From 31 July 2009, you can spread the payment of increases in your 2009/2010 business rates bill over three years.

There are full details of the scheme and how to apply below.

If you want to take advantage of the scheme, please return the attached application form to your local council.

How do I apply?

An application form is available from your local council. You can find contacts for your local council on your rates bill or at: www.direct.gov.uk/en/DI1/Directories/Localcouncils/index.htm

What's the deadline for applying?

You can apply at any time until 31 March 2010, as long as you have some of your bill left to pay. But we would encourage you to apply early.

How much of my bill can I put off paying?

Everyone is able to put off 3 per cent of their whole year's 2009/2010 business rates bill. So, if your yearly bill is £5,000, you will be able to put off paying £150.

What if the property I occupy received transitional relief last year?

If the property you occupy was receiving transitional relief in 2008/2009, you will also be able to put off paying 60 per cent of that amount. (See note below.)

What if I have paid some or all of my bill?

You will be able to put off paying 3 per cent of your whole 2009/2010 bill, as long as you have that amount left to pay. If you have less than 3 per cent left to pay, you can still put off paying this amount. You will not be able to put off paying anything if you have already paid all of your bill.

How will my payments be reduced?

The payments you have left to make will be reduced by the amount you are putting off paying for the whole year. For example, if you can put off £100 and you have four payments left to make, each of those payments will be reduced by £25.

Will I pay interest on the amount I put off paying?

No.

How soon will I see the benefit of making lower payments?

You should be able to see the benefit of your lower payments in your next payment or, at the latest, in the next one after that, depending on when you made your application. The amount you can put off paying will not change in both situations.

When will I have to pay back the amount I put off?

You will pay back half the amount in 2010/2011 and half in 2011/2012, as well as paying your full bill for those years. Your rates bills in the next two years will include details of the amounts you have put off paying and need to pay, and your payments will be adjusted in line with this.

What if I have more than one property?

If you have more than one property in the same council area, you only need to fill in one application form. You will need to give us the address of all the properties you want to claim for.

If you have properties in more than one council area, you will need to apply to each council separately.

What if I stop occupying the property?

You will need to pay the amounts you have a duty to pay by law, including the amount you have put off paying. Your local council will send you a revised bill, letting you know how much you should pay.

What if I am already in arrears?

You do not automatically have the right to put off making any payments if you have already lost the right to pay your bill by instalments. You may still apply to put off making a payment, but it will be up to your local council to decide whether or not to approve this. You may also want to talk to your local council to discuss what other help is available.

What if I don't keep up with my payments?

If you are struggling to keep up with your payments, you should talk to your local council to discuss what other help is available.

Is there any other help for businesses?

Further details of the full range of support and information available to businessess visit: www.businesslink.gov.uk/realhelp or speak to a BusinessLink adviser on 0845 600 9006