



The complaint

Mr G complains that the Co-operative Bank Plc made errors in migrating his accounts from his former provider, B, following its takeover of B. And that he spent a long time on the telephone with various advisers trying to sort the matter out.

What happened

In June 2023 following Co-op Bank's takeover of B, it started to migrate the accounts of B's customers to Co-op accounts. I understand that one of Mr G's accounts was migrated across in June 2023 with a balance of £642.43. At the same time Mr G was in contact with his local branch and arranged to open a new account to receive his DWP payments. In September 2023 a further account was migrated across, with a balance at the time of £1,957.04. This left Mr G with one account still with B with £146.71 in it. Unfortunately this was an old account which should have been closed when the accounts were migrated across.

I understand that, in order to support its vulnerable customers, which included Mr G, Co-op Bank had set up a system whereby those with DWP payments had their accounts migrated manually to ensure that the payment would go into the new account. But in Mr G's case he had set up an account through the branch to receive his DWP payments. However unfortunately the account only received the weekly payments but not the monthly payments he was also in receipt of. Mr G ended up having to sort out that latter payment himself. He pointed out that the letter he'd received about his account conflated the sort code with the account number and caused confusion.

In August and September 2023 Mr G had long telephone conversations with Co-op Bank's advisers. He complained that the advisers refused to help him, that several different advisers spoke to him and that they declined to appoint one advisor to be his point of contact. He further said that as he had serious physical and mental health problems, the number of hours he'd had to spend to try to sort the matter out had seriously aggravated those problems.

Co-op Bank accepted that it had provided a poor service in some respects. It paid Mr G a total of £400 compensation in respect of this.

On referral to the Financial Ombudsman Service, our Investigator said that the £400 paid by the bank reflected the impact on Mr G, and how he was left confused and distressed by some of the actions it was taking. He didn't recommend that this amount be increased.

Mr G did not accept this and the matter has been passed to me for an Ombudsman's consideration.

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.

As our Investigator has explained to Mr G, we act as an alternative dispute resolution service. Our role is to resolve disputes informally. We look at cases holistically, that is we consider the complaints which Mr G has brought to us as a whole, rather than go into each individual point. I can't look at any issues which have arisen after Co-op bank's final response letter of 11 December 2023. And it is also not part of our function to try and find out whether there are any other issues that Mr G might have been able to complain about. On the question of evidence, it is for the Investigator and myself to decide what is relevant and whether we have sufficient evidence to make a decision. We do not follow the processes a court might follow. If the evidence I've seen is incomplete or contradictory then my decision is based on what in my view is most likely to have happened.

Bearing that in mind, we have shared with Mr G a list of the evidence we have relied on in this case.

First of all I fully understand that Mr G is vulnerable and his physical and mental health issues have been noted on Co-op Bank's records. I understand also that because of that any errors or failure of customer service will have had more of a bad effect on Mr G than they may have had on other customers.

Mr G had an issue with the way his accounts were migrated across. And I'm not surprised that he's found this confusing and upsetting. Essentially I understand that he had three accounts with B, but ended up with four accounts with Co-op Bank. I think this happened for two reasons, firstly because he asked for a new account to be set up through the branch to receive his DWP payments, and the branch opened that account, which was a savings account. It migrated one account in June 2023, but didn't migrate the second account until September 2023. I believe though that the original account with B remained open. I have personally found this confusing so I can understand Mr G's position. I think though that he is generally satisfied with the state of his accounts at present. If he wants any new accounts opening or shutting down then he should contact Co-op Bank and ask it to do this.

I think also the issue with the DWP payments is confusing. Co-op Bank as I understand it was supposed to arrange a manual migration of Mr G's account so that his DWP payments would automatically go into the new account with Co-op Bank. As it is Mr G had asked for a new account to be opened, but only one DWP payment went into that account. I understand that he received a letter setting out the new account details, though as one number which contained both sort code and account numbers. I understand that DWP said this wasn't sufficient for it to pay in. However I have noted that when Mr G spoke to Co-op Bank he said that between himself and the DWP adviser they'd worked out which numbers related to which part of the account. I further understand that the weekly DWP payments went into the new account that was opened. and that the monthly DWP payment initially went into his old account with B, but was redirected to his new account with the Co-op Bank. I understand that he has managed to have this set up with DWP, although he's now receiving payments into separate accounts.

As regards setting up a point of contact for Mr G, I do believe that on two occasions Co-op Bank set out the details of an adviser who he could contact. He was not satisfied with the first adviser because he regarded them as being incompetent. But I do think that Co-op Bank took reasonable steps to ensure that when he contacted it, its advisers would have had sufficient details of his case to be able to speak to him about it

In respects of Mr G's interaction with Co-op Bank advisers, I can understand that this was problematic and that particular phone calls with them turned out to be very lengthy. However from the calls I have listened to and having read the case notes, I think Mr G spent a lot of time making requests that the advisers couldn't comply with. For example he was not satisfied with some advisers just providing their first name because they were uncomfortable

providing a surname. I don't think that was unreasonable, although I understand Mr G's position that he wanted to be able to identify that particular adviser when he contacted Co-op Bank any further. He also wanted to speak to the backroom staff who were dealing with the migration of his accounts. It was explained to him that they were not customer facing and that they wouldn't be able to speak to him. This took up a long time, but I have noted that the call took place on a Friday and the account was migrated on the following Monday.

As for several advisers being involved in the call, in particular the one of 15 September 2023, Mr G firstly didn't want to speak to the first adviser because she wouldn't give her surname. Then after speaking to the second adviser for a while, one of the managers took over dealing with the call. From listening to the call, I could hear that Mr G was getting increasingly upset, which would have had an effect on the adviser's ability to deal with the call, so I think it was reasonable for a manager to step in.

Mr G complains that he was given conflicting advice about whether he could convert a savings account into a current account when it migrated. He believes that the letter advising him about the migration of the accounts told him that he could. But when he spoke to Co-op Bank he was told that he would have to open a new account. I would observe that the account it actually opened for him was still a savings account. The letter actually said:

"If you decide that a new Co-operative Bank Smart Saver account is not right for you, you can choose to close or transfer your funds to a different account with us or with another provider without notice, charge or loss of interest."

So I can understand if Mr G interpreted that as being able to transfer it from a saver account to a current account. but as Co-op Bank explained, it could not convert the old saver account to a current account. However it could close the old saver account and if Mr G made the relevant application transfer that into a new current account if that's what he wanted. I think that was just a matter of administration and that it did not prejudice Mr G. A current account would be unlikely to be interest bearing in the same way as a saver account.

Overall, I think that the migration of Mr G's old accounts caused him a good deal of confusion and upset. As did the issue over his DWP payments. I've taken into account his vulnerability and his health issues. I don't think though that he missed any payments or that it has caused him any financial problems. And whilst he did have lengthy telephone calls with Co-op Bank, I don't think that the conduct of the advisers caused those telephone calls to be lengthy, rather that he could not accept what was being said to him.

Co-op Bank has paid Mr G £400 for his distress and inconvenience. We would say that such a payment might be appropriate where the impact of a mistake has caused considerable distress, upset and worry – and/or significant inconvenience and disruption that needs a lot of extra effort to sort out. I think this applies in Mr G's case, but I don't think it would be appropriate to increase it. So I won't require Co-op Bank to pay any further compensation or take any further action.

My final decision

I don't uphold the complaint

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr G to accept or reject my decision before 2 January 2025.

Ray Lawley

Ombudsman