

STOP LOAN SHARKS

Intervention . Support . Education
Illegal Money Lending Team – England

January to December 2025

The Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) has been investigating and prosecuting loan sharks whilst providing tailored support to those who have borrowed for over 20 years.

IMLT Support Officers (known as LIAISE) assist and advise witnesses.

This report is a summary of the findings from a self-selected sample of borrowers in 2025.

Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

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WARNING: This report contains subject matter that may be upsetting, including mention of suicide and different types of criminality.

Feeling bad: How a loan shark can affect borrowers' lives:

Most clients who were supported by the Stop Loan Sharks Team, believed that the loan shark was a friend at the point of borrowing. Illegal lenders will remain friendly until payments are late or missed.

When the lender stops being friendly, situations can quickly feel out of a borrower's control. Below are some of the statements made by borrowers at first point of contact (quotes may have been edited to protect identities):

"I had to flee where I was staying as the lender said they would kill me if I didn't pay. They took my bank card so they could take money out whenever."

"When I couldn't pay, the lender threatened me, saying that people would come to my house or that something bad would happen to my family. I have been living in constant fear, unable to sleep, and worried for my family's safety. My mental health has seriously deteriorated, and I have felt suicidal multiple times."

"The lender visits my house, banging on my doors and windows and shouting for me to come out. They are now threatening my family!"

"The loan shark said I would be shot and my body dumped if I didn't keep up with repayments. They took my bank card so money could be withdrawn from my bank at any time."

"I've been distressed to the point of not wanting to be here anymore. I'm constantly harassed."

"The loan shark turns up at my house or stops me in the street demanding more and more money. I took an overdose due to the stress."

"I feel ashamed and embarrassed at having to need the money but also upset that I have been taken advantage of with the high interest rate. The threats to me and my family are really upsetting."

92% of borrowers said they experienced some form of threat or pressure from the loan shark.

- ⇒ 13% were harassed by the lender via social media platforms.
- ⇒ 46% of clients received verbal threats from the lender and 7% were assaulted.
- ⇒ 15% of clients had their bank cards or passports taken from them to act as security against the loan or enable the lender to take payments from the borrower's bank.
- ⇒ 4% stated that the loan shark had asked for "payment in kind" i.e. sexual liaisons with the client.

The Stop Loan Sharks Team help clients feel better.

98% of borrowers said that they were very satisfied with the support received from our team.

I am really appreciative of all the support I've been given by the team and help with food parcels and stuff.

I met with a LIAISE Officer informally at a park to go over my options.

I am helping with the investigation anonymously for now and am happy that you are there when I need you.

I felt really at ease and supported by IMLT and all my questions were answered.

Everyone I spoke with in the team was polite and never tried to push me into anything.

Having the conversations with us has helped massively and I am very grateful.

Very satisfied, thank you! Very easy to contact and super-fast response. Also helping with debt advice referral - brilliant!

Very responsive and very supportive in advising me and helping with advice about

Stop Loan Sharks have been amazing, I can't fault – moved fast, helping to feel calmer about the situation and taken a big weight off shoulders

Feel very reassured having spoken to you over two days.

The Liaise Officer was very

Quotes may have been edited to protect identities.

Reason for borrowing	%	Reason for borrowing	%
Living expenses/Household bills	21	Addiction - alcohol	3
Addiction - drugs	10	Home decoration or repair	2
Motor vehicle purchase/repair	7	Travel expenses	2
Legal fees	6	To buy food	2
To help out family members	6	Cigarettes	2
Rent payments or arrears	5	Moving costs	1
Business costs	5	Celebration event - Christmas/ birthdays	2
Health or funeral costs	4	Car Insurance	1
Debt consolidation (legal creditors)	4	Holiday	1
Education costs	4	Pet care/medical bills	1
Addiction - gambling	4	Childcare costs	1
Mortgage payments or arrears	3	Covid expenditure	1
Furniture/electrical equipment purchase	3	Clothing	1

23% of clients borrowed for living costs including buying food.

A larger proportion than in previous years had borrowed for vehicle related costs. 8% had borrowed to keep up with mortgage or rental payments.

Borrowing for legal fees included marriage break-up and visa renewals.

