

The complaint

Mr C complained that he was given unsuitable advice to transfer his defined benefit (DB) British Steel Pension Scheme (BSPS), to a personal pension plan.

DC Financial Limited is responsible for answering this complaint and so to keep things consistent, I'll refer mainly to "DCFL".

What happened

In March 2016, Mr C's employer announced that it would be examining options to restructure its business, including decoupling the BSPS from the company. The consultation with members referred to possible outcomes regarding their preserved benefits, which included transferring the scheme to the Pension Protection Fund (PPF), or a new defined benefit scheme (BSPS2). Alternatively, members were informed they could transfer their benefits to a personal pension arrangement.

In May 2017, the Pension Protection Fund (PPF) made the announcement that the terms of a Regulated Apportionment Arrangement (RAA) had been agreed. That announcement said that, if risk-related qualifying conditions relating to funding and size could be satisfied, a new pension scheme sponsored by Mr C's employer would be set up – the BSPS2.

Mr C was concerned about what the announcement by his employer meant for the security of his preserved benefits in the BSPS. He was unsure what to do and was referred to DCFL which is responsible for providing the pension advice. Information gathered about his circumstances and objectives at the time were broadly as follows:

- Mr C was 43 years old, single and had a young child, aged 6, financially dependent on him. He was in good health and at that point he had accrued around 9 years of pension benefits with the BSPS.
- Mr C earned around £32,000 per year and lived in a home valued at approximately £115,000, which had an outstanding mortgage of around £17,000 with 4 years to run. Mr C had disposable income each month of over £600 and £2000 in savings.
- The cash equivalent transfer value (CETV) of Mr C's BSPS was approximately £99,165 and the normal retirement age (NRA) was 65. DCFL said Mr C wanted to retire early if possible, at the age of 57.

DCFL set out its advice in a suitability letter and report on 24 October 2017. It advised him to transfer out of the BSPS and invest the funds in a personal pension plan. DCFL said this would allow Mr C to achieve his objectives. Mr C accepted this advice and so transferred to a personal pension. In 2021 Mr C complained to DCFL about its advice, saying he shouldn't have been advised to transfer out to a personal pension.

Mr C referred his complaint to our Service. One of our investigators looked into the complaint and said it should be upheld. In response, DCFL said it hadn't done anything wrong and was acting on the financial objectives Mr C had at the time.

As the complaint couldn't be resolved informally, it's come to me for a 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.

I've also taken into account relevant law and regulations, regulator's rules, guidance and standards and codes of practice, and what I consider to have been good industry practice at the time. This includes the Principles for Business ('PRIN') and the Conduct of Business Sourcebook ('COBS'). Where the evidence is incomplete, inconclusive or contradictory, I reach my conclusions on the balance of probabilities – that is, what I think is more likely than not to have happened based on the available evidence and the wider surrounding circumstances.

The applicable rules, regulations and requirements

The below is not a comprehensive list of the rules and regulations which applied at the time of the advice, but provides useful context for my assessment of DCFL's actions here.

- PRIN 6: *A firm must pay due regard to the interests of its customers and treat them fairly.*
- PRIN 7: *A firm must pay due regard to the information needs of its clients, and communicate information to them in a way which is clear, fair and not misleading.*
- COBS 2.1.1R: *A firm must act honestly, fairly and professionally in accordance with the best interests of its client (the client's best interests rule).*
- The provisions in COBS 9 which deal with the obligations when giving a personal recommendation and assessing suitability and the provisions in COBS 19 which specifically relate to a DB pension transfer.

I've also comprehensively considered DCFL's responses to the complaint outlined in its undated letter we received in July 2022. This letter addresses many points, all of which I've thought carefully about. However, in this final decision I've rightly concentrated on the issues I believe affect the outcome of the complaint. DCFL made many somewhat 'general' points. For example, it sent me information implying many of its other advice cases had been reviewed by a third party and not all had been found to be unsuitable for clients. However here, I've focussed on the issues pertinent to Mr C's complaint and the circumstances of that time.

I have further considered that the regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority ('FCA'), states in COBS 19.1.6 that the starting assumption for a transfer from a DB scheme is that it is unsuitable. So, DCFL should have only considered a transfer if it could clearly demonstrate that the transfer was in Mr C's best interests.

I've used all the information we have to consider whether transferring away from the BPS to a personal pension was in Mr C's best interests.

I don't think it was, so I'm upholding his complaint.

