

# THE LOOKOUT

THE STUDENT SAFETY & WELLBEING MAGAZINE



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Welcome to The Lookout magazine!

As a third-year student and long-time volunteer with Neighbourhood Watch, I was so pleased to be asked to write the introduction for this issue. It's about a topic that's very important to me and many other students in the UK: student safety.

I've certainly had incidents where I have felt unsafe at university, and it is a horrible feeling. This month we're asking universities across the UK to take student safety more seriously; to listen to students' concerns and hold themselves accountable for incidents where students have felt unsafe or been affected by crime. As students, we are asking universities to DO BETTER.

In a 2023 study conducted by The Centre of Dynamics and Ethnicity at a sample university, only one-third of students agreed that campus security kept them safe. It speaks volumes that students feel they're being failed in this way. This edition of The Lookout includes a thought-provoking quartet of articles written (and illustrated) by students to address various safety concerns and how universities can offer better support and action.

In an article written for Universities UK in 2023, Ammaarah Faisal found that the first few weeks of university are the most dangerous, as students are more at risk of experiencing sexual assault, more likely to consume substances that make them less inhibited, do not have their usual safety nets, and are in an unfamiliar environment. Freshers Week and the first term is the perfect time for universities to act quickly to keep students safe and make them feel safe, showing them that their concerns will be heard. People shouldn't have to put themselves at risk of harm to pursue further education.

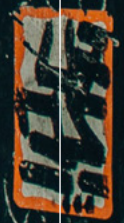
To find out more about Neighbourhood Watch's crime prevention and safety awareness initiatives, visit [ourwatch.org.uk/young-people](https://ourwatch.org.uk/young-people), where you can join their Youth Council, find previous issues of The Lookout, read blogs written by students or even create your own campaign or article. Universities that want to work with Neighbourhood Watch should email [youngpeople@ourwatch.org.uk](mailto:youngpeople@ourwatch.org.uk).

Enjoy reading – and stay safe!

Mair Williams

Journalism & Media, Bangor University

Cover illustration: Olivia Tate, Sheffield Hallam University





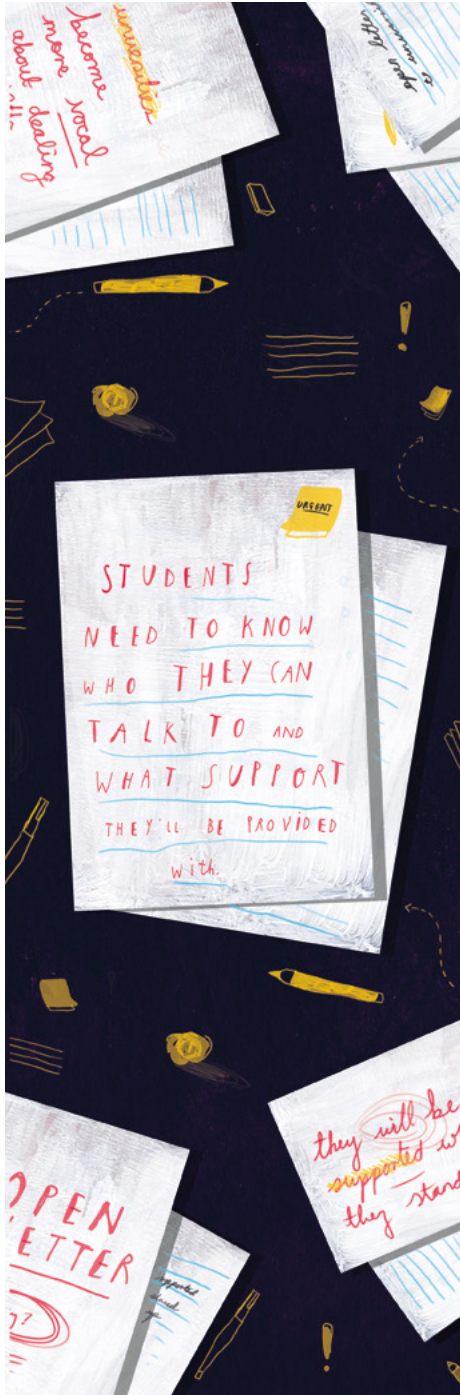
# AN OPEN LETTER TO UNIVERSITIES

## On Harassment

Shorna Sinclair, Birmingham City University

Illustrations: Saffron Lily, Arts University Bournemouth





## Dear universities,

Harassment can happen to anyone and it looks different for everyone. No individual's experience will be the same. Recent studies suggest that students in UK universities are **"over three times more likely than average to have experienced sexual assault and harassment"**. These forms of harassment included a range of "inappropriate comments and catcalling, to unwanted touching in a sexual manner, stalking, sexual coercion and assault, and rape".