Clients were supported across all parts of England. Both loan sharks and borrowers can come from any community or social background.

Ages ranged from 18 to 79 years.

Age range	%
Under 25	7
25-34	23
35-44	32
45-54	22
Over 55	16

50% of clients were male

49% of clients were female

1% of clients identified as non-binary

Family	%
Parent	38
Lone parent	15
Carer for another adult	8

Repayment locations:

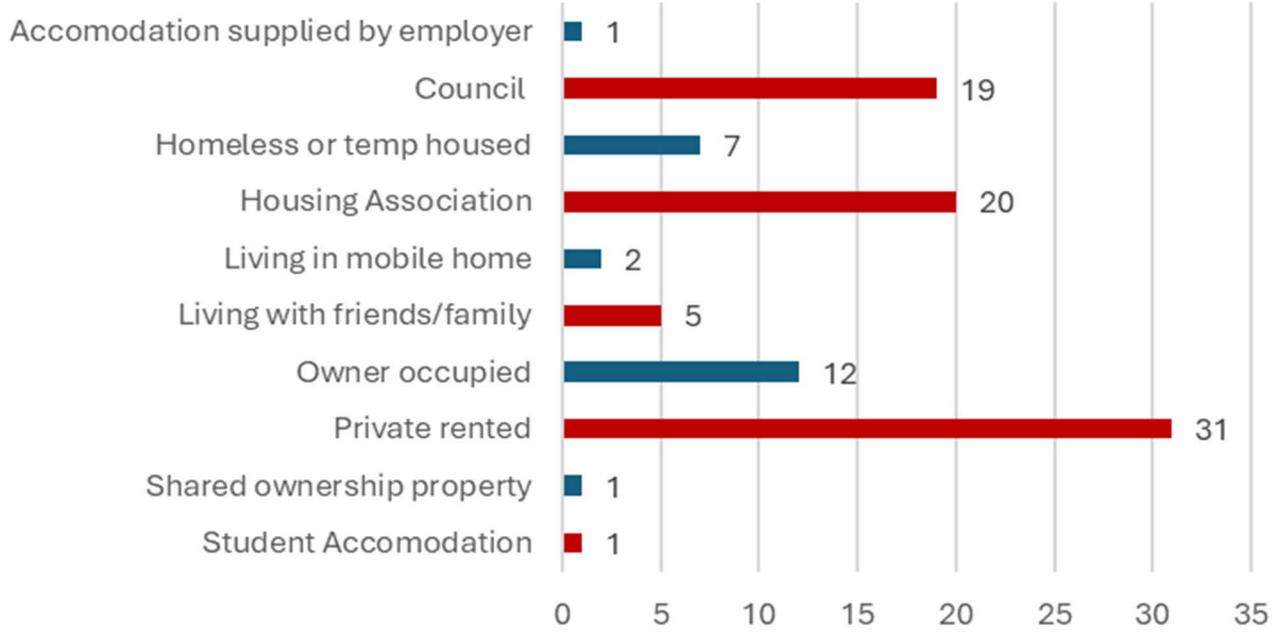
Most of the clients supported in 2025 repaid their loan via bank transfer directly to the lender.

22% of transactions took place at the borrower's or lender's home.

Worryingly some clients were taken to cash point machines by the lender to withdraw funds.

Location of payment	%
Bank Transfer	50
Borrower's home	14
Client's workplace	2
Lender's home	8
Lender's workplace	5
Local area - different locations	10
Not made any payments yet	1
Other	5
Pub/Club/Gym/Social space	1
Taken to cash machine	3

Accommodation type - %



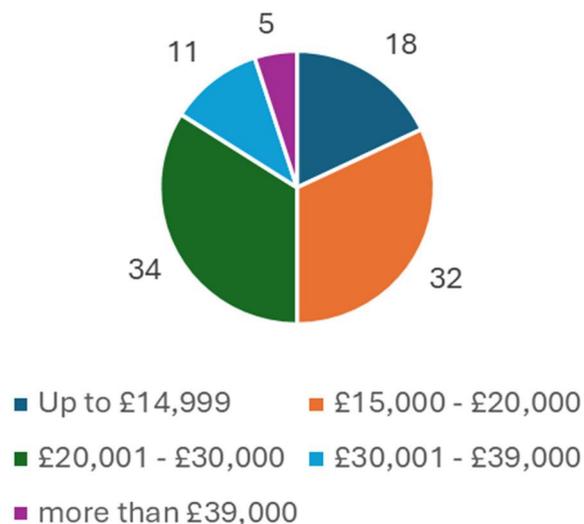
70% of clients lived in rented accommodation, including 39% in social housing.

