

The complaint

Mr L has complained that Santander UK Plc won't refund him the money he lost when he fell victim to a scam.

What happened

Mr L was looking for a property to rent when he sadly fell victim to a cruel scam involving a fictitious property rental arrangement. Mr L paid for what he thought was rent and a deposit upfront, via gift cards from a popular rental company, amounting to just over £1500.

When Mr L discovered he'd been scammed he contacted Santander to report it and subsequently complained when it wouldn't refund him the money he'd lost. Santander didn't uphold Mr L's complaint. It said Mr L authorised the payments and, as they were card payments, weren't covered by any authorised push payment reimbursement scheme. It also felt Mr L should've taken greater care before making the payments.

Mr L, unhappy with Santander's response, referred his complaint to us.

One of our investigators initially upheld the complaint in part but upon further review issued a second opinion not upholding the complaint. He explained that the payments weren't unusual enough for Santander to have intervened before it processed them. He also didn't think there was anything Santander could've done to recover the funds given the method of payment.

Mr L didn't accept the investigator's view and so the complaint has been passed 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.

Having taken into account longstanding regulatory expectations and requirements, and what I consider to be good industry practice, Santander ought to have been on the look-out for the possibility of fraud and made additional checks before processing payments in some circumstances. But for largely the same reasons as the investigator, I don't uphold this complaint.

I have reviewed Mr L's account activity and the payments he made to the scam. Having considered when they were made, their value and who they were made to, I'm not persuaded the account activity was concerning enough for Santander to have intervened and made enquiries about the purpose of the payments before processing them.

I accept the payments were for gift cards, which are sometimes used during a scam, but that doesn't mean the purchase of gift cards should automatically be treated as suspicious; particularly when there are no other concerning factors about the payments. It isn't implausible that a customer may legitimately buy three gift cards of this nature, and overall, I

don't think Santander was on notice that Mr L was at risk of financial harm from fraud.

I'm therefore not persuaded Santander should've done more than it did when it processed the payments Mr L made.

Having thought very carefully about the facts of this complaint, whilst Mr L has undoubtedly been the victim of a cruel scam and I'm sorry to hear it's affected his confidence, I don't find there were any failings on Santander's part that would lead me to uphold this complaint.

My final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold Mr L's complaint against Santander UK Plc.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr L to accept or reject my decision before 13 March 2026.

Katie Doran
Ombudsman