The issue is so prevalent that the Office for Students (OfS) launched a pilot survey on the prevalence of sexual misconduct within higher education providers in England – the first time a survey on these issues has been run at scale in the UK. Research from Revolt Student Assault, in partnership with The Student Room, also produced stark results: 62% of all students and recent graduates have experienced sexual violence at UK universities.

Anna's story provides one example. Anna is a recent graduate who experienced having a stalker during her time at university – she was consistently harassed by a mature student studying in the same building as her. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she was unable to attend any online lectures or exams without being called and harassed by this man, which affected her studies and general wellbeing.

With these statistics and experiences such as Anna's in mind, our universities should be doing everything they can to make their students feel safe, by creating an environment that is hostile

to harassment, providing students with effective preventative methods to reduce risk, and supplying appropriate support and reporting mechanisms for those who experience harassment.

The OfS recently released a 'student guide to tackling harassment, hate and sexual misconduct', which asserted their expectations for universities when dealing with harassment and sexual assault. Their opening statement to these institutions declared, "Every part of the organisation should clearly communicate how they will prevent and respond to all forms of harassment and sexual misconduct, and take responsibility for making sure these expectations are met."

Universities could hold induction seminars for new students, laying out the ways to access the support they provide and sharing how students can report concerns. They could have a declaration stating a zero-tolerance policy concerning any forms of harassment, and also clarify how students can address the university's shortcomings in dealing with harassment concerns.

However, it seems this is not a common experience for students.

I asked 38 current and graduate students across 28 different UK universities if they were aware of their university's policies on harassment. All but two – an astonishing 95% – said their university did not "clearly communicate how they will prevent and respond to all forms of harassment". The actions I've suggested would undoubtedly provide students with more confidence in their universities, and in themselves to report harassment, so why aren't these procedures put in place? They could contribute to early intervention and prevention, warning would-be harassers that inappropriate behaviour will not be tolerated and could end in their dismissal from the university, plus further sanctions.

Students such as Anna would benefit greatly from these policies. After weeks of harassment, she reported it to her lecturers, but disappointingly her complaints were met with "more of a safety concern for him and his grades" than her safety and her grades – he was able to continue attending university and faced no significant repercussions. Anna was left feeling, in her words: "Disappointed. Angry. Frustrated. Inaudible. Insignificant. Panicked. Anxious. In disbelief. Disheartened. And hesitant – I definitely second-guessed myself a lot."

95% said their university did not "clearly communicate how they will prevent and respond to all forms of harassment"



With no support from her lecturers, the people she was meant to be able to trust most, Anna was made to feel that bringing issue to her university's attention was disruptive, as if she had done something wrong – not her stalker, nor her university, but Anna herself. No one should have to experience this when they have been brave enough in a time of vulnerability to act against inappropriate behaviour and harassment.

This is not a rare case, and it has a knock-on effect. The aforementioned Revolt Student Assault research revealed that just 6% of respondents reported their experience to the university. Only 2% were satisfied with the reporting process.

So, universities: with stories such as Anna's in mind, do you feel your institution



is doing enough to ensure students' total confidence that their safety is your top priority? Are you doing enough as a university to prevent these issues?

A zero-tolerance policy should be the bare minimum requirement for institutions when dealing with harassment. Anna's encounter is one of many that proves this is not the case. With Anna's safety being treated as unimportant and her stalker continuing to attend the university, the same situation played out for another girl on their course. Tragically, the university's deliberate inaction enabled the harasser to believe he could get away with his behaviour again, thereby jeopardising another student's safety, wellbeing and education.

Universities must become more vocal about dealing with harassment in their institutions, and students must know who they can talk to and what support they'll receive. Seminars should be held to provide students with important information and resources, and all university staff need to be correctly trained on the appropriate response to a student coming forward. These actions will give students faith in their universities; faith that any form of harassment they face will be dealt with, and that they will be supported when they speak up.

Universities – listen to your students. They are paying attention to your safety and support measures around sexual harassment and misconduct. You should be, too.