12% were homeowners.

7% were either homeless or temporarily housed.

2% were living in student housing.

Client's Annual Income - %



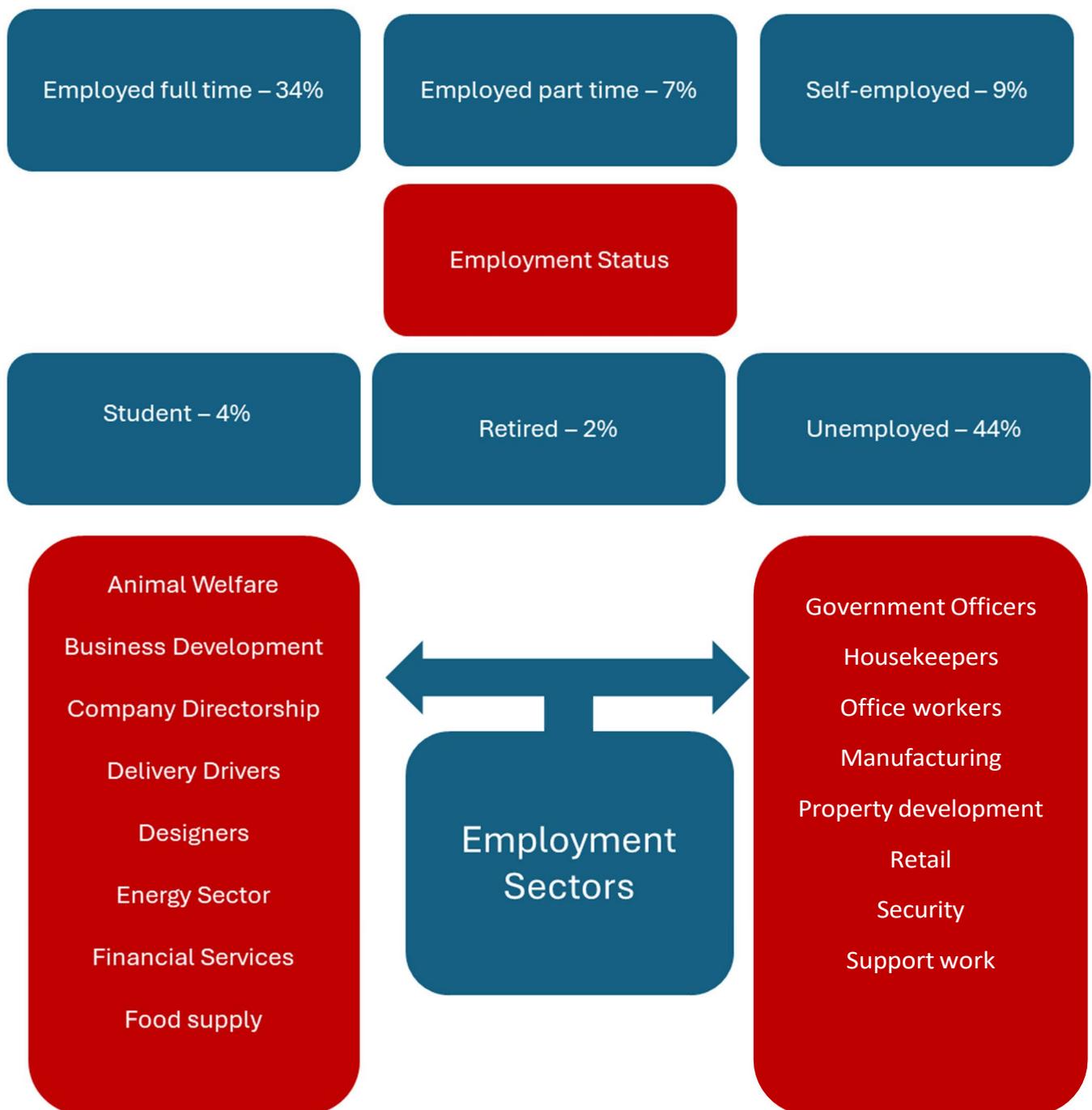
50% of clients had annual household incomes of less than £20,000. The Office For National Statistics states that the current average household income for the UK is £37,500 per year.

