

The complaint

Ms L complains about the customer service she received from The Co-operative Bank Plc (Co-op) when she attempted to complete an account switch.

What happened

Ms L was a customer of Co-op and held the equivalent of a basic bank account with it.

In August 2024 Ms L completed a switch request online to move a current account she held elsewhere to the Co-op. She'd done so because she'd seen that Co-op were offering a switch incentive payment to customers who opened up an Everyday Extra packaged bank account (PBA), subject to particular requirements.

However, shortly afterwards Ms L realised that her current account had been transferred to her Co-op basic bank account, not a new PBA account as she'd intended. She had lost her direct debits, had no overdraft facility and had missed out on the switch incentive payment. This was not what Ms L had wanted to happen and so she contacted Co-op to try to resolve things. Over the course of these communications, she raised a complaint. She was unhappy that the switch process was not clear and felt the support offered by Co-op was poor when she called to explain things had gone wrong.

The Co-op responded to her complaint and said it hadn't done anything wrong. It said Ms L had requested a switch into her basic bank account and hadn't upgraded her account.

Ms L remained unhappy and brought her complaint to our Service. Our Investigator looked into things but didn't uphold Ms L's complaint. They didn't think Co-op had made any errors in relation to the switch process and said that it had provided reasonable customer service when Ms L contacted it following the switch.

Ms L disagreed. So, the complaint was passed to me to decide. I then asked for some more information from Co-op to understand what information was presented to Ms L about the switch. After reviewing this evidence, I issued a provisional decision which didn't uphold the complaint.

Co-op made no further representations. Ms L didn't agree with the outcome. In particular, she felt she'd been provided with poor customer service, including: delays, including a written response to her complaint, and a lack of support in setting up the account she wanted.

I'm now in a position to issue a final decision on this 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 carefully considered the information that was made available to Ms L in relation to the switch process and the incentive payment. And having done so, I'm not persuaded the process was unclear – I'll explain why.

Ms L explained that she was notified of the switch incentive via a banner that appeared in her Co-op mobile banking app, and this was what prompted her decision to switch.

Having looked at the banner, I can see it said that Ms L could get up to £160 if she switched to an Everyday Extra PBA but that terms and conditions applied and there was a link to 'find out more'. This link directed customers to the Co-op website which outlined the details of the scheme.

To get the incentive, the website stated that customers needed *'to complete a full switch from your main current account with another bank to an Everyday Extra account.'*

In terms of how customers could switch, the website gave two options, each with its own set of instructions, one option for new customers and one for existing current account customers. Within both sets of instructions customers were advised to open the Everyday Extra PBA first (either as a new customer or requesting to upgrade their existing account) and then to request a switch to the PBA account. So, I think the instructions were clear that customers needed to already have their Everyday Extra PBA before making the switch request.

But Ms L logged into her online banking and completed the switch request from her basic bank account. I appreciate she thought she was upgrading her account, but I'm not persuaded that Co-op was responsible for this misunderstanding. The evidence I've seen indicates Ms L didn't request an upgrade. Indeed, an upgrade to a PBA from a basic bank account isn't possible, so I don't think Ms L would have been shown anything within her account that suggested she was upgrading to a PBA. And I've seen nothing to suggest that Co-op's communications gave Ms L the impression her switch request was also an upgrade request. Indeed, the instructions I've seen online suggest customers need to first request an upgrade via online banking and then, after this has been done, they can request a switch. So, overall, I'm not persuaded Co-op acted unfairly here.

Ms L was also unhappy with the Service the Co-op provided when she realised something had gone wrong. In particular, she felt it should have done more to help her fix the situation.

I've listened to the two calls Ms L made on 19 August when she first realised there was a problem. Having done so, I think the Co-op staff were polite and professional and attempted to help Ms L. There were clearly connection issues in the first call, and it cut out before the conversation had finished. Whilst I appreciate this was frustrating for Ms L, I've seen nothing to persuade me this was intentional or due to an error of Co-op's. And I think the advisor was trying to look up and explain to Ms L that she'd requested a switch to her basic bank account.

In the second call, the advisor agreed to refer the matter to the switch team to look into further. I recognise Ms L wasn't given an immediate solution, but Ms L was telling Co-op something had gone wrong and the call handler couldn't see that it had. They referred the matter to the relevant team to investigate, which I think was a reasonable step to take.

Ms L emailed the switch team three days later and was told the team had already responded to the advisor, but Ms L hadn't been updated - it apologised for this. There was a breakdown in communication here, but Co-op acknowledged this and apologised promptly which I think was a reasonable response. The switch team then explained that it could see no error from Co-op and that Ms L had requested a switch into her basic bank account. It said it was

unable to stop or reverse the switch and explained basic bank accounts couldn't be upgraded to PBAs, so it wasn't able to do this for her either. I think it provided a detailed explanation and considered if there were any ways it could assist.

I similarly note that the complaints team carried out a prompt investigation and got back to Ms L by 27 August to explain its findings. Having listened to the call Ms L had with the complaints team, it's clear that Ms L feels Co-op ought to have offered a solution sooner. But we now know the only options available to Ms L would have been to open a new current account elsewhere or to upgrade her Co-op basic account to a current account. Having carefully considered the evidence, for several reasons I don't think it was unreasonable that Co-op staff didn't proactively suggest this. Firstly, I think it was reasonable of the complaints team to investigate and explain what had happened before suggesting a course of action to Ms L, as the appropriate solution would likely have varied, depending on whether it had made an error. In addition, these solutions wouldn't have switched over her direct debits or obtained her the PBA she was seeking, so I'm not persuaded it was an obvious solution for the problem Ms L described such that I could say it was unreasonable that it wasn't suggested.

I acknowledge there was then a delay in the Co-op following this complaint call with a written response, something it later apologised for. But it is of relevance to my findings that it had provided its response to Ms L within the call already. So, whilst there was clearly an error here, I'm not persuaded in all the circumstances that this was impactful such that I think Co-op needs to do anything further.

Overall, the evidence I've seen indicates staff were generally trying to help Ms L and investigate her concerns. I agree with Ms L that Co-op's customer service wasn't without fault, but it did apologise where mistakes were made. Taking everything into account, I don't think Co-op needs to do anything further here.

My final decision

My final decision is that The Co-operative Bank Plc doesn't need to do anything further.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms L to accept or reject my decision before 28 July 2025.

Jade Cunningham
Ombudsman