*Signed,  
Shorna*



# ARE YOU A STUDENT UNION OR ACCOMMODATION PROVIDER WHO WANTS TO IMPROVE STUDENT SAFETY?

Partner with  
Neighbourhood Watch  
and give your students a  
**fun and safe university experience**

Email Ashley, our Young People's Programme Manager, to find out more: [ashley.fontaine@ourwatch.org.uk](mailto:ashley.fontaine@ourwatch.org.uk)

# A STUDENT'S GUIDE TO...

# STAYING SAFE AT FRESHERS'

Demi Badura, University of Liverpool

Illustration: Olivia Tate, Sheffield Hallam University

**STARTING UNIVERSITY IS EXCITING - NEW FRIENDS, NEW EXPERIENCES, NEW LOCATION. BUT AS A WISE PERSON ONCE SAID: "WITH GREAT FUN COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY"... OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. STAY SAFE, TAKING THESE PRECAUTIONS.**



## DRINKING

NEVER, EVER DRINK ALCOHOL. Only joking – just make sure you know your limits. The student drinks deals are tempting, but you don't know everyone yet, so look after yourself. If you start to feel too drunk, substitute your drink for water or, if necessary, book a taxi home.

If you don't drink, or choose not to on occasion, you can still enjoy a great night out getting to know new friends.

Stay true to yourself and your boundaries – I guarantee there'll be others in the same boat!

But if you do fancy a drink, always keep a close eye on it, even when you're holding it. During my first Freshers, I'd hold my glass from the top instead of the sides, to prevent anyone from being able to tamper with it. Better yet, I now use an anti-spiking lid – some, such as NightCap, even double up as a scrunchie.

## LOCATION

Make sure your phone is fully charged before you go out. The last thing you want is to lose everyone while you're in the toilet and have no charge on your phone to call them. Early on at Freshers, you may also want to share your live location on your phone with your new housemates and/or those you trust, especially if you're meeting up with someone new on your own.. I recommend using either Find My iPhone or my personal favourite, Life360, which are both free apps.

Safety in numbers isn't a myth, by the way: **it is usually better to go out in a group**, so you always have someone to stick with.

## GETTING HOME

I highly recommend using Uber or Bolt as your taxi service of choice. Firstly, they have the driver's details and will track the journey via the app, information that increases your safety and allows you to share your journey. Secondly, they'll give you the price of the journey before you get in. Win-win!

## LOOKING AFTER YOUR STUFF

Don't take more valuables than you really need when you go out. If you're carrying a bag – preferably one with a zip – then tuck it under your armpit when it's on your shoulder, so nobody can dive into it.

Also try to limit how much you use your phone when you're out on the street. If you're trying to call someone or book a taxi, stay with your group and keep a firm grip on your phone.

## ENJOY YOURSELF

Don't let this list scare you – just let it be a reminder that you're very important, so look after yourself.

Stay safe and have a great time at Freshers!

## MORE RESOURCES

Drug-related information and support.

[TalkToFrank](#)

More student support.

[Neighbourhood Watch Young People's Hub](#)

If you feel unsafe or uncomfortable when out, you can ask for "Angela" and the staff will help you.

[AskForAngela](#)

Neighbourhood Watch's

[Top 10 Tips for Student Safety](#)





# A PRO-FRESHERNAL'S GUIDE TO...

## MAKING THE MOST OF FRESHERS'

Declan Shinnick, Brighton University

Illustration: Olivia Tate, Sheffield Hallam University

**MAKING THE MOST OF FRESHERS' COMES DOWN TO TWO SIMPLE RULES - PLAY BY THEM EACH YEAR, AND YOU'LL HAVE THE GREATEST UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE ON EARTH.**



Before we begin, allow me to explain why I'm something of an expert here. I am writing this with my graduation suit hanging from my bedroom door; I'll walk across the stage today after five consecutive years celebrating Freshers' in every way possible.

From Pop Tarts in Sheffield and Otley Runs in Leeds to skinny-dipping in Brighton, I've genuinely loved my uni experience all of the way through.

**FRESHERS' TERM IS THE EMBODIMENT OF NEW EXPERIENCES & OPPORTUNITIES.**

**EVERYONE IS LOOKING TO MAKE NEW FRIENDS & TRY NEW THINGS.**

## RULE 1: SAY YES

The first rule may sound simple, but it's the key to unlocking an unforgettable time at university: say yes. Freshers' Term is the embodiment of new experiences and opportunities. Everyone is looking to make new friends and try new things. Whether it's an impromptu pub crawl, joining a society or club you've never heard of, or just chatting with someone in the queue for a coffee, say yes to as much as possible.

