**DEBTS - STEPS FOR PRE-ACTION PROTOCOL**

Once you’ve sent a letter of claim to your customer they have 30 days to respond. If they don’t, you can refer your claim to court. However, if the customer replies and disputes the claim or offers to settle it over time, you must take further steps before court action. To be fair you should allow a little more time for postal delays.

* if the customer indicates that they are seeking advice you must allow reasonable time for this. If it's going to take longer than 30 days they must provide an explanation. You must allow them extra time unless it’s unreasonable for you to do so
* if the customer asks for time to pay, you should try to agree instalments, taking account of their financial circumstances
* if you can’t accept the customer’s proposal for repayment you must give your reasons in writing
* where the customer has responded to your letter, but an agreement hasn’t been reached, you should give them at least 14 days' notice of your intention to start court proceedings
* if you reach an agreement with the customer, which they break, you must send a further letter of claim and start the protocol process again.