90% of clients had no savings at all to fall back on in an emergency.

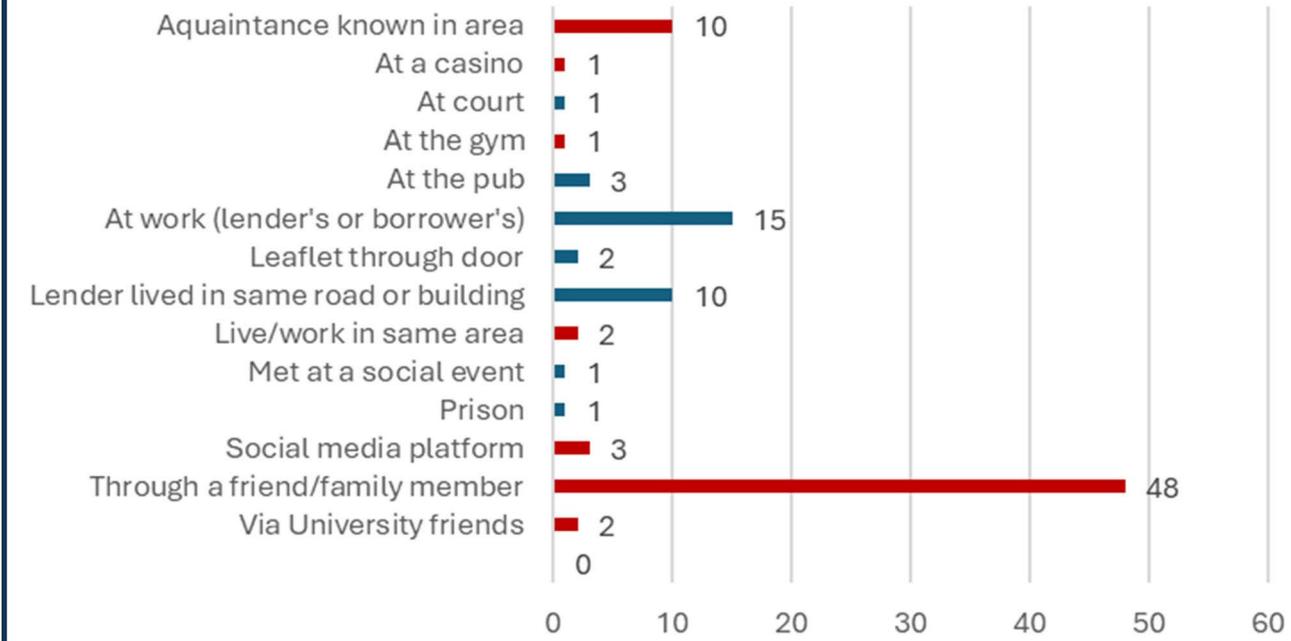
56% of clients were claiming benefits of some sort. This could be a top-up on low wages or disability allowances. 34% were receiving Universal Credit and 20% were claiming PIP (Personal Independence Payments) either as a stand alone benefit or as part of several benefit payment types; for example, a client may be in receipt of Universal Credit and Disabled Living Allowance plus PIP.

55% of clients stated they had long term health conditions, either physical, mental illness or both. The majority said they were suffering from mental ailments - being involved with an illegal lender generally doesn't help with a borrower's state of well-being.

33% of borrowers supported this year had thought about or attempted suicide in their lives. 20% stated it was because of the situation with the loan shark.