Please note that I'm in no way referring to saying "yes!" to controlled substances or stick-and-poke forehead tattoos. "No" is the answer you're looking for there. Saying 'yes' refers to stepping out of your comfort zone during these first weeks, because it can lead to incredible experiences and lasting relationships. The best memories are made from the unexpected. That random flat party could lead to lifelong friendships; that spontaneous trip to a new city could become a cherished story. Saying 'yes' doesn't just broaden your social circle – it also expands your horizons and builds confidence.

## RULE 2: BE YOU

University – and each new year of it – is a fresh start, but while it can be tempting to reinvent yourself completely, authenticity will always serve you better in the long run. Being genuine attracts like-minded people who appreciate you for who you are, rather than a façade.

Take this time to experiment with new styles, interests, even personalities. University is a time for growth and self-discovery. As you navigate this journey, however, keep in mind what truly makes you happy and comfortable. Don't feel pressured to fit into a particular group. There's a space for everyone at uni, and the best experiences come from finding where you naturally belong.

Before I end this off, it's also important to bear in mind that the social scene can be overwhelming, with so many events and parties vying for your attention. My advice? Pace yourself. Freshers' Term is a marathon, not a sprint! Attend the events that genuinely interest you, and don't feel guilty about taking a night off to recharge.

Say yes to new, fun opportunities that are safe and stay true to yourself. You'll

find your place and make memories that will last a lifetime. Remember: this is just the beginning of an incredible journey, so embrace it with open arms and an open mind. Stay safe, and good luck out there. One day you'll be recounting your own stories with a graduation suit hanging from your bedroom door...



# THE STRUGGLE OF STUDENT HOUSING SECURITY



WHAT UNIVERSITIES ARE DOING WELL  
WHAT THEY COULD DO BETTER  
WHAT SUPPORT IS AVAILABLE

**Elena Sanders, University of Sussex**

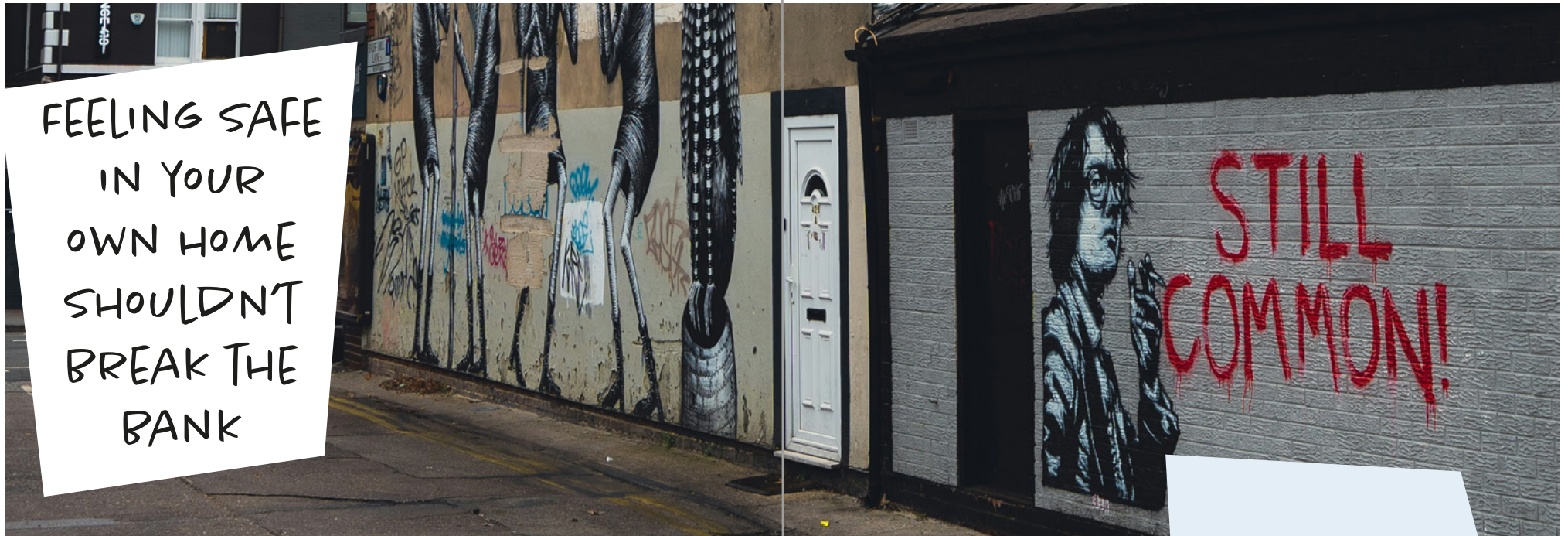
Feeling safe in your own home shouldn't break the bank, but for many students, housing security is increasingly a concern, financially and emotionally. While universities do offer security procedures for on-campus accommodation, renting away from campus leaves many students having to implement their own measures, with minimal support from university services and landlords.

