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Press Release

Colchester Borough Homes warns residents of Christmas loan sharks

Colchester Borough Homes is supporting a campaign by the national Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) to warn residents about the dangers of borrowing money from loan sharks this Christmas.

A loan shark is somebody who lends money illegally without the correct authorisation from the Financial Conduct Authority. Loan sharks often appear friendly at first, but their behaviour soon changes once money is owed and interest rates may be very high. In the worst cases, people have been left afraid to go outside of their homes after loan sharks resorted to violence, threats and intimidation to make a profit.

Christmas is a prime time for loan sharks – these criminals are circling on community estates, looking for the next family to exploit.

Karen Loweman, Director of Housing at Colchester Borough Homes, said, "Falling into the jaws of a loan shark is easier than people think. They often start out friendly, as a neighbour wanting to help, and by the time their victims realise what is going on they are already in debt. We are warning tenants to stay vigilant and only to borrow from legitimate lenders over the Christmas period."

Colchester Credit Union are a much safer alternative to borrowing from unauthorised lenders. The Credit Union offers a safe and easily-accessible home for your savings, as well as ethical loans at reasonable rates.

Currently, the Union are running a Stop Loan Sharks incentive in partnership with the IMLT to encourage more people to save instead of borrowing. The first fifty new members to join Colchester Credit Union and make three instalments into their account within three months will receive a £25 savings boost.

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

“Christmas can be a difficult time for some families; the cost and added pressures may tempt some people into borrowing from a loan shark. This timely campaign will hopefully make people think twice before using an illegal money lender.

“Loan sharks are criminals who prey on vulnerable communities and fleece their victims out of hard earned cash, often through intimidation and violence. If you or someone you know has been the victim of a loan shark, we urge you to seek help by contacting us on 0300 555 2222 or visit www.stoploansharks.uk.”

If you think you have been the victim of a loan shark, you can call the England Illegal Money Lending Team's hotline anonymously or in confidence on 0300 555 2222. IMLT advisors are there to help, not to judge, and will be able to help you work out what your options are. You can also report a loan shark by text to 078600 22116 or online at www.stoploansharks.co.uk.

Help with debt and budgeting is available at [your local Citizen's Advice Bureau](#).

ENDS

Notes to Editors

Attached is the ILMT's Stop Loan Sharks logo.

About the Illegal Money Lending Team

The England Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) can help people who have been a victim of a loan shark. The national team are a law enforcement agency who work with local Trading Standards authorities across the country to investigate and prosecute illegal money lending and related offences. The team have previously prosecuted loan sharks for other forms of criminality, including drug offences, kidnap and even rape.

The 50-strong team are made up of Investigators who work to bring loan sharks to justice and LIAISE officers who protect and support victims, and work with a number of partner agencies to raise general awareness of the issue.

The IMLT have secured more than 380 prosecutions for illegal money lending and related activity, leading to nearly 328 years' worth of custodial sentences. They have written off nearly £72.5 million worth of illegal debt and have helped over 27,000 victims.

How to spot a loan shark

Residents are urged to never borrow money from someone if they:

- Have been provided with no or very little paperwork on loans

- Have had debts randomly increase or have had additional amounts added to a loan unexpectedly.
- Have personal items taken as security on a loan (passport, driving license, bank cards)
- Have been subject to intimidation and threats by the money lender.

You can check if someone is authorised to lend money by visiting the Financial Conduct Authority's website and searching for a company, person or postcode through their [Financial Services Register](#).

For further information about CBH please visit www.cbhomes.org.uk

For more information contact communications@cbhomes.org.uk or call 07943 737487.