

## **The complaint**

Miss L has complained about Debt Managers (Services) Limited chasing her for a debt that wasn't hers and failing to communicate with her about it.

## **What happened**

In May 2019, Debt Managers purchased a debt. They say that the original creditor gave them Miss L's email address as the contact email for that customer, though this is not Miss L's debt.

Between June and September 2019, Debt Managers sent Miss L a series of emails chasing her about the debt.

In September 2019, Miss L told Debt Managers that the debt they were chasing her for wasn't hers. But Debt Managers refused to deal with Miss L since she couldn't pass security – since she wasn't the real debtor.

Miss L complained to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO), and following this Debt Managers finally replied to her concerns in February 2020. They explained they'd sent correspondence meant for Miss L to the wrong address, which is why she hadn't heard from them at times. They explained that the original creditor had given them Miss L's email. And they confirmed they'd removed that email from their system, as the debt wasn't hers. They apologised for not handling things appropriately before.

Our investigator looked into things independently and upheld the complaint. He said Debt Managers should've listened to Miss L and recognised sooner that she wasn't the real account owner, so that they could give appropriate reassurance and explanations. He noted that they hadn't dealt with her issues until she'd complained to the ICO, and felt it was unfair that she had to spend so many months waiting to find out what was going on and why she was being chased for a debt that wasn't hers. He suggested Debt Managers pay £300 compensation for the trouble and upset they'd caused.

Debt Managers didn't agree. Contrary to their final response, they now felt that they'd acted appropriately. The complaint's been passed to me to decide.

## **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 that, I've come to the same conclusions as our investigator, and for much the same reasons.

While of course I wouldn't expect Debt Managers to discuss any sensitive or personal details with the wrong person, I would expect them to take things seriously if someone tells them they're being incorrectly chased for a debt. That includes investigating the matter promptly, putting things right, and keeping the wrongly-chased person properly updated so that they can be reassured.

But here, Miss L contacted Debt Managers in September 2019, and didn't receive a substantial update about her situation until February 2020.

It should have been obvious to Debt Managers that if they were chasing the wrong person, then Miss L would not have been able to pass security. So I'm not sure why they delayed things so much here because of that. They didn't need to give her any of the real debtor's information in order to look into her concerns about being wrongly contacted.

I'm also not sure why Debt Managers are now claiming that they acted appropriately, as they already admitted in their final response that they did not. They chased the wrong person for a debt, failed to deal with her promptly and appropriately when she told them the debt wasn't hers, and sent correspondence to the wrong address – making Miss L think they were ignoring her. This all caused her unfair stress, worry, and inconvenience over the course of five months.

Our investigator suggested that £300 compensation was appropriate to put this right, and I agree.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons I've explained, I uphold Miss L's complaint, and direct Debt Managers (Services) Limited to pay her £300 compensation.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss L to accept or reject my decision before 19 November 2020.

Adam Charles  
**Ombudsman**