Moving to university sparks an exciting journey of independence, self-discovery and meeting new people, which students should be able to enjoy without questioning their safety. Surely it's time for universities and landlords to

start taking the issue of housing security seriously.

Housing security encompasses more than just remembering to lock the door. It's about keeping your valuables protected and knowing forms of crime prevention, so you can feel safe where you live. Unfortunately, many students encounter accommodation safety issues during their time at university, which has a range of impacts both academically and personally. According to housing charity Shelter in 2021, one in four students felt that accommodation issues had negatively impacted their academic performance, while over 60% reported a





negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

Awareness of crime prevention and how to increase home security is key to student welfare, with research by Northumbria University this year finding that health and wellbeing improves when fear of crime goes down. But reducing such fear relies on sufficient support, education and guidance, which many students are lacking. University safety and crime prevention teams can offer helpful measures and resources to students. It's always worth finding out about the services available at your university.

However, support can unfortunately be limited. There is a clear need for greater awareness and guidance on housing security by universities, private student

housing providers and landlords. These currently fall short – but alternative platforms do offer students the opportunity to share their experiences and seek advice.

[Rate Your Landlord](#) is a review service aimed at students who want to discuss their personal experiences of accommodation and renting. Established by a collective group of students' unions and universities, the forum urges students to share both positive and negative reviews in order to build an understanding of renting as a student. With a growing collection of stories and advice to access, users can learn from shared experiences, prompting discussion about what must change to achieve improved housing security.

Another helpful source of information is [Neighbourhood Watch](#), which offers a huge range of easy-to-implement advice for crime prevention and safety, as well as community projects across the country. And although navigating accommodation guidelines and regulations can be complex and time-consuming, other useful organisations include [Citizens Advice](#), [Shelter](#) and the [National Union of Students](#) (NUS).

So, what can you do now? What measures can you easily implement? Neighbourhood Watch encourages using the acronym WIDEN in preventing burglary, which research from Nottingham Trent University has shown can provide up to 50 times more protection:

## WINDOWS

Lock the windows

## I NTERIOR

Put interior lights on a timer

## D OORS

Deadlock or double lock your doors

## E xTERIOR

Put exterior lights on a sensor

## N EIGHBOURS

Keep an eye out for neighbours

If all universities and landlords shared the WIDEN advice with their students, this greater awareness of crime prevention would help to keep students' homes safe.

Housing is a key aspect of university life, so what else can universities do to improve student security? Sufficient support services should be accessible to students living on or off campus, providing individuals with the skills and knowledge to keep themselves and their homes safe. Crime prevention teams can also offer reassurance and work alongside students to implement security measures and increase awareness. For instance, landlords and accommodation services could team up with local Neighbourhood Watch and safety teams, as well as students, to tackle areas with higher burglary rates, which would be reassuring to those who live there.

Platforms such as Rate Your Landlord highlight a collective response to the lack of secure conditions for students, which is a growing concern for many. At the heart of improving housing and services are the experiences and perspectives of students – voices that universities and landlords must listen to and prioritise. Through greater security measures, crime prevention initiatives and awareness, student welfare will improve. It's time for universities to put their students' safety first.

### Rate your Landlord

Discuss your personal experiences of accommodation and renting.

[rateyourlandlord.org.uk](https://rateyourlandlord.org.uk)

### Neighbourhood Watch

Offers a huge range of easy-to-implement advice for crime prevention and safety.

[ourwatch.org.uk](https://ourwatch.org.uk)

### Citizen's Advice

A full range of articles and advice about housing, landlords, evictions and university accommodation.

[citizensadvice.org.uk](https://citizensadvice.org.uk)

### Shelter

Housing charity providing advice on tenancies and renting costs

[shelter.org.uk](https://shelter.org.uk)

### National Union of Students

Know your rights as a renter with the NUS renters hub plus join the fight for student tenants' rights.

