

Stop Loan Sharks Reporting App Launched

A smartphone app has been launched to make it quicker and easier for people to report loan sharks and access support.

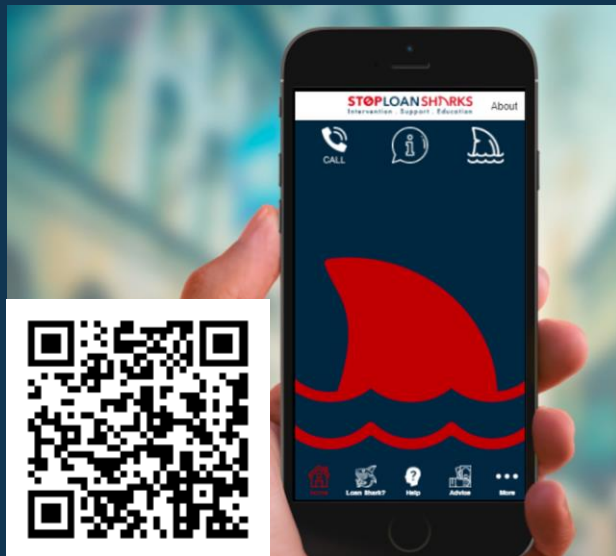
The Stop Loan Sharks app, launched by the England Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT), includes a contact form and phone number to report loan sharks, as well as information to help victims of illegal money lenders to get support.

It also offers users advice on the tell-tale signs that someone is a loan shark. These include offering cash loans without any paperwork, charging extortionate interest, taking bank cards and passports as security, and threatening behaviour or violence to get money.

The app was funded from cash recovered from loan sharks under the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA).

It provides information to various frontline professionals who may meet loan shark victims in the course of their work, such as debt advisors, social workers and housing staff.

These professionals can read information on how to recognise the signs that a client may be involved with a loan shark and advice on how to respond.



Other features include a search tool to help users find credit unions and legitimate lenders, links to confidential debt advice services and push notifications about loan shark arrests and court cases.

Download the Stop Loan Sharks App for free from the [App Store](#) and [Google Play](#) or scan the QR Code on your phone!

Couple sentenced for illegal money lending

A husband and wife team ran a lucrative illegal money lending business in the Stockton area and netted over £500k in loan repayments.

Alan Fromson, 80, and Joyce Fromson, 78 were both sentenced to 10 months in prison, suspended for two years at Teesside Crown Court on November 17.

The pair from Carlton, Stockton, pleaded guilty to two charges of illegal money lending between July 2007 and October 2019.

The couple ran a legitimate business until 2007 when they failed to renew their licence that would enable them to lend to customers legally.

Simon Mortimer, prosecuting, said they issued loans worth around £382,800, earning £214,044 in interest payments and netting a total of £573,457 over a 12-year period.

In interview, Alan told investigators “the money goes straight into our pockets and we could get away with it, so we did” and “we have had a very, very good living out of it”.

The couple explained they had copied the Provident model and ran their own separate money lending rounds, with Alan operating in the Thornaby area and Joyce in Stillington and Carlton. **Read the full story [here](#).**

Exeter man sentenced for illegal money lending

An Exeter man who exploited vulnerable people has been given a suspended sentence.

Robert Ferguson, 69, from Exeter, admitted running an unlawful money lending business and was jailed for 30 weeks, suspended for two years at Exeter Crown Court on November 4.

He was also ordered to do 180 hours unpaid community work and pay £300 costs.

The case was prosecuted by the IMLT in partnership with Devon, Somerset and Torbay Trading Standards and Devon and Cornwall Police.

Simon Mortimer, prosecuting, told the court that Ferguson had been running his illegal money lending scheme between April 2014 and November 2019.

He charged exorbitant rates of interest to friends or people he met in pubs and received tens of thousands of pounds in loan repayments, which was paid directly into his bank by more than 20 people.



His customers in Exeter, Devon called him 'The Bank of Fergs'.

The court heard how some victims were given details of Ferguson's bank account, so they could pay him as soon as they got their benefit payments.

One victim met Ferguson in a pub and took out loans to pay for general living expenses such as food and rent. He ended up repaying £6,797 on loans totalling £1,575. **Read the full story [here](#).**

Loan shark suspects charged in Oldham

Three people have been charged with offences of illegal money lending, money laundering and fraud by false representation in Oldham.

The IMLT working in partnership with Oldham Council Trading Standards and Greater Manchester Police, executed warrants at two addresses in the Hollins and Holts areas of the town on Wednesday, December 9.

