

The complaint

Mr H complains that Vanquis Bank Limited (Vanquis) refused to allow him to opt out of receiving his credit card statement by post.

What happened

Mr H has a credit card with Vanquis and telephoned them requesting they stop sending him credit card statements by post as he was concerned that the statements could be stolen or intercepted. Vanquis looked into his request but subsequently told Mr H because his credit card account was over the agreed limit it was their policy to send statements and other notifications by post. Mr H says he has access online and also receives regular text messages from Vanquis, so he can see how much he owes without any issues.

Vanquis say that they need to be able to send statements and other notifications when customers are over their account credit limit. Vanquis also say that if Mr H puts his account within the agreed credit limit, they will consider his request to opt out of statements being sent by post. Vanquis have reviewed Mr H's account and do not feel an increase in his credit limit is appropriate nor a way of dealing with the statement issue.

Mr H wasn't happy with their response and referred the matter to this service.

The investigator looked at the available information and upheld Mr H's complaint. He felt that Vanquis were given an exceptional reason for opting out of receiving statements by post given the potential risk of a third party being able to access his statements and potentially commit fraud on Mr H's account. He told Vanquis to allow Mr H to opt out of receiving statements by post and pay Mr H £50 by way of compensation for the inconvenience caused.

Vanquis didn't agree with the investigators view and asked for the matter to be referred to an ombudsman for final decision.

What I've decided – and why

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

Having done so, I have come to the same outcome as the investigator and I will explain how I have come to my decision.

When considering this complaint, I have looked at whether Vanquis acted unreasonably when Mr H requested to opt out of his statements being sent by post.

Mr H says that he is concerned that his mail may get intercepted and has experienced previous issues with his post which I can see would be a concern to him as he is worried about potential fraud on his credit card account.

Mr H also has access to his account online and this service has been told by Vanquis that the information contained on his online statement replicates that of the posted statements.

Mr H also receives regular text messages informing him of the status of his account, so I am satisfied that Mr H is able to see the same information he would see if he received his statements by post.

Vanquis say that they are willing to opt out of postal statements for Mr H if he can put his account back within the limit. Vanquis have considered the option of increasing Mr H's limit, which may overcome the issue, but they have decided that is not appropriate at this time. I am satisfied and agree this isn't the solution, given that even if Vanquis were to increase the limit, it is not to say that this problem wouldn't reoccur in the future should his account go over the agreed limit again.

I can't see that by posting statements are anymore of a guarantee of Mr H looking at these statements than he might by looking at his online account. Given that Mr H has explained he had post go missing before this would suggest that sending statements by post could result in him not receiving posted statements at all.

What is important here is Mr H still remains a customer of Vanquis despite him being regularly over his credit card limit, as Vanquis have pointed out. I am satisfied Vanquis should still treat his request not to receive postal statements like any other customer given that they have told us that the online statements contain the same information as posted statements. I am also satisfied that the risk of his post being interfered with is an exceptional circumstance here.

Vanquis says that they have a requirement to send out regulatory/legislative letters to Mr H. For the purposes of this complaint I have only looked at Mr H's request for opting out of his statements. I understand there could be occasions where Vanquis have to send formal letters to Mr H and in those less frequent circumstances, I can understand Vanquis can only do that by sending this by post.

I am satisfied for the reasons given before that Mr H should be able to opt out of receiving his credit card statements by post and he should continue to regularly review his account activity using his online banking facility.

I know that Vanquis will be disappointed with my decision, but I support the view of the investigator here.

Putting things right

I instruct Vanquis Bank Limited to allow Mr H to opt out of receiving statements by post and to pay him £50 for the trouble and upset caused.

My final decision

My final decision is that I uphold this complaint.

I instruct Vanquis Bank Limited to allow Mr H to opt out of receiving statements by post and to pay him £50 for the trouble and upset caused.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr H to accept or reject my decision before 2 September 2020.

Barry White
Ombudsman