ISSUE 71

SCAMS AWARENESS NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2026

WELCOME TO OUR

Monthly Newsletter

In this newsletter:

- What is a loan shark and how to recognise one p.2
- Financial pressure & Stop,check & decide. p.3
- Our new partnership p.4

When borrowing becomes a scam: spotting the signs of a loan shark

We are delighted to announce that Age UK Cheshire's Scams Awareness & Aftercare Service has become an accredited partner of the England Illegal Money Lending Team, also known as Stop Loan Sharks.

You might wonder what loan sharks have to do with scams. The answer is: quite a lot.

Illegal money lending is a form of financial crime, and people who borrow from loan sharks can be exposed to a range of financial and personal risks. Stop Loan Sharks also highlights links between illegal lending and other criminal activity, including fraud.

It is also important to remember that a loan shark does not necessarily look like the stereotypical 'dodgy lender'. They can be someone who lives in your community – a neighbour, friend, colleague, or even another parent at the school gates. They may initially appear friendly and helpful, particularly if someone is struggling financially and needs money quickly.

Cheshire age UK Let's change how we age

Cheshire West and Chester

STOPLOANSHARKS

Cheshire East Council Trading Standards

What is a loan shark?

A loan shark is someone who lends money without the proper authorisation from the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

Legitimate lenders have strict rules they must follow. Illegal lenders operate completely outside those rules and may charge excessive amounts, impose unfair repayment terms, or use intimidation when people struggle to repay.

For someone who is already worried about money, an offer of quick cash can seem like a lifeline. The problem is that what starts as a small loan can quickly become a cycle of debt that is extremely difficult to escape.

Would you recognise one?

There are some warning signs to look out for. You should be particularly cautious if someone offering you money:

- Doesn't provide any paperwork or agreements for the loan.
- Won't clearly explain how much you are borrowing and how much you will have to repay.
- Adds unexpected charges or increasingly large amounts to what you owe.
- Asks to keep your bank card, passport, benefits card, or another valuable item as security.
- Becomes threatening, intimidating, or harassing if you miss or delay a payment.
- Tells you not to tell anyone about the arrangement.

One warning sign on its own doesn't necessarily mean someone is a loan shark, but several of these signs together should make you stop and think.

Where does fraud come in?

Loan sharks and scammers have something important in common: they take advantage of people when they are vulnerable or under pressure.

Someone who is struggling financially may be more likely to accept an offer of quick cash without having the opportunity – or confidence – to check who they are dealing with.

There can also be serious risks when a lender asks for personal items such as a bank card or identity documents. These aren't things that should ever be handed over as security for a loan. Your bank card, account details, and personal information are valuable, and giving someone access to them can put you at risk of further financial crime.

Need money quickly? Pause before you borrow

Financial pressure can make it difficult to think clearly. An unexpected bill, a broken appliance, or a change in circumstances can leave someone feeling that they need money immediately, and that can make an offer of quick cash seem very tempting.

Scammers and illegal lenders know this. They may use urgency, reassurance, or a friendly approach to make someone feel that they have found an easy solution to their problem. You might even be told that there is no need for paperwork or that the usual checks don't matter.

But legitimate borrowing should never depend on you feeling pressured into making a quick decision.
If you are considering borrowing money, take a step back and give yourself time to check who you are dealing with and what you are agreeing to. Don't be embarrassed about asking someone you trust for a second opinion, particularly if you are unsure about the terms or feel uncomfortable about any part of the arrangement.

There may also be other sources of help available if you are struggling financially. An advice service can help you look at your options before you commit to borrowing.

Remember, needing financial help is nothing to be ashamed of – but feeling pressured into handing over money, personal information, or valuable belongings is a warning sign.

Stop – Check – Decide

- STOP:
  Don't feel pressured into accepting money or handing over personal information.

- CHECK:
  Is the lender authorised? If someone is offering you a loan, check that they are authorised by the Financial Conduct Authority.

- DECIDE:
  Don't allow someone else's urgency to become your emergency. Take time to seek independent advice before agreeing to anything.

But what if you've already borrowed from a loan shark?

This is perhaps the most important message from Stop Loan Sharks: You are not in trouble.

The person committing the crime is the illegal lender – not the person who has borrowed the money.

People can feel embarrassed, frightened, or ashamed about borrowing from an illegal lender, particularly if they have been threatened or told not to tell anyone. That can make it very difficult to ask for help.

Stop Loan Sharks offers free, confidential, and non-judgemental support. You don't have to give your name, and you don't have to make a formal report if you aren't ready. Their team will work at your pace and help you understand your options.

The England Illegal Money Lending Team has been tackling illegal lending for more than 20 years. During that time, it has supported tens of thousands of people and helped them escape the influence of loan sharks.

Our new partnership

If you are worried that you, a friend, or a family member may be dealing with a loan shark, you can contact Stop Loan Sharks completely confidentially:

24-hour confidential helpline: 0300 555 2222

WhatsApp 07700 102773 (Mon–Fri, 9 am–8 pm)

Live Chat: Available via the Stop Loan Sharks Website (Mon–Fri, 9 am–8 pm)

Email: reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk

You don't have to wait until things become serious before asking for advice. And if you're worried about someone else, you can contact them for advice, too.

Our new partnership

We are particularly pleased to have become an accredited partner of Stop Loan Sharks. It strengthens the support we can offer to older people across Cheshire and helps us to raise awareness of an area of financial crime that can remain hidden for a long time.

Our partnership means we can work alongside the Stop Loan Sharks team to help people recognise the warning signs and make sure those affected know that confidential support is available.

If something doesn't feel right, trust your instincts and talk to someone you trust. Asking for help is not something to be ashamed of – it is a positive step towards taking back control.

If you are affected by the content of this bulletin, you can talk to us. Our Scams Awareness and Aftercare Team can offer free support, advice and guidance. Contact our team today on:

01625 612958 (OPTION 5)

scams@ageukcheshire.org.uk

Cheshire age UK Let's change how we age

Cheshire West and Chester

STOPLOANSHARKS

Cheshire East Council Trading Standards