intervention aimed to influence consumer decision making by clearly showing which drinks were high sugar at the point of purchase.

On alternating weeks, simple on-shelf red ‘pop-out’ stop signs were placed on the refrigerator shelves containing high sugar chilled drinks. This was a low maintenance intervention which did not require sustained effort. The analysis found that the signs led to a 7.3 per cent reduction in high sugar drinks sales. We did not find evidence that total chilled drink sales declined when the signs were in place, suggesting that people substituted with low sugar alternatives.

There is opportunity for this intervention, particularly given its low cost and low maintenance, to be introduced to other areas of the public sector including leisure centres, railway stations and other hospitals across local authorities to reduce purchasing and consumption of high sugar products. Please find the nudge in appendix four of this document.

Key tips

- **Resources to set up the trial**: ensure that you have the appropriate resources to set up and carry out the trial.
- **Start small**: these projects are complex so starting with something that is simple and which you have direct control over can give you the ‘proof of concept’ you need to secure buy-in and expand your activity.

Ask yourself

- Are the nudges automated or do they need manual assistance or human intervention?
- Am I looking to trial something manageable rather than biting off more than I can chew initially?

Find out more

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#9
Measure your results

Continuously measure what has caused the change in behaviour.

Upon a positive result from the BI trial, the authority should start to put the motions in place to roll out the intervention across the service. For example, Warrington Borough Council aimed to reduce the number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans because some of their needs could be met in other ways.

In order to do this, the council sent personalised invites to health partners and other senior partners to ensure a multi-disciplinary membership of the Provision and Placement Panel. All the panel members wrote and agreed the panel’s terms of reference, and the forms used by the team were redeveloped to make the information more accessible. It has contributed towards an efficient, collaborative and effective decision-making process to ensure the best outcomes for children and young people.

This trial has reduced the number of EHC plans produced with an actual savings figure over 12 months of £42,000 and a cost avoidance projection figure of £380,000. Warrington are continuously monitoring the effectiveness of the panel in order to keep improving.

Key tips

- **The nudge**: ensure you know where the nudge is coming from.
- **Manage your expectations**: behavioural insights is not a panacea. Often, trials will not realise changes amongst the target population of more than 8 per cent. This does not however mean that a huge impact cannot be made to a group of vulnerable people, or in terms of efficiency savings.

- **Continuous monitoring**: keep measuring whether the trial has made an impact. If you do not see results within the first quarter, it does not mean that you never will.

Ask yourself

- How do I know if the person has received the nudge and that it is the nudge specifically that has caused the change in behaviour?
- Will I carry out a 12 month review and analysis of the results and lessons learnt?

Find out more

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www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Warrington%20Borough%20scope%20FINAL.pdf

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After a successful trial and results, it is time to communicate this to both your own organisation and to other authorities.

Kent County Council, Kent Police and their commissioned support services increased the number of domestic abuse victims that seek and receive support. This excellent result has meant that scaling the intervention is the next step to ensure that other local areas hear about the initiative and implement it themselves.

It is important to think about how the project could be scaled from the very beginning of the project. Thinking about practicalities ahead of time will make the scaling of the approach easier.

We are working with the Kent organisations to run a learning event for five interested authorities and police forces. The LGA and Kent will be on hand to help guide the other authorities through the process. The idea is that one authority can tell five others, those five can tell five more and so on. This can be assisted with a ‘how to guide’ or a ‘trial in a box’ which provide material for the authority to use when replicating the approach. Please find the nudge in appendix three of this document.

### Key tips

- **A network**: building a cohort of those in the sector who are interested in how the project develops will not only provide a learning community for yourself but will also create a ready-made group of authorities to whom the project can be scaled up to.

- **Communicating impact**: you can tell other council teams about your nudge techniques to help spread the word.

- **Scaling up the approach in the region and nationwide**: you can run seminars and write blogs on how you have achieved a change in behaviour and how others can do the same.

### Ask yourself

- Are others interested in the trial and can I keep in touch with them as it progresses?
- Have I enabled another team to start their own behavioural insights intervention?
- Have I contacted the LGA to help me to scale the approach nationwide?

### Find out more

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Appendix 1

The appendices are made up of the actual nudges from the projects undertaken. As more nudges are created, they will be published on the LGA website.

Your leaflet to nudge the take-up of assistive technology

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Assistive Technology

Our devices can help you live safely and independently in your own home for longer.

Assistive technology devices are simple tools that help you stay independent. We provide them to thousands of people across Knowsley. Our most popular options are:

01 A pendant alarm
A small device which can be worn discreetly around your wrist or neck. It can be triggered if you fall but is not picked up by your home, and will contact a friend, relative or care team.

02 Smart home assistant
A device which you control with your voice and that responds to you. It allows you to control lights, take pictures, or even open and close doors. The Amazon Echo and Google Home are both smart home assistants.

03 Medication dispenser
A small plastic container which can be set to dispense medication at set times. It is often opened by people who may have difficulty using their hands to open other medication.

”As well as making sure I get support when I have fallen, my pendant alarm makes me feel secure in my home. If someone is knocking on my door and I don’t like the sound of them, I feel better knowing the Lifeline service is there.”

Ged Wilson, Knowsley

E: email: assistive.technology@knowsley.gov.uk
Dear [Name of applicant]

We are sending you this Personal Housing Action Plan to help with your housing need. It tells you what you need to do, and how the council will help you.

The plan is geared towards helping you:

1. stay in your current home (if you can), or
2. find a new place to rent in the private market.

These are realistic ways to meet your housing need. We can help you by providing advice, speaking to your landlord, or by helping you find a new place on websites such as www.rightmove.co.uk and www.zoopla.co.uk. Finding a new place to rent means you can quickly move into a new home, and you can choose the area you want to live in.

Do not assume that your housing need can be met by applying for social housing. Even if you meet the qualification criteria to join the housing register, you are very unlikely to be offered social housing. Last year, those people who did get an offer of social housing had to wait at least 14 months before they were offered a home and some as long as four years.

The best way to quickly solve your housing issue is to follow the actions in your Personal Housing Action Plan. You will need to show that you have completed these actions to be eligible for support from the council.

You can contact [email] if there is anything in the plan you don't understand.

Yours sincerely

[Name]
Housing Options Officer
Appendix 3

Your Victim Support nudge card

What can Victim Support do for you?

• **Provide** advice and security items to help you and your family stay safe
• **Introduce** you to other services, such as counselling and financial advice
• **Listen** to you in confidence

Victim Support is an independent charity. They provided support to over 814,000 people last year.

They can also be reached on: 0808 168 9276 Mon – Fri 8am-8pm and Sat 9am-5pm; or 0808 1689111 outside these hours.

Take the call from Victim Support

We have arranged for Victim Support to call you. Many people in your situation find a quick call with them useful.

What happens next?

☑ Reported incident to the police.
☐ Victim Support to call your mobile within 2 to 3 days from a withheld number.
☐ Pick up the phone and confirm your name when asked.
Appendix 4

Your high sugar stop sign