

# News story: Britain bites back in the fight against loan sharks

## Britain bites back in the fight against loan sharks

Loan sharks face a fresh crackdown today (25 April), with more funding to tackle unlawful lending, and an increase in the amount of money seized from loan sharks to support those most vulnerable to their nasty tactics.

- over £5.5 million will be spent to fund the fight against loan sharks, helping to investigate and prosecute illegal lenders, and support their victims
- £100,000 of money already seized from loan sharks will also be spent to encourage people in England at risk of being targeted by loan sharks to join a credit union, helping them to access a safer form of finance and get their lives back on track
- and for the first time in Northern Ireland a new education project will be created to raise awareness of the dangers of loan sharks and to support vulnerable communities

John Glen, Economic Secretary to the Treasury said:

These nasty lenders are nothing more than lowlife crooks taking hard-earned cash from the pockets of the most vulnerable. Over 300,000 people are in debt to illegal money lenders in the Britain and they need to know that we're on their side. That's why we're taking the fight to the loan sharks and spending more than ever to support their victims.

In total, £5.67 million of funding will be provided to Britain's Illegal Money Lending Teams (IMLT) and bodies in Northern Ireland to tackle illegal lending – a 16% increase compared to the previous year. The money will be used to investigate and prosecute illegal lenders, and to support those who have been the victim of a loan shark.

Since the Illegal Money Lending Team was established in England in 2004, they've made over 380 prosecutions, leading to 328 years' worth of sentences, and have written off over £73 million of illegal debt, helping over 28,000 people to escape the jaws of the loan sharks. Similar teams operate in Scotland and Wales.

In Northern Ireland, the Consumer Council will lead its first ever education and awareness campaign to help prevent the most vulnerable from being bitten by loan sharks, and the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) will get funding for a specialised officer who will lead on illegal lending within the Paramilitary Crime Task Force.

Tony Quigley, Head of the England Illegal Money Lending Team, said:

Loan sharks are a blight on society and prey on vulnerable people who struggle to make ends meet. These criminals use callous methods to enforce repayment and victims are often subjected to threats, intimidation and violence. We will not tolerate this sort of criminal activity in our country and loan sharks who are caught flouting the law will be pursued and prosecuted.

It is important for people to realise that alternatives to borrowing from loan sharks are available if you are in financial difficulty. Loan sharks are never the answer and we strongly support credit unions who can provide a safe and legal alternative. If you have been affected by illegal money lending, please call our confidential hotline on 0300 555 2222.