Financial viability

DCFL referred in its transfer analysis and suitability report to 'critical yield' rates. The critical yield is essentially the average annual investment return that would be required on the transfer value - from the time of advice until retirement - to provide the same annuity benefits as the DB scheme. In this case, DCFL used the existing scheme (BPS) for the critical yield comparisons, rather than the 'new' BPS2.

However, before assessing the critical yields in Mr C's case, I think it's important to point out that DCFL could have taken time to compare the benefits of the BSPS2 with transferring out, rather than just using the current BPS for comparisons.

I say this because many weeks before this advice, which was dated 24 October 2017, BPS members had been told that if the RAA was approved, they would have a choice – to move into a new scheme (BSPS2) or into the PPF with the old scheme. A newsletter had also been put on a microsite that had been set up to support BPS members and more details of the BSPS2 had emerged by the time DCFL produced its suitability report.

It's true the situation was dynamic in that changes were being proposed at that very point, but we know a great deal about the timeline because we've seen many similar complaints to this one. And as the existing scheme (BPS) was clearly no longer an option, using the existing scheme rather than the new one, to make comparisons with, wasn't giving Mr C the best opportunity to make an informed decision about what to do. I think it's also fair to say that despite some uncertainty at the time, the BSPS2 critical yields were likely to be between the BPS and PPF yields, but most likely much closer to the existing scheme (BPS).

I also think it's important to point out that DCFL itself acknowledged, during its advice, that the critical yields required to match the benefits of Mr C's existing scheme were high. It said in its suitability report, of 24 October 2017, *"the critical yield required is high and it would be very unlikely that an investment could provide a return to match the benefits you are giving up"*. It explained the critical yields required to match his existing benefits at the age of 65 was 6.64%; and it was 9.42% compared against retirement at the age of 55.

The advice was given just after the regulator gave instructions in Final Guidance FG17/9 as to how businesses could calculate future 'discount rates' in loss assessments where a complaint about a past pension transfer was being upheld. Prior to 1 October 2017 similar rates were published by the Financial Ombudsman Service on our website. Whilst businesses weren't required to refer to these rates when giving advice on pension transfers, they provide a useful indication of what growth rates would have been considered reasonably achievable for a typical investor.

The relevant discount rate closest to when the advice was given which I can refer to was published by the Financial Ombudsman Service for the period before 1 October 2017 and was only 4.5% per year for 21 years to retirement (age 65), which is well below the critical yield figures I've referred to above. For a retirement at 55, the discount rate was 4.3%.

This infers that reaching the yields above would be unlikely. And there would be little point in transferring if Mr C was likely to receive lower pension benefits in the longer term.

However, I've also considered some other issues. I've also kept in mind, for instance, that the regulator's upper projection rate at the time of the advice was 8%, the middle projection rate was 5%, and the lower projection rate was 2%. DCFL said Mr C's attitude to risk (ATR) was "moderate", so I think a growth assumption near to the regulator's mid-rate was appropriate here, and probably also quite close to the discount rate. These were below the critical yields I've set out above.

Of course, all this could be said to be of limited relevance since DCFL itself said at the time the critical yields were very unlikely to be achieved. And so, having said this back in 2017, it would be hard for DCFL to argue now that these types of growth figures *were* viewed as achievable at the time.

Elsewhere in its transfer analysis, DCFL showed some figures to Mr C that implied he'd be able to have an income from his transferred funds well into his old age. But these weren't

making like-for-like comparisons with the scheme he could join (BSPS2) as the benefits and guarantees associated with a DB pension were being lost.

DCFL also made mention of the PPF, which it described as a compensation scheme providing a “*safety net*” for pension schemes when the sponsoring employer becomes insolvent. DCFL said the critical yield to match the benefits available through the PPF at age 65 was 4.82% per year if Mr C took a pension under the reduced terms of the PPF.

But these yields related to the *reduced* benefits available with the PPF and DCFL itself says Mr C wouldn’t have wanted to transfer to this scheme. It’s also important to remember here that the effect of charges and fees associated with a personal pension would have further reduced the likely growth.

As a further comparison, I can also see that DCFL’s transfer analysis showed that in order to purchase an annuity to provide benefits of equal value to the existing scheme at retirement at age 65, the funds required would be around £293,771 – far in excess of Mr C’s ‘current’ CETV. Even in order to purchase an annuity to provide benefits of equal value to the estimated benefits of the existing scheme, assuming *no* spouse’s pension, *no* increases in payment and *no* guarantee at retirement, the estimated fund required was still £172,817. In my view, these costs provide a revealing window into the real value Mr C would lose if he transferred out to a personal pension plan.

