

Safe and Sound - Bromsgrove

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Sue Hanley, Chair of the North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership

This month we would like to give you some information about loan sharks, what they do and how to avoid becoming a victim of them.

A loan shark is someone who lends money without a Consumer Credit Licence; unlicensed money lending is illegal and a criminal offence.

The England Illegal Money Lending Team, part of National Trading Standards, investigates illegal money lending and related offences. Since 2004, they have supported over 26,000 people and written off over £63,500,000 of debt. There are an estimated 310,000 people in debt to illegal money lenders in the UK. The IML Teams within the UK work to raise awareness of what illegal money is while investigating and prosecuting loan sharks.

Anyone can be a victim of a loan shark. It's not always easy to spot one as they will at first appear friendly and helpful, but will turn on you when you can't pay. Be careful who you trust - nearly four out of five loan shark victims found the lender through a friend and around half of victims considered the loan shark to be a friend. The loan shark can resort to threats, violence and intimidation even if the debt has been paid off several times over.

A loan shark will typically have little paperwork and will add penalty charges for late payments. They often refuse to tell the borrower how much they still owe and when they will finish repayments. They may take personal items as security, for example bank cards and driving licences.

Victims often don't report loan sharks because they fear reprisals. They may also worry that they will receive a criminal record if the police or other agencies become aware of their transactions with the loan shark - this is not the case.

You can check to see if your lender is legal by searching the Financial Conduct Authority database <https://register.fca.org.uk/> or call the hotline number below.

To report a loan shark, get help and advice ring the 24/7 hotline: 0300 555 2222 you can be anonymous if you prefer. Visit <http://www.stoploansharks.co.uk/> email reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk or text the lender's details to 07860 022116

For more information about North Worcestershire Community Safety Partnership, visit www.nwcsp.org. Follow us on Twitter @saferbromsgrove and @nworcscsp