

The complaint

Mr H complains that TSB Bank plc hasn't provided him with the service it should have done given his support needs.

What happened

Mr H received an email from TSB stating that his account was going paperless. He contacted TSB as this wasn't suitable for him given his needs. He was told to contact TSB after the switch to paperless to request for his reasonable adjustments to be added again. Mr H doesn't feel that TSB have treated him as it should have given his vulnerabilities.

TSB responded to Mr H's complaint. It noted his concerns as:

- Being told his account would become paperless when this wasn't suitable for him;
- He was only notified of the change by email and this wasn't backed up with a letter meeting his requirements;
- Issues with the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) service;
- Not providing pre-bookable face to face branch meetings anymore; and
- Receiving poor service when he visited a branch on 26 February 2024.

TSB acknowledged that paperless statements weren't suitable for Mr H and said he could move back to his paper preferences after 5 May 2024. It apologised for not writing to Mr H to inform him of this change. It said the IVR was working correctly and that an appointment can be arranged in branch by completing a form. It apologised that Mr H didn't receive the service he should have in his branch visit and said that it had contacted the branch manager about this. Because of the issues Mr H experienced, TSB cleared the overdrawn balance on his account of £2.19 and paid him £50 for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Mr H referred his complaint to this service.

Our investigator noted that Mr H had made TSB aware of his needs regarding receiving correspondence in a specific format on 13 January 2020 and that it had accepted in its final response that paperless statements weren't suitable for Mr H. Given this she didn't think TSB had acted fairly or reasonably by emailing Mr H to say his account would be going paperless. She said this issue had caused Mr H stress and anxiety and recommended that TSB pay Mr H a further £150 because of this.

TSB didn't agree with our investigator's view. It said that Mr H couldn't have suffered anxiety for months as he had continued to receive his paper statements after being informed of the change to paperless statements. It also said that Mr H had limited use of his account.

TSB's response didn't change our investigator's view. As a resolution hasn't been agreed, this complaint has been passed to me, an ombudsman, to issue a 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 am sorry to hear of the stress and anxiety Mr H has been caused by the issues he has raised, and I have taken this into account when considering what is a fair outcome to this complaint.

Mr H was upset when he received an email from TSB telling him his account was going paperless. TSB has explained that in February 2024, it made a business decision to automatically change a large number of customers' settings to paperless for statements and correspondence. The customers selected were those that used its online services and had a registered email address. It said that Mr H had registered for online banking in March 2018 and had been a regular user of the service.

While I appreciate that it was a business decision to change customers' settings to paperless, I do not think that this resulted in Mr H being treated fairly given what TSB already knew about his needs. TSB has provided its system notes which show Mr H's medical condition was recorded in January 2020 and the format in which he needed his correspondence was also recorded. TSB accepted that providing Mr H with paperless statements wasn't suitable and given this I think it would have been reasonable for TSB to have considered this before sending Mr H the email. I also agree that given Mr H's needs just informing him by email about this change wasn't sufficient. Had TSB noted Mr H's support needs before this email was sent it could have written to him at that time in the required format and provided a more tailored approach.

I have looked at the email that was sent and this does explain what to do if a customer still wishes to receive paper statements. There was no opt out of the change and so the customer was required to change the settings or contact TSB after 5 May 2024 to have their preferences reinstated to paper statements and correspondence. While this may not be a major inconvenience for some customers, the process was upsetting for Mr H and taking into consideration his needs, I understand that the approach taken by TSB caused him distress and anxiety.

I note TSB's comment that Mr H continued to receive paper statements up to the change date and that Mr H has limited use of his account, but I do not find that this would have taken away the stress and anxiety he was feeling about the change that would occur on 5 May 2024 and the action he then needed to take.

Mr H has raised concerns about the about the IVR not recognising his voice, but I find that TSB responded to this issue in its final response and provided him with information about what to do if he encountered issues. TSB also provided information about arranging an in-branch meeting.

I appreciate that TSB paid Mr H £50 compensation when he raised his complaint (as well as clearing his overdraft) but given the stress and anxiety Mr H was caused by his needs not being considered when the move to paperless statements and correspondence was announced, I agree with our investigator that further compensation should be paid. And taking into consideration that TSB was aware the change would not be suitable for Mr H and that he wasn't informed in writing about this and then didn't receive the service he should have when he visited a branch, I agree that a further £150 compensation is reasonable.

Putting things right

TSB Bank plc should pay Mr H an additional £150 for the distress and inconvenience he has been caused.

My final decision

TSB Bank plc should take the action set out above in resolution of this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr H to accept or reject my decision before 21 November 2024.

Jane Archer
Ombudsman