Searches were carried out at the properties where officers seized electronic devices.

The suspects, two men aged 31 and 33 and a 32-year-old woman, have been released on bail to appear at Tameside Magistrates' Court on Thursday, January 14, 2021.



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Loan shark survivor wins hero award after sharing her story to help other victims

A Teesside mum who fell into the clutches of an unscrupulous loan shark has been awarded a Chartered Trading Standards Institute (CTSI) Hero Award for sharing her experience to encourage other victims to come forward.

Becky found herself in financial hardship and borrowed £50 from someone she considered a friend to buy school uniforms for her children but ended up repaying an estimated £35,000.

She bravely spoke about her horrific ordeal of becoming entrapped by a loan shark, which led to attempts to take her own life after falling in debt and receiving terrifying threats from an ominous "Big Man."

Becky and her husband were both unemployed at the time, and with no access to credit cards or able to get a loan from the bank, she felt she had no option but to accept the cash from the woman posing to be her friend.

Becky said: "I had the £50 in 15 minutes. It seemed like easy money, but I didn't realise the dangers.

"The first time I was in arrears she added another £150 on top. So, you could borrow £50 one week, and owe £100 the next. But if you couldn't pay it would be £250 in a fortnight, £400 in three weeks.

"The most I ever owed was £1,500. She was taking hundreds a week off me, and I had to use food banks."



The loan shark would text Becky's kids if she was late with payments and warned they would be coming to visit unless she paid up.

The family have moved away from the loan shark and the lender is now under investigation.

Becky was nominated for the award by the IMLT.

If you or someone you know is in a similar situation to Becky, call the Stop Loan Sharks Helpline on **0300 555 2222** or get help [here](#).

Loan shark survivor shares story in new video

Loan shark survivor 'Bee' has shared her story in a new video to encourage others to come forward and get help.

'Bee' needed £3,000 to pay for her mum's funeral in Thailand. She had a poor credit rating and struggled to obtain credit through legitimate means. Bee was introduced to the loan shark through a friend in the Thai community whose boyfriend lent her the money.

Bee was forced to hand over £600 interest (20%) on the loan every month until she could pay off the capital. She was constantly harassed for money and she had to sell her late husband's jewellery to keep up with the payments.