However, to be clear, DCFL’s recommendation that he should transfer out to a personal pension was not predicated on the financial comparisons with his current scheme alone. Rather, DCFL said Mr C had different reasons to transfer away, so I’ve thought about all the other considerations which might have meant a transfer *was* suitable for him, despite providing the overall lower benefits mentioned above.

I’ve considered these below.

Flexibility and other needs

DCFL recommended a transfer to a personal pension based on what it said were Mr C’s wider objectives. I have summarised the following themes as supporting the recommendation to transfer away and which were included in the suitability report:

- Mention was made several times throughout the advice of Mr C retiring early if possible, at around 57. In a personal pension he could take more tax-free cash. He could then draw his desired retirement income more flexibly.
- Mr C wanted personal control over his pension.
- There would be flexible access to death benefits in a personal pension plan and it was important to be able to pass on any unused pension fund to his child, if Mr C died.
- The future of the BSPS was a concern and he’d lost trust in the company. Mr C didn’t want to enter the PPF. He was also concerned about further cuts in benefits.

And, the “comprehensive client financial information form”, apparently completed on 9 October 2017 (and signed by Mr C on 24 October 2017) said there were what DCFL described as sufficient reasons to transfer. These included (I’ve summarised):

- Flexible Income.

- The ability to retire early and suffer no 'reductions' in the pension for doing so.
- Better death benefits.
- The fund would no longer enter the PPF.
- An ability to transfer the pension [again] to another policy when Mr C retired, if he wished to.

So, it seems the supporting reasons that DCFL recommended the transfer out to a personal pension was for the flexibility and control it offered to Mr C. I have therefore considered all these issues in turn.

- *Retiring early / taking tax-free cash*

DCFL mentioned that Mr C had said he wanted to retire early. I don't doubt that Mr C might have genuinely hoped to retire as early as 57, which is what was recorded on the 'fact-find'. But I've seen nothing that shows this was anything more than something he aspired to do at that stage, as opposed to being part of a formulated plan. I say this because Mr C was only 43 years old at the time and it's simply not credible that he had any concrete plans for retirement at that point.

DCFL also promoted to Mr C that he could access more tax-free cash if he transferred to a personal pension plan. It said he'd be able to access 25% of his pension as a lump-sum and then use the remaining funds more flexibly. It's usually the case that more tax-free cash can be accessed from a personal pension when compared against a DB scheme; this is because the values and benefits of the two schemes are calculated differently. But extra tax-free lump sums being removed from a personal pension, potentially from the age of 55 in his case, also came with consequences in that the amount left for his later retirement years would obviously decrease. I accept DCFL mentioned this at the time, but it still used this rationale as supporting its recommendation to leave, in my view.

Even if I were to consider the unlikely scenario that Mr C's retirement plans were more fixed than the mere aspirations set out by DCFL - and he really did want to retire early - I think DCFL should have assessed the possibility of achieving this goal whilst being a member of the BPS2, for example. Early retirement under the BPS2, or indeed the PPF, would still have been an option for Mr C, although this would have meant Mr C's pension benefits would have been somewhat different due to him accessing the pension earlier and for longer. I think it's likely there were discussions about this, but I think this was discounted by DCFL and portrayed negatively. The advice simply focussed on him transferring away completely.

So, whilst I accept the notion of retiring early and / or accessing tax-free cash might have been appealing, this needed to be considered against the other options Mr C faced, including opting for the BPS2. I can't see that Mr C required flexibility in retirement in the way DCFL suggested, which in any case, was poorly defined.

In fact, it seems DCFL and Mr C himself could only estimate the amount he'd need to live on in retirement, which was said to be around 50-60% of his current income. But this, in my view, demonstrates the speculative nature of assessing the retirement needs of someone who is many, many years away from it. Mr C's estimated BPS annual pension, rather than the BPS2, upon his NRA was £7,654 per year (shown elsewhere as £7,765). But I think the values would have been broadly comparable, and as a DB pension this was guaranteed and index linked.

