

The complaint

Mr W complains that Santander UK plc can't tell him what has happened to the money in his savings account.

What happened

Mr W has an Alliance & Leicester passbook showing a balance in it. He asked Santander what had happened to the money and made a complaint.

Santander said the account was originally an Alliance & Leicester cash ISA and was transferred to Santander in 2010. It said its records show that the ISA was closed on 4 January 2011 and the closing balance of just over £23,000 paid out. It also said it can't now say where the money was paid to, and suggested Mr W check his records.

Mr W asked us to look into his complaint. Our Investigator concluded that the account had been closed and the money in it transferred. She didn't think it was unreasonable that Santander no longer has any further records given the time that has passed since the closure in 2011.

Mr W didn't accept that so the complaint has been referred to me to decide.

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.

The existence of a passbook which hasn't been marked as closed doesn't always mean an account is still open or that there's money in it that can still be withdrawn. I wouldn't generally expect a bank to refuse its customer access to their money if they had mislaid their passbook.

I've examined the records Santander has provided for Mr W's account very carefully. They show that the account was originally opened in August 2003 and it was closed and the money in it withdrawn or transferred on 4 January 2011. The records don't however show where the money went.

Banks and building societies don't have to keep records of withdrawals, account closures and transfers forever. But they will keep records of open accounts, even if they haven't been used for some time. Mr W's account was still open when it was transferred from Alliance & Leicester to Santander in 2010, after Santander bought Alliance & Leicester. If his account remained open today, I'd expect it to appear as open in Santander's records.

But it doesn't. Santander's records satisfy me that the account was closed and the money in it withdrawn or transferred in January 2011. And I think it most unlikely that Santander would have released the money and closed the account without taking reasonable steps to satisfy itself that it was doing so on the instructions of the account holder.

In the circumstances, I consider it most likely that Mr W's account was properly closed in 2011. I don't think Santander still has the money in the account, and I don't think it's unreasonable that it can't give Mr W more information about what happened to the money. So – while I realise Mr W will be disappointed – I can't fairly make any order or award.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr W to accept or reject my decision before 8 January 2026.

Janet Millington
Ombudsman