

## **The complaint**

Mr S complains as representative of Mrs S, Skipton Building Society (Skipton) provided poor customer service when dealing with a maturing savings bond.

## **What happened**

Mr S says his wife held a savings bond with Skipton which was due to mature in November 2023. Mr S says his wife received maturity instructions from Skipton, but this arrived 4 days post the maturity of the bond. Mr S says his wife then telephoned Skipton to arrange the closure of the savings bond but was told by a staff member in no uncertain terms, further identification was required before this could be arranged within the 21-day cooling off period, and this information was required because she lived overseas.

Mr S says he and his wife live in rural Portugal and the postal service isn't good there and it wasn't a simple process to get the identification Skipton needed and verified by a notary. Mr S says this caused great inconvenience to them both and when his wife asked to speak to a senior member of staff, she was told that couldn't be arranged immediately. Mr S says his wife then sent the information required by Skipton in a letter, detailing her disappointment in the way she had been treated but made clear that this wasn't a formal complaint.

Mr S says his wife never received a detailed response to the letter she had sent and without her consent Skipton for some reason treated the letter as a formal complaint which is not what she asked for.

Mr S says while his wife's bond funds were eventually released in early December 2023, Skipton never addressed the initial concerns within his wife's letter. Although Skipton paid a sum of £50 by way of apology, Mr S didn't feel this went far enough to deal with the issues his wife raised and wants a detailed response to the individual points raised in her letter of 22 November 2023.

Skipton says it has apologised to Mrs S for the poor customer service she received regarding the arrangements to deal with the maturity of her savings bond. Skipton says the identification was needed to update its records for Know Your Customer (KYC) purposes as this hadn't been reviewed for some years, but this could have been explained to Mrs S sooner.

Skipton says it was sorry that it didn't respond in writing to the letter Mrs S had sent, but it had acted on her instructions the day following its receipt. Skipton says as far as the call back was concerned it could only organise this within a 48-hour window due to senior staff availability.

Skipton says it agreed to pay Mrs S £50 for the inconvenience this matter caused her.

Mrs S wasn't happy with Skipton's response and referred the matter to this service.

During the course of this complaint, Skipton agreed to increase its offer to £200 to proactively settle the matter, which the investigator thought was fair, but Mrs S didn't feel

Skipton had addressed her concerns properly and would only accept the offer if it did so.

The investigator then carried on with his investigation and looked at all the available information but felt Skipton's offer was fair in the circumstances. The investigator says Skipton could have been clearer that the identification required wasn't because of Mrs S's overseas status but was a KYC requirement needed for all its customers - but this could have been made known to Mrs S much sooner. That said the investigator felt Skipton were within its rights to request such information when it did.

The investigator felt having seen Mrs S's November 2023 letter, he could understand why this may have been interpreted as an expression of dissatisfaction and therefore no further redress was necessary here. The investigator noted that while this letter wasn't responded to, Skipton dealt with the release of the savings bond funds, the day after it was received on 6 December 2023.

The investigator felt Skipton's offer of redress of £200 was fair in the circumstances.

Mrs S didn't agree with the investigator's view, and she still requires a detailed response to the points raised in the letter she sent them in November 2023 as part of the redress offered and asked for the matter to be referred to an ombudsman 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.

Having done so, I won't be upholding this complaint and I will explain how I have come to my decision.

I can understand it would have been worrying for Mrs S to have to provide further identification to Skipton before it would release the funds of her maturing bond. Especially as she was only given a small window of time to do so and made more challenging due to the fact she lives overseas.

When looking at this complaint I will consider if Skipton acted reasonably when dealing with Mrs S's maturing bond and if it has adequately answered the issues she raised in her letter dated 22 November 2023. Additionally, I will consider if its revised offer of redress of £200 is reasonable here.

Mr S has provided this service with comprehensive details of the course of events here and while that has proved helpful, I won't be commenting on every point he has made as I don't feel it's necessary in order to come to a full and impartial decision here. That's not to say I haven't considered everything said – I have. But it's just that I don't need to comment on each individual point here in order to reach a decision on what's fair and reasonable.