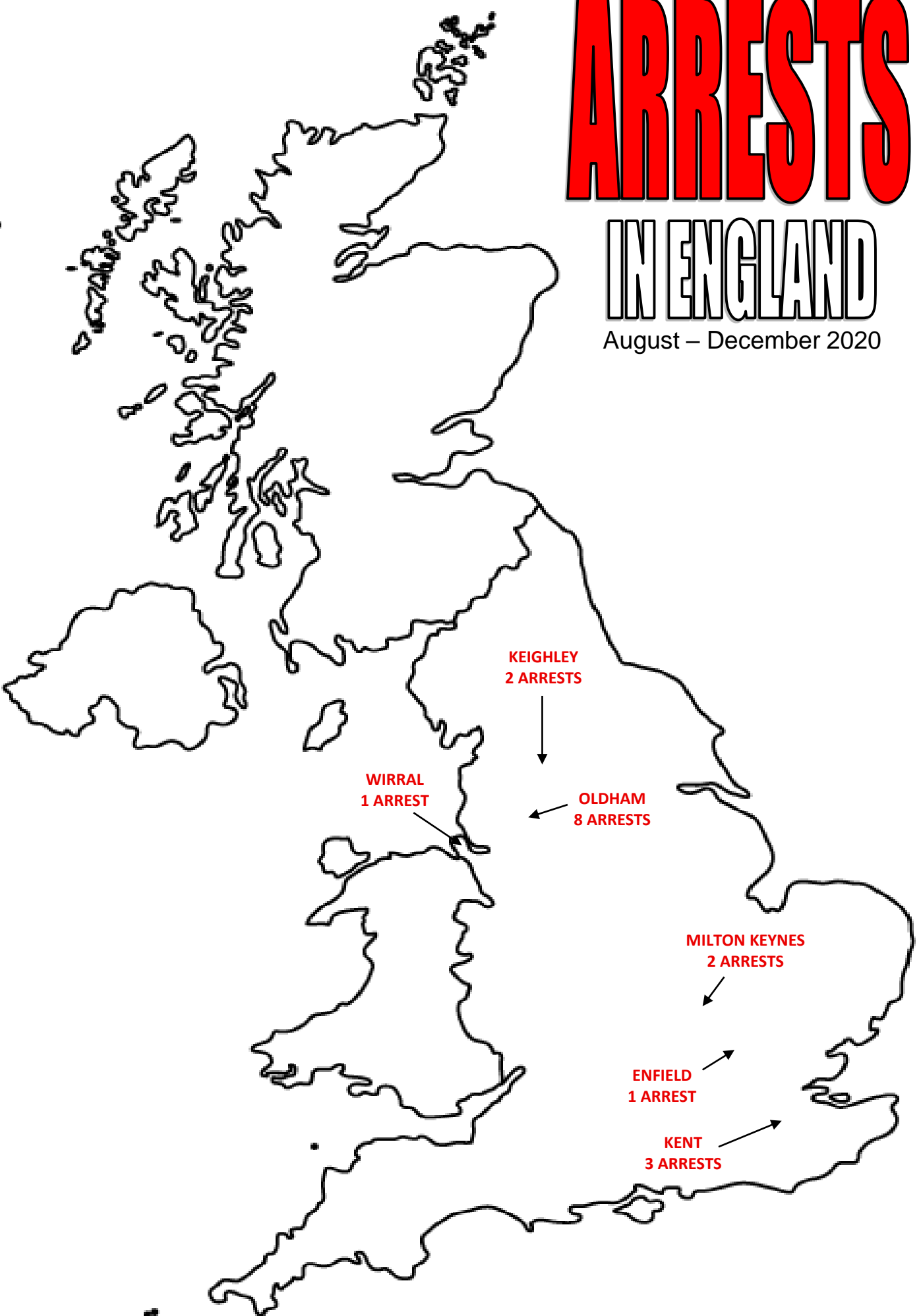


You can watch Bee's Story on [YouTube](#)

ARRESTS

IN ENGLAND

August – December 2020



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Campaign launched to tackle online loan sharks

The IMLT have launched a new campaign aimed at tackling illegal money lending on the internet and warning of the dangers of online loan sharks.

The **#SharkFreeSurfing** campaign comes amid concerns that more people are falling prey to unscrupulous lenders online as recent statistics show one in five met their lender on social media in the first half of 2020.

Loan sharks are increasingly using social media platforms, such as Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat, to advertise their illegal loans and target potential victims.

These criminals will lure people in with seemingly attractive loan offers, but will quickly resort to intimidation, threats and violence to enforce repayment and trap borrowers in a spiral of debt.

It is hoped that the campaign will help encourage not just victims, but the wider community to report online illegal money lending activity.

A promotional graphic for the Stop Loan Sharks campaign. It features a shark emerging from a smartphone screen, which displays a social media interface with red 'X' marks over various posts. The text on the graphic includes: 'DID YOU KNOW', '1 IN 5 FIND THEIR LOAN SHARK ON SOCIAL MEDIA', 'CALL OUR 24/7 CONFIDENTIAL HELPLINE', '0300 555 2222', a QR code with the instruction 'Scan the QR code to download the Stop Loan Sharks App.', and the hashtag '#SharkFreeSurfing'. The top right corner has the 'STOP LOAN SHARKS' logo and the tagline 'Intervention . Support . Education'.

The IMLT and partners have been sharing information and advice on social media about how to spot and avoid online loan sharks. Find out more and check out our top tips for staying safe online [here](#).

Congratulations to all the Stop Loan Sharks Short Story Competition winners!
Listen to the 7 Days of Sharks stories on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Spotify](#) and our [website](#).

Partner Recognition Programme launching 2021

The IMLT is pleased to announce the upcoming launch of the [Stop Loan Sharks Partner Recognition Programme](#).

The programme encompasses Partner and Partner Plus awards for organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support for the IMLT to raise awareness of the dangers of loan sharks in communities.

Partners must actively ensure that their staff are able to respond to suspected and reported illegal money lending by either signposting victims to relevant services or providing direct support.

[Contact us](#) about free loan shark awareness training.

The Recognition Programme is open to all partner organisations who meet at least five of the priority criteria outlined on our [website](#).



Partners will need to complete an application for recognition and submit this with supporting evidence.

[Get in touch](#) to find out more or visit our [website](#) for the award criteria.

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PRESS COVERAGE

**The
Guardian**

My working week: 'One woman is forced to pay off debts with sexual favours'

The past six months in my job working to help people targeted by loan sharks have been busier because of the pandemic



The Guardian
My Working Week Series
5 October 2020

BirminghamLive

New Birmingham app to rescue loan shark victims - using money seized from criminals

23 September 2020

DevonLive

Exeter pub loan shark dubbed 'Bank of Fergs' exploited desperate punters

5 November 2020

Telegraph & Argus

Man arrested in Keighley 'loan shark' operation

21 August 2020



Channel 4
Steph's Packed Lunch
11 November 2020



BBC One
Ill Gotten Gains
14 September 2020



Suspected 'loan sharks' arrested during early morning raids at properties across Oldham

5 August 2020

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Foundation 92 awarded POCA funding for project

Cash confiscated from convicted loan sharks has been awarded to [Foundation 92](#) to help fund a community project raising awareness of loan sharks.

