

## **The complaint**

Mrs C complains about The Co-operative Bank Plc (Co-op) in terms of how they dealt with an attempted fraud, and issues experienced organising replacement debit cards. This caused inconvenience and distress.

## **What happened**

In February 2024, Mrs C received a phone call which she believed to be a fraud attempt. As a result, she contacted her bank Co-op to inform them. The only service they could offer due to the time Mrs C called was to cancel the debit cards and issue replacements. As Mrs C needed to use a card the next day, she decided not to cancel them. Instead, Mrs C went to a branch the next day to withdraw some cash, then asked the cards be cancelled which she was told they would be.

When Mrs C didn't receive replacement cards, she chased this up with Co-op to initially be told that they had been ordered. Mrs C chased up the cards again and this time it was established that regrettably, an error had been made, and replacements had not been ordered as promised; Co-op immediately ordered the cards.

When Mrs C received the cards, she went to a branch again to register for more security for her account and raised a complaint at the same time. In an attempt to resolve the complaint, Co-op apologised for the delay, the incorrect information and the upset caused, awarding £50 in recognition of distress. Some days later, Co-op issued a Summary Resolution Communication (SRC) complaint letter closing the complaint.

Unfortunately, the SRC that Co-op issued was the incorrect type of complaint response and, they had not actually agreed the resolution with Mrs C. As a result, Mrs C did not feel her complaint had been taken seriously.

Remaining unhappy, Mrs C brought the complaint to our service which an investigator looked into. During this investigation, Co-op contacted our service to revise their compensation offer. They said they wanted to increase the £50 to £125, and additionally wanted to offer £75 for how the complaint was dealt with, making a total of £200. After our investigation, our investigator regarded Co-op's revised offer as fair and reasonable, recommending that Mrs C accepted it.

Mrs C responded to our investigator saying that Co-op's offer was derisory. She also gave more details on what had happened, finishing with her resolution for the complaint being £500 in total. Our investigator acknowledged the points raised but said their overall conclusions about the complaint remain unchanged. Consequently, Mrs C requested an ombudsman review her complaint.

## **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 have looked at the information Co-op has supplied to see if it has acted within its terms and conditions and to see if it has treated Mrs C fairly.

It is always regrettable when we see a relatively simple process like cancelling and replacing cards result in a much longer protracted experience and I sympathise with Mrs C for the frustration she experienced. It's our role to identify if a business has made a mistake and if so, look at the impact this has had on the consumer.

If I don't mention any specific point, it's not because I failed to take it on board and think about it, but because I don't think I need to comment on it to reach what I think is a fair and reasonable outcome. No discourtesy is intended by me in taking this approach.

What's not in question is that errors were made. Specifically, Co-op's failure to order replacement cards when initially agreed, incorrect assurances that the cards were in transit, and how they closed the complaint. I'm satisfied that within Co-op's apologies and the actions they took – ordering replacement cards as soon as the error was established - they treated Mrs C fairly. I also want to acknowledge Co-op's efforts to resolve the complaint soon after it was referred to our service, with its revised compensation offer.

In addition to the points that our investigator addressed from Mrs C's response to their view, I wanted to clarify some points. Firstly, Mrs C asked who was responsible for the replacement cards not being ordered when agreed but from the evidence I've seen, it was human error by the Co-op.

Mrs C also expressed unhappiness about a 25-minute wait she experienced in contacting the Co-op when she called to chase her cards saying that as a result, she decided to go to a branch. I'm sorry that Co-op didn't answer their telephones sooner but I know businesses are sometimes busier than they want to be, and Mrs C may want to bring this up separately with Co-op if she wishes.

I wanted to acknowledge Mrs C's concerns about a security reset procedure that was completed in a non-private area of a Co-op branch, despite her request for an office. This wasn't brought up with Co-op within the complaint they addressed and as such, it's not something I can consider. Similar to the call wait issue, Mrs C may want to raise this with Co-op so they have the opportunity to investigate and respond before any potential involvement from our service.

Regarding the compensation offer, we're all inconvenienced at times in our day-to-day lives – and a certain level of frustration and minor annoyance is unwelcome but to be expected. It's the impact of the errors made over and above that which we consider determining if an award of compensation is merited, and if so, how much.

Mrs C has quoted details from our service's website in terms of her desired compensation amount citing the £500 to be fair as she feels it falls into the category of an award of over £300 and up to around £750 but our categories are only guidelines. Whilst I do acknowledge the worry this has caused, having considered all the evidence, I find that Co-op's offer of compensation is fair and reasonable. Within my considerations, I'm acknowledging that the cards were ordered as soon as the mistake was established, I've not seen any evidence that Mrs C has suffered financially and, there's been no materiel losses.

Looking at correspondence from Mrs C, I know she will be disappointed with my decision but it's vital that I look at compensation through the lenses of fairness and reasonability. In conclusion, I cannot fairly require Co-op to do anything further.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons I have given it is my final decision that the complaint is upheld. I require The Co-operative Bank Plc to pay Mrs C compensation of £200 for the distress and inconvenience, less anything paid already.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs C to accept or reject my decision before 16 July 2024.

Chris Blamires  
**Ombudsman**