

The complaint

Miss M complains that HSBC UK Bank Plc trading as first direct has removed the Text Message Banking (TMB) service.

What happened

Miss M explains that she relied on TMB to check payments in and out of her account each morning. She says that she has no 'risk appetite' to use online or mobile services having assessed the risk of them. And that instead she has to phone up and now expects to spend time in call queues. She believes that the removal of TMB is about cost saving and not about treating customers fairly or understanding customer needs.

HSBC said that it didn't feel that TMB has the up-to-date information that customers require as it gives a 'static' position each morning. And it hasn't moved with the times. HSBC didn't accept that it was bullying Miss M into using online service as it was her choice about how to conduct her banking going forward. HSBC said it wasn't its intention to increase call waiting times and it said that it was constantly recruiting telephone representatives. It said that it wouldn't be changing its decision to remove the service permanently from 17 May 2025 onwards for all customers.

Our investigator didn't recommend that the complaint be upheld. She said she recognised that Miss M had valued TMB. And didn't want to use online services. She said that HSBC would still be providing text alerts in 'real time' if an account was for example about to go overdrawn. But this was part of a completely different service. It wouldn't provide the daily update and mini statement that was part of TMB. And not an automated telephone system which Miss M had said might support her in getting information more quickly.

Our investigator said HSBC was entitled to remove services with sufficient notice. And here it had provided notice in line with the terms and conditions of the account. She said it had provided information to her about the consultation it had with a sample of customers discussing the removal of TMB. And that it had written to Miss M and explained the other ways she could access her account including through a telephone service available 24 hours a day over seven days a week. So, she didn't agree it hadn't treated customers fairly. She said she couldn't investigate Miss M's potential concerns about longer call wait times as this was something that hadn't happened at the time of her complaint to HSBC. And if this was a future problem then Miss M would need to raise this with HSBC first.

Miss M wanted her complaint to be reviewed by an ombudsman. She said that there was a real risk of her not identifying unauthorised payments to her account without TMB. And she thought that the removal of the service was done without consultation and was discriminatory against those unable to use online services or unwilling to do so. In her view the removal of the service would be one of those commercial decisions that would in later years be viewed as unfair or unjust.

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 first acknowledge the strength of feeling Miss M has about TMB which has already now been withdrawn. And that as HSBC has told her this isn't about cost and she has relied on this service she can't see why it has been removed. She's given clear reasons why online or mobile banking isn't for her. It's not that she would be unable to use those services but that she sees the risk as too great drawing on her professional experience. I need to say that I can only look in this complaint at the impact for her and not any other customers.

HSBC is exercising its commercial discretion to decide what services to provide. And it's entitled under its terms and conditions to withdraw services with notice. It's shown it's complied with those terms and conditions in the notice it gave to Miss M here. And it's told this service that Miss M was in a second set of customers losing TMB. It said it had surveyed a sample of customers. And that it had learnt from the prior experience of withdrawing TMB from some customers. Miss M had the service until it ended and it says she was given a specific factsheet with its letter designed for those customers who didn't use digital services. In my view Miss M hasn't shown that HSBC's timescale and approach prevented her say from switching banks had she chosen to or to having to adjust to the change.

I've listened to the call she had with HSBC about TMB. This had been prefaced by her saying she wanted to make a complaint and not being able to submit this online. She'd said she wouldn't use online banking services which HSBC reports it had already noted as her preference from past contact. So, I don't think the person she spoke to would have had any success had he tried to persuade her to use online services. While he could have acknowledged more the benefits Miss M felt TMB provided her rather than just give the explanation of what HSBC thought, I don't see this affected the outcome. There was frankly nothing he could do by then to change the removal of her service and he was realistic about that. He did explain the position clearly and addressed her points about call centres. He was part of a still ongoing team that could have provided support with using digital services had Miss M wanted that.

There are means for Miss M to access the information she needs without using online services. And to help her identify say any unauthorised payments from her account. Having said that I can appreciate Miss M's scepticism about using telephoning banking and her concern about call waiting times. There's been no real commitment about this to her from HSBC and our investigator has explained that we can't look at what might happen in future.

I know Miss M is going to be disappointed when I say that I don't think HSBC has made a mistake in exercising its commercial discretion to remove the TMB service. And nor do I find that it has acted unreasonably or unfairly in Miss M's case for the reasons I've explained. So, I won't be requiring it to do anything else.

My final decision

My decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss M to accept or reject my decision before 17 October 2025.

Michael Crewe
Ombudsman