However, as he was so young in pension terms, it wasn't possible to say what Mr C's financial and income needs were likely to be in retirement. I certainly haven't seen anything to persuade me that Mr C *wouldn't* have been able to meet his likely retirement income needs by accessing his DB pension instead of transferring out to a personal pension plan. This is because Mr C had already almost finished his mortgage and he already enjoyed a significant disposable income each month. And as well as retirement being a long time away, we know Mr C had already joined his employer's new defined contribution ('DC') scheme and would have been making contributions to it for up to 21 years more, until he retired. Mr C's contributions to this 'second' pension were being added to by his employer and I think there's every reason to say that by retirement – whenever it came – there would have been a substantial amount in this DC pension to complement his deferred DB scheme (in BPS2).

I think therefore, that by retirement, Mr C could have been in a good position if he'd transferred to the BPS2. On one hand he'd have had a long-standing modest DB pension, but one with all the guarantees and benefits this type of scheme brought. And on the other hand, he'd have built up a substantial DC pension over many years, which, if he later found he did require flexibility, this pension could have provided it.

I have therefore considered what DCFL said about retiring early and the potential flexibility brought about by transferring to a personal plan: it implied this would include how funds were invested, the level of income he could withdraw from it and a greater ability to flexibly use the tax-free lump sum element.

However, I don't think recommending a transfer-out based on these reasons was suitable because he was still quite young in pension terms, and so little was known about what his retirement would look like. DCFL also implied that Mr C would be able to have complete control over the pension if he transferred out. But I've seen nothing which shows Mr C had either the desire or capacity to exercise personal control over his pension. Mr C's previous exposure to investing was not really known and he had no such investments at the time of his own.

So, I think Mr C's circumstances were much more aligned to him transferring to BPS2 and retiring from that when he felt he was ready to do so, and then drawing a DB pension. Because he also had a 'second', DC pension, this supported that strategy, in my view.

I therefore think the much more suitable option was for Mr C to access his DB pension in the way it was originally intended. Using this, together with his other assets put him in a good retirement position, when it eventually came.

- *Death benefits*

DCFL implies that death benefits were discussed at the time and the personal pension would better enable the retention of the value of the funds if Mr C died. But I'm afraid I think this was no more than a 'stock' objective used to help justify the advice to transfer away.

Death benefits are an emotive subject and of course when asked, most people would like their loved ones to be taken care of when they die. The lump sum death benefits on offer through a personal pension was probably made to look like an attractive feature to Mr C. But whilst I appreciate death benefits are important to consumers, and Mr C might have thought it was a good idea to transfer the BPS to a personal pension because of this, the priority here was to advise him about what was best for his retirement provisions. A pension is primarily designed to provide income in retirement.

I also think saying Mr C's death benefits would improve in a personal pension because he could pass over all his funds needed putting into context. Only in his forties and in good health, he wasn't currently married but he had a young child. In my view, the likely death benefits attached to the new DB scheme were therefore highly relevant to him and they were also underplayed. The dependents pension of BSPS2, for example, could have been of use until his child, who was only six years old, left full time education if Mr C were to pass away. But this seems to have been overlooked.

I therefore don't think DCFL made the value of this benefit clear enough. These benefits were guaranteed and they escalated – they were not dependent on investment performance, whereas the sum remaining on death in a personal pension was. Importantly, there may also not have been a large sum left anyway in a personal pension, upon Mr C's passing, particularly if he lived a long life and used the pension to draw income in retirement. DCFL should therefore not have encouraged Mr C to prioritise the potential for higher death benefits through a personal pension over his security in retirement.

It also doesn't appear that DCFL took into account the fact that Mr C could have nominated his child, or someone else for that matter, as the beneficiary of any funds remaining in his DC scheme. So, to this end, Mr C had already ensured part of his pension wouldn't 'die with him'.

Finally, at 43 years old I think life insurance would have been a reasonably affordable product if Mr C really did want to leave a legacy for someone.

Overall, I don't think different death benefits available through a transfer to a personal pension justified the likely decrease of retirement benefits for Mr C. I think this objective was no more than a generic comment and not tailored to Mr C's situation when the advice was given.

- *Concerns over financial stability of the DB scheme*

It's clear that Mr C, like many employees of his company, was concerned about his pension. His employer had recently made the announcement about its plans for the scheme and DCFL said he lacked trust in the company. He'd heard negative things about the PPF and DCFL said he could have more control over his pension fund.

So, it's quite possible that Mr C was also leaning towards the decision to transfer because of the concerns he had about his employer and a negative perception of the PPF. However, it was DCFL's obligation to give Mr C an objective picture and recommend what was in his best interests.

