

Complaint

Mr P complains that Moneybarn No. 1 Limited ("Moneybarn") unfairly entered into a conditional sale agreement with him. He's said that it was unaffordable due to his existing position.

Background

In February 2020, Moneybarn provided Mr P with finance for a used car. The purchase price of the vehicle was £7,799.00. Mr P paid a deposit of £400 and entered into a conditional sale agreement, which had a 60-month term, with Moneybarn for the remaining £7,399.00.

The loan had interest and charges of £9,908.65 over the course of the 60-month term. This meant that the total amount to be repaid of £17,307.65 (not including Mr P's deposit) was due to be repaid in 59 monthly instalments of £293.35.

Mr P complained that the agreement was unaffordable and so should never have been provided to him. Moneybarn didn't uphold the complaint. It said that its checks confirmed that the finance was affordable and so it was reasonable to lend.

Mr P's complaint was considered by one of our investigators. She didn't think that Moneybarn had done anything wrong or treated Mr P unfairly. So she didn't recommend that Mr P's complaint should be upheld.

Mr P disagreed with our investigator and the complaint was passed to an ombudsman for a final decision.

My findings

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

We've explained how we handle complaints about irresponsible and unaffordable lending on our website. And I've used this approach to help me decide Mr P's complaint.

Having carefully thought about everything I've been provided with, I'm not upholding Mr P's complaint. I'd like to explain why in a little more detail.

Moneybarn needed to make sure that it didn't lend irresponsibly. In practice, what this means is that Moneybarn needed to carry out proportionate checks to be able to understand whether any lending was sustainable for Mr P before providing it.

Our website sets out what we typically think about when deciding whether a lender's checks were proportionate. Generally, we think it's reasonable for a lender's checks to be less thorough – in terms of how much information it gathers and what it does to verify that information – in the early stages of a lending relationship.

But we might think it needed to do more if, for example, a borrower's income was low, the amount lent was high, or the information the lender had – such as a significantly impaired credit history – suggested the lender needed to know more about a prospective borrower's ability to repay.

Moneybarn says it agreed to this application after Mr P provided details of his monthly income and carried out credit searches on him. It says Mr P's income was cross checked against the funds going into his account each month and the amount going into Mr P's account each month suggested Mr P's declaration of income was plausible.

The credit searches also showed that Mr P had previously defaulted on credit, with the most recent instance taking place around 16 months prior to this application. Finally, the searches also indicated that Mr P had a county court judgment ("CCJ") recorded against him some four years previously.

In Moneybarn's view, when the amount Mr P already owed plus a reasonable amount for Mr P's living expenses were deducted from his monthly income the monthly payments for this agreement were still affordable.

On the other hand, Mr P says his existing commitments meant that these payments were unaffordable and there was no way he was going to be able to maintain them.

I've thought about what Mr P and Moneybarn have said.

The first thing for me to say is that I'm not persuaded that the checks Moneybarn carried out did go far enough, as I'm not persuaded that it was reasonable to rely on an estimate of Mr P's living costs given what Moneybarn saw on its credit checks. And I think that this ought to have led Moneybarn to do more to verify Mr P's actual regular living costs. That said, I don't think that obtaining further information on Mr P's actual living costs would have made a difference to Moneybarn's decision to lend in this instance.

I say this because having considered the information Mr P has provided it appears as though when his regular living expenses and existing credit commitments, at the time, are deducted from his monthly income, he did have the funds, when the application was made, to sustainably make the repayments due under this agreement.

I accept it's possible that Mr P's actual circumstances at the time might have been worse than what I've seen here. I say this in light of when this agreement was taken out and the onset of the pandemic shortly afterwards. But I have to be mindful of the fact that a lender is only able to make a decision based on what it knows, or could reasonably have been expected to have known at the time.

So while I do appreciate that it might have proved more difficult for Mr P to make his payments than he'd anticipated, particularly given the unprecedented situation which unfolded globally shortly after the agreement was provided, the crucial thing here is that I don't think that asking for more information would have prevented Moneybarn from lending in this instance.

Therefore, overall and having carefully considered everything, while I'm not persuaded that Moneybarn's checks before entering into this conditional sale agreement with Mr P did go far enough, I'm satisfied that carrying out reasonable and proportionate checks won't have stopped Moneybarn from providing these funds, or entering into this agreement with him.

As this is the case, I don't think that Moneybarn acted unfairly or unreasonably towards Mr P. So I'm not upholding this complaint. I appreciate that this will be disappointing for

Mr P. But I hope he'll understand the reasons for my decision and at least consider that his concerns have been listened to.

Although I'm not upholding this complaint, I'd like to remind Moneybarn of its obligation to exercise forbearance and due consideration in relation to the outstanding balance on Mr P's account, subsequent to the agreement being voluntarily terminated, should it be the case that he is experiencing financial difficulty.

My final decision

My final decision is that I'm not upholding Mr P's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr P to accept or reject my decision before 31 January 2024.

Jeshen Narayanan
Ombudsman