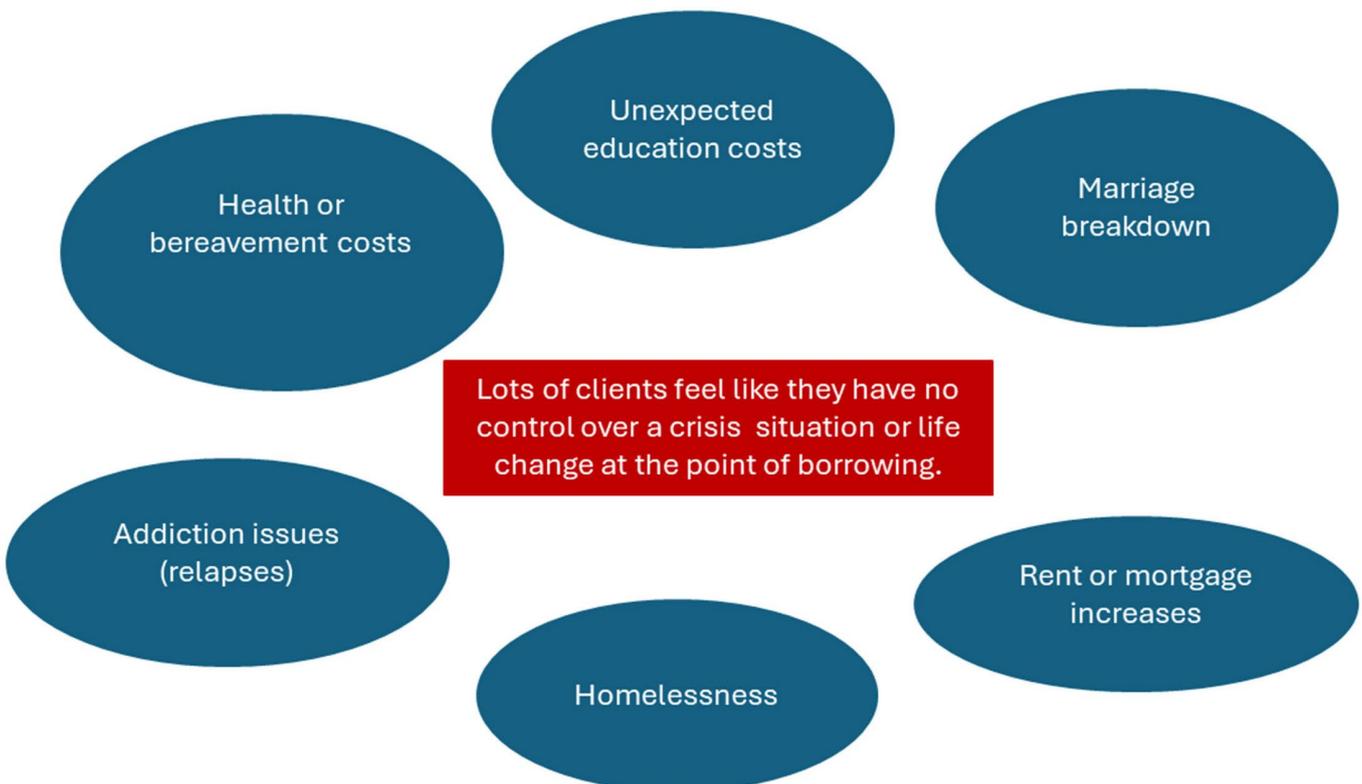


"First interaction with the loan shark" - %



15% of clients met the lender within a workplace setting. The Stop Loan Sharks team can help companies make sure all their policies are “shark proofed”, raising awareness within the organisation and providing one-to-one support as needed.

In the last year we have been asking clients if the lender is well known within the local community: 80% of clients said that they were. The IMLT have a scheme called “We Can Help You Make The Call” so that local organisations can help local people access support.



Loans and repayments:

Amount borrowed:	
£	%
Less than £100	1
101 - 300	8
301 -500	5
501-1000	16
1001-2000	15
2001-5000	21
5001 - 10,000	13
10,001 - 20,000	9
20001 – 100,000	8
more than 100,001	4

The median amount borrowed by clients was £3,000.

The lowest amount borrowed was £50. The borrower repaid £700!

The highest amount borrowed was £275,000 for property improvements over several loans. The borrower was expected to repay £400,000.

One client told us that they had borrowed £100 and had repaid £100,000 and still owed £14,000.

There was a case of a borrower receiving £10,000 from the loan shark. They then had to repay £3,000 monthly until they could make a lump sum payment of the capital amount (£10,000); they were, in essence, renting the money.