By the point of the advice being delivered details of BSPS2 were emerging and it seemed likely it was going ahead. So, I think this should have alleviated Mr C's concerns about the scheme moving to the PPF.

However, even if there was a chance the BSPS2 wouldn't go ahead, I think that DCFL should have reassured Mr C that the scheme moving to the PPF wasn't as concerning as he thought. The income available to Mr C through the PPF would still have probably provided a significant portion of the income he would have needed at retirement, and he was still unlikely to be able to exceed this by transferring out, given his actual ATR and the effect of pension charges and fees. And although the increases in payment in the PPF were lower, the income was still guaranteed and was not subject to any investment risk. So, I don't think that these concerns should have led to DCFL's recommendation to Mr C to transfer out of a DB scheme altogether.

Summary

I don't doubt that the flexibility, control and potential for higher death benefits on offer through a personal pension would have sounded like attractive features to Mr C. But DCFL wasn't there to just transact what Mr C might have thought he wanted. The adviser's role was to really understand what Mr C needed and recommend what was in his best interests.

Ultimately, I don't think the advice given to Mr C was suitable. He was giving up a guaranteed, risk-free and increasing income within the BSPS2. By transferring to a personal pension, the evidence shows Mr C was likely to obtain lower retirement benefits. And I don't think there were any other particular reasons which would justify the transfer and outweigh this. I think DCFL ought to have advised him against transferring out of his DB scheme for this reason, particularly as it meant he'd be worse off in retirement.

So, I don't think it was in Mr C's best interests for him to transfer his DB scheme to a personal pension when he had the opportunity of opting into the BSPS2.

I think it was clear to all parties that BSPS2 was likely to be going ahead. Mr C still had many years before he intended to retire. So, I don't think that it would have been in his interest to accept the reduction in benefits he would have faced by the scheme entering the PPF, as it wouldn't necessarily have been offset by the more favourable reduction for very early retirement. By opting into the BSPS2, Mr C would have retained the ability to transfer out of the scheme nearer to his retirement age if he needed to. Also, Mr C had a dependent child, and there were valuable death benefits to remaining a member of a DB scheme, such as BSPS2.

On this basis, I think DCFL should have advised Mr C to opt into the BSPS2.

I have considered, given the circumstances of the time, whether Mr C would have transferred to a personal pension in any event. I accept that DCFL disclosed some of the risks of transferring to Mr C, and provided him with a certain amount of information. But ultimately it advised Mr C to transfer out, and I think Mr C relied on that advice.

I'm not persuaded that Mr C would have insisted on transferring out of the DB scheme, against DCFL's advice. I say this because Mr C was an inexperienced investor and this pension accounted for most of his retirement provision at the time. So, if DCFL had provided him with clear advice against transferring out of the DB scheme, explaining why it wasn't in his best interests, I think he would have accepted that advice.

I'm also not persuaded that Mr C's concerns about the PPF were so great that he would have insisted on transferring his pension, knowing that a professional adviser, whose expertise he had sought out and was paying for, didn't think it was suitable for him or in his best interests. So if DCFL had explained Mr C was also unlikely to exceed the benefits available to him through the PPF if he transferred out, and that he could meet his income needs in retirement without risking his guaranteed pension, I think that would have carried significant weight.

In light of the above, I am upholding this complaint. I think DCFL should compensate Mr C for the unsuitable advice, using the regulator's defined benefits pension transfer redress methodology.

Putting things right

A fair and reasonable outcome would be for the business to put Mr C, as far as possible, into the position he would now be in but for DCFL's unsuitable advice. I consider Mr C would have most likely opted to join the BSPS2, rather than transfer to the personal pension if he'd

been given suitable advice. So, DCFL should use the benefits offered by BSPS2 for comparison purposes. Compensation should be based on his normal retirement age of 65, as per the usual assumptions in the FCA's guidance.

On 2 August 2022, the FCA launched a consultation on new DB transfer redress guidance and set out its proposals in a consultation document - [CP22/15-calculating redress for non-compliant pension transfer advice](#).

In this consultation, the FCA said that it considers that the current redress methodology in Finalised Guidance (FG) 17/9 (Guidance for firms on how to calculate redress for unsuitable defined benefit pension transfers) remains appropriate and fundamental changes are not necessary. However, its review has identified some areas where the FCA considers it could improve or clarify the methodology to ensure it continues to provide appropriate redress.

