



The Commercial Desk
COMMERCIAL CONSULTANCY

THE COMMERCIAL HEALTH CHECK

Findings report

What your documents show

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01 Summary - what your documents show

You sent us nine months of paperwork. We went through all of it, line by line, and this is what it says.

£6,800 of retention is past its contractual release date and can be applied for now; £4,300 of it sits with the two main contractors still trading. Work already done but not billed, or applied for below its value, comes to an estimated £7,300 to £13,500 a year. A further £8,000 to £12,000 a year of quoted work was never followed up: work that could be won, not money already earned.

#	WHERE THE MONEY GOES	COST
1	Retention held on finished jobs, not yet applied for	£14,200 held; £6,800 past its release date now
2	Extra work instructed on site, never billed	est. £4,300 to £7,900 a year
3	Payment applications going in below the value of the work	est. £3,000 to £5,600 a year
4	Quotes sent and not followed up	est. £8,000 to £12,000 a year of winnable work
-	The owner's time on month-end paperwork	about 9 hours a week

Three things are working well and should not be touched: your pricing discipline, your record-keeping on materials, and your relationship with both main contractors. Section 5 sets them out: a health check that only lists problems is not an honest picture.

The three fixes worth doing, in order of money against effort:

1. **Apply for the retention that is due.** £6,800 is contractually due now across three completed contracts. Money already earned, not new work.
2. **Record extra work when it is instructed.** A written confirmation the same day, sent from the phone on site, turns a verbal instruction into a variation that can be priced and applied for.
3. **Prepare the application from the records.** Month-end takes two hours, goes in on the contract date, and carries the substantiation behind every line, so a short certification has something to answer.

Everything in this report stands on a document you gave us. Section 8 traces every figure to its source. Where we have estimated, the basis is stated and the estimate is deliberately conservative.

You paid £500 for this report. It identifies £6,800 due now, an estimated £7,300 to £13,500 a year of work done and not paid for, and £8,000 to £12,000 a year of work that could be won. The £500 is credited against any implementation within 90 days, and if you take the findings to someone else to fix, this report is written so they can.

02 How this review was done

Documents received (12 August 2026): sales invoices, November 2025 to July 2026; the quote book (61 quotes, January to June 2026); contract documents and payment terms for both live main-contractor packages; payment application records for both (the last six on Package A, February to July 2026); remittance advices; the completed-contracts file 2023 to 2026; bank statements (receipts side); your diary summary of a typical week.

Method. Every finding follows the same rule: **counted, not guessed**. Where a figure could be counted from your documents, it was. Where it had to be estimated, the estimate is labelled, the basis is stated, and the conservative end is used. Nothing in this report relies on industry averages alone.

Counted once. Extra work never billed is counted in 3.3 and work certified short in 3.4; the same item is never counted as both.

The lens. A joinery firm's money moves through eight stages: enquiry, quote, contract, the job, variations, application and invoice, payment, retention. We checked each stage for the same thing: money that was earned but never collected, or collected late enough to cost you.

03 Findings – stage by stage

3.1 Enquiries and quotes: the work you never hear back on

Counted: 61 quotes sent January to June 2026. 19 won (31%). Of the 42 not won, your records show follow-up contact on 4. The other 38 went silent: no call, no email, no record of an outcome.

What it costs. At your average quote value (£3,850), even two to three additional wins a year from systematic follow-up is roughly £8,000 to £12,000 a year of work you already priced.

Estimate. Basis: two to three additional wins a year at your average quote value; deliberately conservative against your 31% win rate and the 38 quotes a half-year that currently go silent.

The deeper issue: you cannot currently see your pipeline. The records do not show which quotes are still live, which won work has yet to start, or how the other enquiries ended. That is not a discipline failure: there is no place to write it down.

3.2 Contracts: one clause worth renegotiating

Both live packages are on the main contractor's standard subcontract order. Package A's terms are usual for the sector. **Package B's order carries pay-when-certified wording and a 5% retention with release tied to the main contract, not your works:** your last money is hostage to a completion date you do not control. You have already lived the consequence: the £2,150 retained on the phase you finished in March 2026 is not due until the whole project certifies, likely next spring.

What it costs: nothing new this year, but it is the clause that turns a retention that should have come back within a year into one that may take two and a half: on your own works the March 2026 phase would release in March 2027; tied to a main contract likely to certify next spring and then run its own defects period, it may be 2028. **The fix costs nothing:** a one-page terms check before signature and two sentences on the next order. You have the leverage: they have placed three packages with you and their QS answers your calls.