[nus.org.uk](https://nus.org.uk)

# COULD YOU SPOT A LOAN SHARK?

A loan shark may pretend to be your friend at first but become aggressive if you miss payments

They can threaten you or your family

They can try to bully you into taking more loans out

They will charge huge interest and give no paperwork

If you have borrowed from a loan shark, or know someone who has, contact  
Stop Loan Sharks for free, confidential advice

**0300 555 2222**  
**stoploansharks.co.uk**

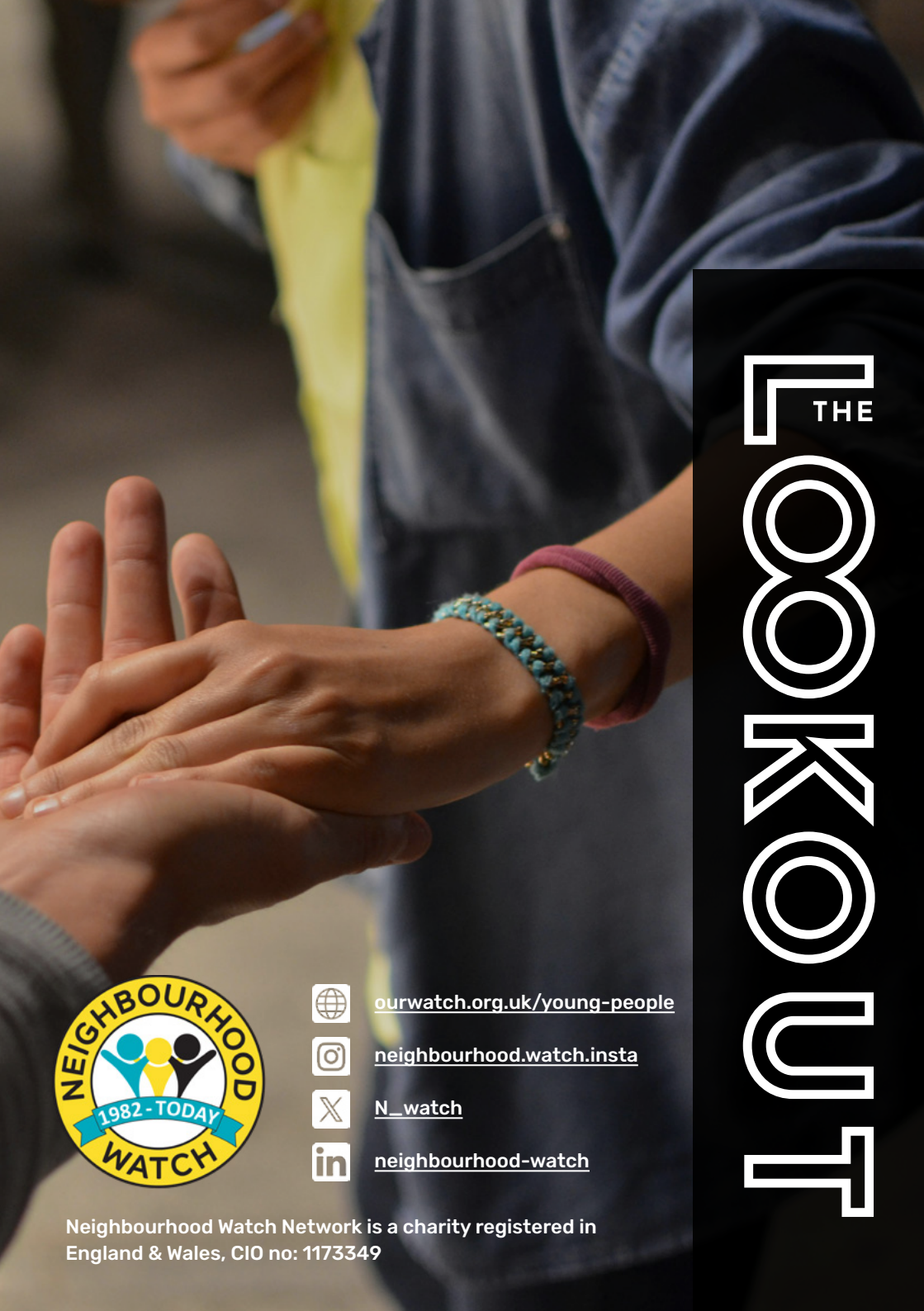


@SLSEngland @StopLoanSharksEngland  
#SLSEngland #StopLoanSharksEngland



**STOP LOAN SHARKS**  
Intervention . Support . Education





# THE LOOKOUT



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[N\\_watch](https://twitter.com/N_watch)



[neighbourhood-watch](https://neighbourhood-watch)

Neighbourhood Watch Network is a charity registered in  
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