Foundation 92's Positive Pathways programme was successful in its POCA application and will work to deliver a socially distanced early action and intervention project throughout Salford, specifically working with young people aged 16-24 and adults who are currently economically inactive or unemployed.

Staff from the charity's Education Team will utilise training from IMLT to help provide financial and budgeting support to local residents throughout the Salford community, helping Salford to thrive.

The funding received from IMLT will enable Foundation 92 to tackle crime, support family financial stability and educate the community on how to recognise illegal money lending, and how to lead a financially sustainable lifestyle.



The funding will also see Foundation 92 staff work collaboratively alongside [Everton in the Community](#), the charitable arm of Everton Football Club, as the two organisations will join forces to offer an engaging and interactive learning experience for people at risk of illegal money lending.

Milton Keynes crackdown on loan sharks

The IMLT have working in partnership with [Milton Keynes Council](#) and [Thames Valley Police](#) to raise awareness of loan sharks in the city.

Council colleagues and partners have been speaking with residents across MK about the dangers of getting involved with loan sharks.

The campaign aims to encourage people to avoid using loan sharks and report the crime if they have been a victim. It also focuses on informing people on the help available if they are struggling with debt and safer ways to borrow money.



Stop Loan Sharks extend Live Chat open hours

The IMLT has extended its Stop Loan Sharks Live Chat opening hours to provide additional support to victims of loan sharks during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Live Chat is available on the [website](#) from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, excluding bank holidays. Victims can talk to an IMLT officer in real-time and access free, safe and anonymous support.



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Scottish Illegal Money Lending Unit Launch Charter Mark

The Scottish Illegal Money Lending Unit (SIMLU) have launched the Stop Loan Sharks Scotland Charter Mark.

The first recipients of the award are housing, care and property management company Wheatley Group and StepChange debt charity in recognition of their commitment in supporting and promoting the work of the SIMLU and for taking a zero-tolerance stance on illegal money lending within their communities.

The organisations have also pledged to work in partnership with the SIMLU to increase their reach within communities and to raise the confidence of residents to enable them to report illegal loan shark activity safely.

The launch comes as the SIMLU issue a warning to Scots to avoid borrowing from loan sharks this Christmas. As more people find themselves in financial difficulties due to the Covid-19 pandemic, illegal lenders may look to take advantage of those who are most vulnerable.



Although loans from community-based lenders may be seen as providing a quick solution for those in crisis situations, the lenders may not be authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority and could charge huge interest rates. On average, loans from illegal lenders end up costing three times as much as a legal loan.

To find out more about the work of the SIMLU and to find organisations who can provide support and advice to those in financial difficulties, visit the website or call the confidential helpline on 0800 074 0878.

Listen to the Scottish Illegal Money Lending Unit's first ever podcast on Spotify.

Tredegar man fined for illegal money lending

Mark Dean Jenkins, aged 51 from Tredegar in Blaenau Gwent pleaded guilty to illegal money lending at Newport Magistrates' Court in a case brought by the Wales Illegal Money Lending Unit (WIMLU).

He lent £2,000 to an old school friend and neighbour who was struggling with a gambling addiction.

The friend lost his job and his marriage broke down.

He eventually lost his home and ended up sleeping rough before a charity helped him find accommodation at a hostel in Abergavenny.

Magistrates heard Jenkins threatened to "cripple him" and burn his hostel down unless he paid the money back plus £1,000 in interest.

He was fined £200 and ordered to pay £450 in court costs. His victim is now living in a flat of his own and is trying to rebuild his life.

Ryan Evans, from the Wales Illegal Money Lending Unit said: "Jenkins tried to make out he was a Good Samaritan.

"He said 'I did lend him money but I didn't charge him interest, I was just helping out a friend', but as time went on and the investigation continued the evidence was stacking up against him."

Many loan sharks are known to their victims - they could be a neighbour, a parent at the school gate or appear to be a friend at first. **Call the WIMLU 24-hour hotline 0300 123 33 11.**

Follow Stop Loan Sharks on social media



Listen to the Your Money and Your Life podcast series
Available on Apple Podcasts, Spotify & Google Podcasts.