3.3 The job and variations: extra work done and never billed

Counted: across the three most recent completed jobs, we matched site records and invoices against the original quotes. **Seven items of extra work appear in the records (photographs, texts to the client, materials bought) and do not appear on any invoice.** Value of the seven: £1,080 across the three jobs, £360 a job. Against the 22 comparable jobs your completed-contracts file shows for the twelve months to July 2026, that is £7,920 a year at the sampled rate, or £4,290 if the sampled jobs were worse than typical and the true rate is nearer £195 a job: an estimated **£4,300 to £7,900**.

Estimate. Basis: counted sample of three jobs, £360 a job, scaled by the 22 comparable jobs in the twelve months to July 2026; the low end assumes the sampled jobs were unusually bad, at £195 a job, which is the cautious reading.

This is the most common leak we see in trade businesses, and the most fixable: the work was done, the client knew, the evidence exists; it just never became a line on a bill. The fix is a capture habit at the moment the instruction happens, from the phone that is already in your hand.

3.4 Applications and payment: month-end is costing you a full cycle

Counted, Package A: of the six payment applications from February to July 2026, four went in after the contractual date; one late enough that it **missed the assessment window entirely and slipped a whole payment cycle: £11,400 arrived six weeks late**. Two applications were certified short (total £1,860 down) with no substantiation submitted to argue back from, and no record that the shortfall was ever queried.

Counted, direct work: your debtor days on direct clients run at **54 against your stated 30-day terms**, and the ledger shows £940 of settlement discounts given over the same six months, February to July 2026, to get invoices paid. Chasing happens from memory, usually when cash feels tight.

What it costs: the amounts certified short and never queried, and the discounts given on direct invoices to settle them late: conservatively **£3,000 to £5,600 a year**, before counting the Friday-afternoon hours the current scramble consumes. The working: £1,860 certified short on the six sampled applications and £940 of settlement discounts over the same six months is £2,800 in half a year, £5,600 at that rate for the year, and £3,000 if the sampled half-year was worse than typical.

Estimate. Basis: £1,860 certified short on the six applications from February to July 2026 and £940 of settlement discounts on the direct ledger over the same six months, £2,800 in six months, carried at that rate for the year; the low end assumes the sample was worse than typical.

3.5 Retentions: the finding this report leads with

Counted, from your completed-contracts file and remittances:

CONTRACT	COMPLETED	RETENTION HELD	RELEASE POSITION
Contract 1	Nov 2023	£2,400	Final release passed, due in full
Contract 2	Jun 2024	£1,900	Final release passed, due in full
Contract 3	Feb 2025	£2,500	Final release passed, due in full
Contract 4	Oct 2025	£2,250	First half received; final due Oct 2026
Contract 5	Mar 2026	£2,150	Tied to main contract certification (see 3.2)
Contracts 6 to 9	2024 to 2026	£3,000	Various; scheduled, not yet due
Total		£14,200	£6,800 due now

£6,800 is contractually yours today. Nobody asked for it, not through any fault: no ledger existed, so no release date was ever watched. Two of the three main contractors involved are still trading and still solvent, and £4,300 of the £6,800 sits with those two; the longer this waits, the worse those odds get. The third holder's position, with the remaining £2,500, is not yet established: establishing it is the first step. The Commercial Payments Bill going through Parliament proposes to end retentions with a transition period; whatever it becomes, retention held on finished jobs needs finding and applying for now.

This is the one finding where we name the applicable service directly, because the report would be incomplete without it: recovering scheduled retention is offered as a fixed-fee sprint (£750, plus 12.5% of the retention paid to you within six months of the sprint). The share is calculated on the retention itself, never on statutory compensation or any penalty, and it is invoiced when the money reaches you, never before. You can equally chase it yourself with the schedule above: it is your money and this table is yours to use.

3.6 The owner's evenings

From your own diary week: **roughly 9 hours a week** on quotes, invoicing, chasing and paperwork, almost all after 7pm. At your day rate, that is the most expensive administrator the business could hire, and it is also the reason the follow-ups in 3.1 and the chasing in 3.4 do not happen: the hours run out before the list does.

04 What it adds up to

LEAK	ANNUAL COST (CONSERVATIVE)	UPPER ESTIMATE	ONE-OFF RECOVERABLE
Unchased retentions COUNTED	-	-	£6,800
Unbilled extras ESTIMATED	£4,300	£7,900	-
Applications certified short and late settlement ESTIMATED	£3,000	£5,600	-
Total, money already earned	£7,300	£13,500	£6,800
Unfollowed quotes ESTIMATED	£8,000	£12,000	-
Winnable work NOT IN THE TOTAL ABOVE	£8,000	£12,000	-

Unchased retentions: Counted from the completed-contracts file and the remittances: £14,200 held across nine contracts, of which £6,800 is past its final release date.

Unbilled extras: Estimate. Basis: counted sample of three jobs, £360 a job, scaled by the 22 comparable jobs in the twelve months to July 2026; the low end assumes the sampled jobs were unusually bad, at £195 a job, which is the cautious reading.

