

9<sup>th</sup> December 2019

**For Immediate Release**

## **Festive warning: Don't get involved with a loan shark – yule regret it!**

The England Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) are warning people not to turn to loan sharks to cover the cost of Christmas.

These unlicensed lenders charge extortionate amounts of interest and have been known to use threatening language, intimidation and even violence when demanding payments from their desperate victims.

Using the hashtag **#StopLoanSharksXMAS** this year's online campaign is providing the public with useful information and advice to ensure they stay safe and don't fall victim to unscrupulous lenders.

A series of videos including a Sharks Flashmob and catchy festive jingle will be shared from the Stop Loan Sharks Facebook and Twitter accounts to raise awareness of the issue.

**Tony Quigley, Head of the England Illegal Money Lending Team said:** "People may feel under pressure to borrow money in the run-up to Christmas but might not realise the situation they will find themselves in if they use a loan shark.

"Our advice to residents in need of financial support would be to turn to a Credit Union rather than a loan shark who could take advantage and charge exorbitant interest rates.

"We hope by turning the spotlight on loan shark activity we can help more people spot the dangers signs and seek help if they are affected."

All money lenders require proper permission from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to lend money and those who do not are acting illegally.

The national team continues to investigate and prosecute loan sharks, which in past cases has included instances of blackmail, threatening behaviour, violence, kidnap, drugs offences and rape.

## **Stay safe, borrow responsibly and start saving for next Christmas**

- Remember: loan sharks should be avoided because they will make a difficult financial situation much worse.
- If you need to borrow money, check the lender is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.
- There are legitimate services you can access for help with money, such as credit unions, which offer safe saving and affordable loans options. [Find your nearest Credit Union](#).
- Start preparing your finances for next Christmas and open a savings account with your local credit union.
- For advice on all money matters, including debt and loans, contact the Citizens Advice Bureau advice line on 03444 111 444.

You are not in trouble if you have borrowed cash or have been paying back a loan from an illegal money lender, the loan shark is. They are the people committing a crime, not you.

Nationally, Illegal Money Lending Teams have secured more than 394 prosecutions for illegal money lending and related activity, leading to nearly 480 years' worth of custodial sentences. They have written off £74.9 million worth of illegal debt and helped over 29,000 people.

You can safely report a loan shark to the Illegal Money Lending Team on 0300 555 2222 or fill out the [online form](#).

### **ENDS**

For media enquiries, please contact IMLT Press Officer Holly-Leigh Luckman on 0121 464 4699 or email [Holly.luckman@birmingham.gov.uk](mailto:Holly.luckman@birmingham.gov.uk).

### **Notes to editors:**

The Illegal Money Lending Teams in England, Scotland and Wales work alongside the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) to investigate those operating within the consumer credit market without the appropriate authorisation.

The Illegal Money Lending Teams in England and Wales work in partnership with local Trading Standards Authorities in their related countries. They consist of specialist officers who investigate and prosecute illegal money lending and related activity and LIAISE officers who support victims and raise awareness of the dangers of borrowing from illegal money lenders.