

The complaint

Mrs C complains that Santander UK Plc (Santander) told her they don't routinely receive £5 notes as part of their cash deliveries, and consequently she isn't always able to obtain them when withdrawing cash in her local branch.

What happened

Mrs C says she likes to gift £5 notes to her relatives, but these aren't always available when withdrawing cash from her local Santander branch (she said this happened on two occasions). Mrs C says that when this happens, she then has to withdraw a larger denomination and buy something in a shop to get a £5 note as change.

Mrs C's local Santander branch told her they don't routinely receive £5 notes as part of wider regular cash deliveries and instead normally rely on those deposited by other customers, so this means they can't always provide them when requested. As Mrs C remained unhappy with this, she approached the Financial Ombudsman Service.

After the case came to this service, Santander told us they'd like to make an offer of £50 compensation for any inconvenience caused to Mrs C. They also said they'd asked Mrs C's branch to hold a stock of £5 notes going forward. And they said if Mrs C specifically wanted £5 notes at certain times, she could let the branch know in advance so they could ensure they were available, as other customers would be within their rights to ask for them too. One of our investigators let Mrs C know what Santander had said and relayed the offer of compensation.

Mrs C said she didn't accept Santander's offer. Mrs C said Santander hadn't explained why they'd made the decision to stop routinely receiving £5 notes as part of their cash deliveries, and they hadn't asked their customers to complete a survey on their thoughts about this before making that decision. Mrs C also said that £5 notes are available at other banks, and Santander shouldn't be permitted to decide what notes they hold.

Our investigator said that it was Santander's commercial decision what notes to have in stock more generally, but in any event, Santander had asked Mrs C's branch to stock £5 notes going forward. The investigator also clarified that there was no minimum order for £5 notes if Mrs C wanted to order them in advance. And as Mrs C had said other banks had £5 notes available, the investigator thought the impact to Mrs C when they were unavailable was minimal. Ultimately, the investigator said she thought Santander's offer of £50 compensation was fair.

Mrs C didn't agree and asked for a final decision from an ombudsman.

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.

Firstly, I should explain that the Financial Ombudsman Service isn't the regulator of financial businesses such as Santander. It isn't for this service to decide how businesses operate more generally, or to interfere with their commercial decisions. This includes which specific denomination notes bank branches should or shouldn't hold readily available, and whether businesses need to consult or survey all customers before making a decision. The regulator of financial businesses, who decide how they should operate more generally, is the Financial Conduct Authority.

In any event, since Mrs C approached this service, Santander has confirmed they've asked Mrs C's branch to retain a stock of £5 notes in case customers want them, instead of simply relying on those that have been paid in by customers. I think that's reasonable in an attempt to reduce the chances of Mrs C having the same issue in the future.

However, Santander has also said that any customers would be able to ask for the £5 notes, so if Mrs C specifically wants that denomination for a certain time, it would be advisable for her to contact the branch in advance to request a specific amount, with no minimum amount needing to be ordered. I don't think that's an unreasonable suggestion to try to minimise the risk and inconvenience to Mrs C.

Mrs C has confirmed other banks in her area offer £5 notes to members of the general public. And she was able to break bigger denomination notes where needed too. So, whilst not available on occasion when Mrs C visited her local Santander branch (she mentioned it happened twice), Santander has offered £50 compensation for any inconvenience caused. I don't think that's unreasonable in the circumstances, so I won't be directing Santander to pay Mrs C more than this.

My final decision

Santander UK Plc has made an offer to pay £50 compensation to settle the complaint, and I think this offer is fair in all the circumstances.

So, my final decision is that Santander UK Plc should pay the £50 compensation it has offered.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs C to accept or reject my decision before 29 August 2025.

Callum Milne
Ombudsman