Applications certified short and late settlement: Estimate. Basis: £1,860 certified short on the six applications from February to July 2026 and £940 of settlement discounts on the direct ledger over the same six months, £2,800 in six months, carried at that rate for the year; the low end assumes the sample was worse than typical.

Unfollowed quotes: Estimate. Basis: two to three additional wins a year at your average quote value; deliberately conservative against your 31% win rate and the 38 quotes a half-year that currently go silent.

Headline range: £7,300 to £13,500 a year, plus the £6,800 one-off recovery. A further £8,000 to £12,000 a year is winnable work, not money already earned.

Even at the bottom of every range, a year of the work already done and not paid for, with the retention due now, comes to more than twenty-five times the cost of this report: a first-year figure, an annual estimate added to a one-off sum.

05 What is working – leave these alone

Your pricing. Your quoted margins are consistent and sensible; the jobs we sampled came in on or near quote. The problem is rarely the price: it is what happens after the work is done.

Your materials records. Invoices matched to jobs cleanly. Whoever set that habit up did you a favour; it made half this report countable.

Both main-contractor relationships. Package A's QS certifies fairly when given substantiation, and repeat orders on both packages say they want to keep you. That is exactly why the retention conversation (3.5) and the terms conversation (3.2) can be had from a position of strength: you are not a supplier they can afford to burn.

06 The three fixes, ranked – money against effort

1. Retention recovery: found money, this month. The schedule in 3.5 is the case file. Letters to the three overdue holders, referencing the contract terms and release dates, escalating politely on a fixed cycle. No system needed, no behaviour change: it is administration of money already earned. **Effort: hours. Return: up to £6,800.**

2. Recording extra work when it is instructed. A phone form (photo, voice note, two taps) that turns "while you're here, can you just..." into a logged, priced, client-visible extra, reviewed weekly, billed monthly. Built on tools you own in your own name,

running cost stated in the quote before anything is built. **Effort: days to build, seconds to use. Return: £4,300 to £7,900 a year.**

3. Preparing the application from the records. A per-contract application workbook: measured works carried forward, variations feeding in from fix 2, substantiation attached, internal deadline three working days ahead of the contractual date. Month-end becomes two hours, not a day, because the capture form and the workbook do the collating as the month goes on, leaving the checking and the sending; and a short certification has something to answer, because the evidence goes in with the application. **Effort: days to set up per contract. Return: £3,000 to £5,600 a year, plus the slipped-cycle risk largely removed.**

Fixes 4 and 5 (quote follow-up and a place to see your pipeline) are in the full findings above. They are worth doing and are deliberately not in the top three: ranked on money against effort they return less for more work than the three above.

07 Recommended next step – and the honest alternative

The implementation of fixes 1 to 3 is a fixed fee of £3,400. The £500 you have paid for this report comes off it, so £2,900 to pay: £1,200 on the signed scope, £1,700 at handover. Delivered in three to five weeks: the retention letters drafted in week one, the capture form and application workbook built, tested on a live month, and handed over with everything (accounts, tools, data) in Calder Joinery's name. Those letters are inside the £3,400: the sprint in 3.5 is not needed on top of it for these three contracts. Running cost of the tools, in your name, stated in the scope before you sign. Nothing is rented from us: every account is in your name, so what we built stays yours and keeps running without us. Work starts once the first instalment has cleared, which is the discipline this report recommends to you.

The honest alternative: this report is written to stand alone. The retention schedule is usable today; any competent bookkeeper can run the chase letters; any systems builder can build the capture form from section 6. Some health checks end with "your house is in order, no build recommended", and every report is written as if it might be that one.

08 Appendix – calculation basis

Every figure in this report is one of two kinds. Counted. Taken directly from your documents: the retention schedule (completed-contracts file and remittances), the 61 quotes and 4 follow-ups (quote book), the seven unbilled extras and the 22 comparable jobs behind their scaling (site records against invoices, three-job sample;

completed-contracts file), the four late applications and £1,860 certified short (application records), 54 debtor days and £940 of settlement discounts (sales ledger against receipts). Section 2 names the period each record covers.

Estimated. Stated basis, conservative end used: the annual extras leak, the quote follow-up value, and the short certifications and settlement discounts, each with its basis and its scaling printed under the table in section 4. No industry averages are used as evidence anywhere in this report.

We keep the material you sent for 30 days after the report, so the guarantee can be checked against it, then delete it, except the records we must keep by law and a copy of this report. The Health Check terms you accepted on payment set this out.

Findings report CHC-2026-001 · prepared for the client named on the cover under the Health Check terms accepted on payment. **This specimen is a worked example on a fictional client: all figures illustrative.**