

## **Objectives of the BIS Illegal Money Lending Project**

### **Objective 1 - To obtain a clear understanding of the scale and impact of illegal money lending as well as learning lessons on the best way to enforce**

The evidence so far indicates that illegal money lenders are widespread and prevalent. They operate in areas that have a high proportion of rented accommodation and target the most vulnerable members of society. High rise flats are common premises targeted by loan sharks as legitimate lenders do not lend to people residing in this type of accommodation due to the health and safety risks for their collectors.

Evidence shows illegal moneylenders vary from those who lend £10 over a few days and demand £12 on repayment, to those who provide substantial loans to those looking to set up businesses; interest rates range from 100% up to 117,000% APR in some instances.

Information gathered so far suggests that illegal money lending is being operated across all sectors of the community. The majority of people using moneylenders are in receipt of income support or benefits and are introduced through word of mouth. However, evidence also suggests that money lenders operate within the wider community and the pilot identified illegal money lending within the business community. In many of the investigations it has been established that the moneylenders resort to intimidation and violence in order to secure payment. Other common traits include: adding indiscriminate charges, targeting single mothers and introducing payment through sexual favours.

Money lenders often use victims of money lending to assist them with maintaining their criminal lifestyle and anonymity, for example illegal money lenders' vehicles are often registered at a clients' address.

There is also anecdotal evidence which suggests that illegal money lenders have an impact on the wider community in which they operate, with victims resorting to petty crime to enable them to meet payments. Reducing the activities of illegal moneylenders or removing them altogether may therefore help to reduce levels of other criminal activity within a community.

With regard to enforcement activity the investigation of illegal money lending has proven to be very resource intensive. Target individuals need to be observed and monitored to determine their activity, to identify them and if possible establish their address. A significant proportion of targets are also what are termed "life style criminals", which means that evidence of other illegal activity can surface during the course of an investigation. This may not only involve other agencies but can also extend the life of an investigation, thereby adding to the pressure on resources.

**Objective 2 - To create a climate where victims can come forward – confident that prosecutions will be undertaken, and convictions obtained, without fear of reprisals**

Effective branding and publicity of the pilot project has meant extensive promotion of the aims of the project and work of the team, within both the local and wider community. Evidence suggests that this has been achieved because it can be evidenced that victims are willing to contact the hotlines, and to provide further evidence to help achieve prosecutions.

The team has used injunctions, backed by the power of arrest under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, to remove lenders from their area of operation. Injunctions are reinforced with an agreement from the local police to flag the matter on their system and respond immediately if they receive a call from one of the victims.

**Objective 3 – To change the perception amongst those lending that illegal money lending is rarely prosecuted.**

A proactive media campaign is on-going in those areas that have successfully targeted criminals. Engaging the media promotes the work of the team and raises public awareness.

**Objective 4 – To develop ways of replacing the removed lenders with more support for their victims.**

The Illegal Money Lending Team will help victims of illegal moneylenders with practical help and support through and in conjunction with the services of local Debt Advice Teams and the National Debtline. It has been noted that victims often need more than simple money advice and so face-to-face advice is considered the most helpful way forward and is the route normally adopted.

Links are also established with credit unions and their associations and where practicable these agencies are also called upon to provide help and advice. The Illegal Money Lending Team offers money management to all victims of moneylenders who contact them for advice and assistance. Partnership working in this area is recognised as being essential in this area of service provision.