A policy statement was published on 28 November 2022 which set out the new rules and guidance-<https://www.fca.org.uk/publication/policy/ps22-13.pdf>. The new rules will come into effect on 1 April 2023.

The FCA has said that it expects firms to continue to calculate and offer compensation to their customers using the existing guidance in FG 17/9 for the time being. But until changes take effect firms should give customers the option of waiting for their compensation to be calculated in line with the new rules and guidance.

We've previously asked Mr C whether he preferred any redress to be calculated now, in line with current guidance, or wait for any new guidance/rules to be published. He doesn't want to wait for the new guidance to come into effect. I am therefore satisfied that a calculation in line with FG17/9 remains appropriate and, if a loss is identified, will provide fair redress for Mr C.

This calculation should be carried out as at the date of my final decision and using the most recent financial assumptions at the date of that decision. In accordance with the regulator's expectations, this should be undertaken or submitted to an appropriate provider promptly following receipt of notification of Mr C's acceptance of the decision. As I've said above, compensation should be based on his normal retirement age of 65

DCFL may wish to contact the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) to obtain Mr C's contribution history to the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS or S2P). These details should then be used to include a 'SERPS adjustment' in the calculation, which will take into account the impact of leaving the occupational scheme on Mr C's SERPS/S2P entitlement.

If the redress calculation demonstrates a loss, the compensation should if possible be paid into Mr C's pension plan. The payment should allow for the effect of charges and any available tax relief. The compensation shouldn't be paid into the pension plan if it would conflict with any existing protection or allowance.

If a payment into the pension isn't possible or has protection or allowance implications, it should be paid directly to Mr C as a lump sum after making a notional deduction to allow for income tax that would otherwise have been paid. Typically, 25% of the loss could have been taken as tax-free cash and 75% would have been taxed according to his likely income tax rate in retirement - presumed to be 20%. So making a notional deduction of 15% overall from the loss adequately reflects this.

The payment resulting from all the steps above is the 'compensation amount'. This amount must where possible be paid to Mr C within 90 days of the date DCFL receives notification of his acceptance of my final decision. Further interest must be added to the compensation amount at the rate of 8% per year simple from the date of my final decision to the date of settlement for any time, in excess of 90 days, that it takes DCFL to pay Mr C.

It's possible that data gathering for a SERPS adjustment may mean that the actual time taken to settle goes beyond the 90 day period allowed for settlement above - and so any period of time where the only outstanding item required to undertake the calculation is data from DWP may be added to the 90 day period in which interest won't apply.

If the complaint hasn't been settled in full and final settlement by the time any new guidance or rules come into effect, I'd expect DCFL to carry out a calculation in line with the updated rules and/or guidance in any event.

I've considered the impact on Mr C of the unsuitable advice and transfer. Our investigator recommended that a sum of £250 should be paid to Mr C by DCFL for what he referred to as the trouble and upset caused by this unsuitable transfer. I've taken into consideration Mr C's age and circumstances and also that by retirement this DB pension would still have been a significant part of his overall pension entitlement, So I think the thought of losing benefits would have negatively impacted Mr C. I therefore agree that DCFL should also pay Mr C £250 for the distress and inconvenience caused by the unsuitable advice which has likely had an impact on his retirement planning

Where I uphold a complaint, I can award fair compensation of up to £160,000, plus any interest and/or costs that I consider are appropriate. Where I consider that fair compensation requires payment of an amount that might exceed £160,000, I may recommend that the business pays the balance.

My final decision

Determination and money award: I've decided to uphold this complaint and I now direct DC Financial Limited to pay Mr C the compensation amount as set out in the steps above, up to a maximum of £160,000.

Where the compensation amount does not exceed £160,000, I would additionally require DC Financial Limited to pay Mr C any interest on that amount in full, as set out above.

Where the compensation amount already exceeds £160,000, I would only require DC Financial Limited to pay Mr C any interest as set out above on the sum of £160,000.

Recommendation: If the compensation amount exceeds £160,000, I also recommend that DC Financial Limited pays Mr C the balance. I would additionally recommend any interest calculated as set out above on this balance to be paid to Mr C.

If Mr C accepts my final decision, the money award becomes binding on DC Financial Limited.

My recommendation would not be binding. Further, it's unlikely that Mr C can accept my decision and go to court to ask for the balance. Mr C may want to consider getting independent legal advice before deciding whether to accept any final decision. Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr C to accept or reject my decision before 22 February 2023.

Michael Campbell
Ombudsman