



Bookkeeping and Accountancy Ltd

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Handling Business Debt and Recovery

Proven methods to manage loans, creditors, and financial setbacks

Introduction: Facing Financial Difficulties

Business debt is common and, with the right approach, manageable. Many successful businesses have faced periods of financial difficulty and emerged stronger. The key is to act early, communicate openly, and take systematic steps to address the situation. This guide provides proven methods to manage loans, handle creditor pressures, and recover from financial setbacks.

Top Tip: The worst thing you can do is ignore the problem - creditors are generally more willing to work with businesses that engage proactively.

Assessing Your Financial Position

Before you can solve the problem, you need to understand it fully:

Creating a Debt Inventory

List all debts systematically to understand the full picture:

- Amount owed to each creditor
- Interest rate and any penalty charges
- Repayment terms and minimum payments
- Security or guarantees attached
- Consequences of non-payment (repossession, legal action)
- Contact details for each creditor

Cash Flow Analysis

Understand your capacity to service debts:

- Prepare a realistic cash flow forecast
- Identify all sources of income and their timing
- List all essential operating expenses
- Calculate the surplus (or deficit) available for debt repayment
- Identify any assets that could be sold

Prioritising Debts

Not all debts are equal - prioritise based on consequences:

- HMRC debts - significant powers of enforcement
- Secured debts - risk losing essential assets
- Employee wages and pension contributions
- Essential suppliers without whom you cannot trade
- Utilities and premises costs
- Unsecured creditors and non-essential suppliers

Communicating with Creditors

Early, honest communication is essential for maintaining relationships and finding solutions:

When and How to Communicate

Contact creditors before you miss payments, not after:

- Be honest about your situation without oversharing
- Explain what has caused the problem
- Show that you have a plan to address it
- Propose specific, realistic payment arrangements
- Ask what flexibility they can offer
- Follow up all telephone conversations in writing

Negotiating Payment Arrangements

Most creditors prefer negotiation to enforcement:

- Propose reduced payments you can actually maintain
- Request interest freezes or reduced rates
- Ask about payment holidays for temporary difficulties
- Offer a lump sum in full and final settlement if appropriate

- Get all agreements confirmed in writing
- Keep records of all communications and agreements

Top Tip: Be realistic in your proposals - breaking a payment arrangement damages trust and may result in immediate enforcement.

Formal Restructuring Options

When informal arrangements are not sufficient, formal procedures may help:

Time to Pay with HMRC

HMRC offers Time to Pay arrangements for tax debts:

- Contact the Payment Support Service before enforcement action
- Explain your circumstances and what you can afford
- Agreements typically spread payments over 6-12 months
- Interest continues to accrue during the arrangement
- You must keep up with current liabilities as well as the arrangement

Company Voluntary Arrangement (CVA)

A formal agreement with creditors supervised by an insolvency practitioner:

- Propose to pay a proportion of debts over time (typically 3-5 years)
- Requires approval by 75% of creditors by value
- Prevents creditors taking enforcement action
- Company continues to trade under director control
- Creditors often receive more than in liquidation

Other Options

Depending on your situation, consider:

- Refinancing - replacing existing debts with new facilities on better terms
- Asset-based lending - releasing cash from debtors, stock, or property
- Sale and leaseback of property or equipment
- Seeking new investment or shareholder loans
- Pre-pack administration for a fresh start

Improving Cash Flow During Recovery

Generating cash quickly helps stabilise your position:

- Chase outstanding invoices aggressively - every day counts
- Offer early payment discounts to accelerate collections
- Reduce payment terms for new customers
- Require deposits or stage payments for large orders
- Sell unused or underused assets quickly
- Reduce stock levels to release tied-up cash
- Cut all non-essential expenditure immediately
- Renegotiate supplier payment terms
- Consider invoice factoring for immediate cash against receivables

Top Tip: Focus on your most profitable products and customers - now is not the time for unprofitable business.

Building Long-term Financial Resilience

Once you have stabilised, take steps to prevent future problems:

- Maintain cash reserves of 3-6 months operating costs
- Monitor cash flow weekly, not just at month-end
- Set credit limits for customers and enforce them
- Diversify your customer base to reduce dependency
- Build strong relationships with multiple suppliers
- Review pricing to ensure adequate margins
- Seek professional advice early when problems emerge
- Keep your accountant informed of your financial position
- Consider appropriate insurance including business interruption

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