Mrs S's complaint centres around the following main issues:

- Skipton didn't consider her overseas residency when asking for verified identification and only gave her a short window of time to complete this and it only required this information because she lived overseas.
- Skipton couldn't arrange for a senior manager call back surrounding her issues in less than 48 hours.
- Skipton never responded to the points detailed in her letter dated 22 November 2023 and simply treated this as a complaint when she specifically asked it not to.

The first thing to say here is part of the issues Mrs S faced was due to the fact she lives overseas and it's reasonable to say postal services outside of the UK can be subject to delays and by Mrs S's own admission, the postal services in the rural location she lives, aren't great. So, without trying to excuse any poor service Skipton provided Mrs S, which it has accepted, I can't hold Skipton responsible for any delay in receiving the maturity letter.

So here, perhaps in hindsight with Mrs S knowing the bond was due to mature and the known inconsistencies of the postal service, there was an opportunity to contact Skipton before the bond maturity to put plans in place. I say this because the previous communications from Skipton regarding the bond were in letter form.

I understand Mrs S was told there was no extension to the 21-day cooling off period to provide the maturity instructions which may have been a worry for her. While I understand this, it's reasonable to conclude the member of staff at that point was in all likelihood simply stating Skipton's set position and process for maturing bonds. That said, I was pleased to see Skipton agreed to extend this for Mrs S and allowed for the release of the maturing funds on the 6 December 2023, a day after it received her letter enclosing the identification it had asked for.

As far as the requirement for Mrs S to provide verified identification before Skipton would release the maturing funds is concerned, I have been told by Skipton this information would have been required by any of its customers, not just because of Mrs S's overseas status, when its records hadn't been updated for some years, as was the case here.

I am satisfied Skipton were justified in asking for the identification it needed to meet its KYC requirements, given these hadn't been updated for some years and it's not for me to tell it what information that must consist of. That said, I agree with the investigator and as acknowledged by Skipton, having known that would be required, it could have asked for this sooner than it did and if the Skipton member of staff implied it was needed purely because of Mrs S's overseas status, then that was not the case, which Skipton have recognised.

Mr S has made the point that his wife asked for a call back from a manager when she telephoned Skipton in November 2023 but was told this couldn't be arranged immediately. While I can understand the frustration this may have caused her, I'm satisfied with Skipton's explanation this was due to the availability of senior staff, so it could only reasonably do so within 48 hours, and I think that's fair.

Looking at the issue regarding the response to the November 2023 letter from Mrs S, I can understand the frustration of not getting a response to that and for that letter to be treated as a complaint when she specifically asked for it not to be.

Skipton have apologised for not responding to it and instead got on with dealing with the release of the maturing bond and as part of its redress/compensation it has recognised that and apologised. I have also read the letter Mrs S sent and like the investigator while it was asked not to be treated as a complaint, there was clear dissatisfaction in the service provided, so perhaps it's understandable why it was treated as such.

I can also see during the course of this investigation Skipton provided Mrs S with details of the emails sent to this service covering the main issues raised by Mrs S in her November 2023 letter. While Mr S may not agree and doesn't feel that goes far enough, I'm satisfied Skipton have acknowledged any shortcomings in its service and provided a reasonable level of response to the main points and I won't be asking it to provide any further commentary.

So, in conclusion as I have already explained it's fair to say Skipton have recognised it has fallen short of the level of service it provided Mrs S, but it has taken steps to put things right,

apologised and offered a total of £200 by way of apology and I'm satisfied that is fair here in the individual circumstances of this complaint, even if Mr S doesn't agree.

I will now leave it with Mrs S if she now wishes to accept Skipton's offer of an additional £150 to draw a line under the matter. While Mrs S will be disappointed with my decision, I won't be asking any more than that of Skipton here.

### **My final decision**

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs S to accept or reject my decision before 30 October 2024.

Barry White  
**Ombudsman**