- ⇒ 39% of clients had been repaying the loan for less than a year at point of contact.
- ⇒ 43% of clients had gone without food, fuel payments or not managed to make rent or mortgage payments because of paying the loan shark.
- ⇒ 25% of clients had used a foodbank in the last year.
- ⇒ 25% of clients said they were unable to make payments for utilities such as fuel, leaving them vulnerable to changing weather conditions or unable to cook a meal.
- ⇒ 22% were in rent arrears in the previous year.

Part of the IMLT Liaise Officer's work is raising awareness about loan sharks with agencies who offer debt or energy advice or provide food or welfare assistance.

We will also signpost clients direct to support services across the country. We try to find the best solution for the individual. This might be a small charity providing mental health assistance for example, or a large organisation providing debt or housing advice.

We work with many valued partners across England, ranging from those who help with debt advice or tackle addiction to providing food parcels, recycled clothing and furniture.

15% of clients applied for a loan with a legal company (one authorised to lend by the Financial Conduct Authority) in the last year. 9% were refused, usually because of a poor credit history. The majority of clients who did not apply stated that they believed their application would be turned down so didn't try.

Advice and Options:

49% of people offered support by the IMLT owed money to legal organisations in addition to or because of the loan shark.

The lowest amount owed to legal creditors was £160 and the highest £60,000 for debts including mortgage arrears.

19% of borrowers had received debt advice but only 8% had told the advisor about the loan shark. When questioned, most said they didn't think it was something the advisor could help with.

The remainder of clients said the advisor didn't ask them about illegal lenders.

The IMLT help to promote Credit unions and Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs) as a possible route to savings and loan products for communities.

Credit Unions and CDFIs are safe and ethical organisations that provide saving and loan products. A borrower's credit score may be improved by repaying their loan.

Many Credit Unions and CDFIs can signpost to other support such as food aid or furniture packages.

They may also offer extra services such as "piggy bank" accounts, junior savings or financial education and budgeting tips.

- 62% had never heard of the term "credit union".
- 20% had heard of them but didn't know what they were.
- 14% had heard of the Credit Unions or CDFIs and knew what they were.
- 6% were already members.

Many people believe that Credit Unions are just for those who can't bank in a mainstream organisation but it's worth checking out a local one to see what they offer.

Many borrowers are contacted directly by the Illegal Money Lending Team after a warrant has been executed.

A total of 42% of referrals came via partner organisations to date this year.

33% of reports came via a housing or money advisor. The Stop Loan Sharks Team have scripts available for staff to approach the subject with clients.

3% were referrals from the Police after interaction with a victim or suspect. Pocket Notebook Aide Memoires can be ordered from the Team to help with identifying illegal money lending activity.

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Our offer to partners

The England Illegal Money Lending Team needs your help in the fight against loan sharks. We want to work with any agency in England who believes our work may be relevant to clients.

We can offer the following - free of charge:

- Presentations to staff – these can be tailored to suit, online or in person
- Bespoke training for staff – a more in-depth discussion about intelligence, victim support and crime prevention
- Help to discover and share best practice from other agencies within your sector
Publicity material: posters, postcards, blogs and bespoke articles for newsletters and websites
- Certificates for staff and evidence of training and partnership working for inspections
- Awareness-raising resources
- One to one support for any client who has been affected by illegal lending

Stop Loan Sharks Partners receive regular updates and an action plan developed with our team to protect your clients and community from illegal lenders.

Together we can:

Help to make your policies 'loan shark-proof' and protect your clients

Examine data to find and reach potential borrowers

Target specific areas with prevention and education work

Raise awareness of illegal lending and promote safer alternatives

Use money seized from loan sharks to offer initiatives to raise awareness and promote savings

Offer bespoke projects to engage specific groups – schools, tenants etc

Offer input on your Financial Inclusion Strategy

Provide guest speakers at housing/financial inclusion, crime prevention/poverty conferences

Provide promotional items for events including a shark suit, banners, posters and more

For more details on any of the above please contact
your local Stop Loan Sharks LIAISE Officer

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www.stoploansharks.co.uk including Livechat from 9am - 8pm

24 hour helpline: 0300 555 2222

WhatsApp - 07700 102773 from 9am - 8pm

Email: reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk