

## **The complaint**

Mrs H and Mr H complain about the way Santander UK Plc handled matters when they were victims of a fraud.

## **What happened**

In July 2019 it appears that someone was able to open a sole account in Mr H's name, without his knowledge or authority. Three transfers, totalling £9,000, were made to the new account from Mr and Mrs H's joint account. The bank sent text alerts about the transfers to Mrs H, and she called Santander to say neither she nor Mr H had made them.

Mrs H had to call several times because of unreliable phone signals and each time had to repeat herself. Even when she was able to complete the call, Mrs H says that the bank gave no assurance that the money would be returned. And she was very concerned about the possibility of further fraud, since the joint account included information about other accounts held with other banks, which she then had to contact as well.

Mrs H also discussed CIFAS registration with Santander (which can provide a degree of protection against further fraud), and again there were problems with the call. Having offered to initiate this for Mr and Mrs H, the bank said that only certain people could do that, so there would be a delay.

Because the third party who had opened the new account had changed Mr H's address on the bank's systems, he then had to contact credit reference agencies to have that address removed.

Santander agreed to refund the missing money in full, but didn't tell Mr and Mrs H it had done so. They didn't notice until some time later because they believed the blocks placed on the account would prevent them from using online banking.

Santander agreed that it hadn't handled the case as well as it might have done. In particular, it accepted that it could have been more proactive after the initial contact and that call handlers could have expressed more empathy. It acknowledged too that it should have contacted Mr and Mrs H when it made the refund. It apologised and offered compensation of £250. Mr and Mrs H didn't accept that offer and referred the case to this service.

One of our investigators considered what had happened, but concluded that Santander's offer of compensation was fair in all the circumstances. Mr and Mrs H said they didn't think it properly reflected the stress they'd suffered; they asked that an ombudsman review the case.

## **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 agree with the investigator's conclusions, and for similar reasons.

I don't of course under-estimate the stress and anxiety that Mr and Mrs H have suffered here. That is unfortunately a consequence of being targeted by fraudsters, even where, as in this case, no financial loss results. But what I have to consider is whether Santander's handling of their case added unnecessarily to that stress and, if so, whether the offer of £250 in compensation is fair in the circumstances.

Santander acknowledged that there were areas in which it could have done better - in particular in the way it communicated to Mr and Mrs H what it was doing about the case.

But there were also a number of difficulties which weren't the fault of Santander - for example, the initial difficulties in maintaining a phone connection. And, whilst I can see why Mr and Mrs H would have liked reassurance that their money would be refunded, that depended on what the bank's investigation found about how the fraud took place.

In my view, the offer of £250 doesn't reflect the stress that Mr and Mrs H have suffered overall, but I think it does reflect the extent to which Santander has added to that stress in the way it handled matters. I don't intend to ask it to increase its offer, but simply leave it to Mr and Mrs H to decide whether or not they want to accept it.

### **My final decision**

My final decision is that I don't require Santander UK Plc to do anything more to resolve Mr and Mrs H's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs H and Mr H to accept or reject my decision before 9 September 2020.

Mike Ingram  
**Ombudsman**