

complaint

Miss B complains Vanquis Bank Limited placed a block on her credit card account without notifying her, which resulted in a declined payment and caused her embarrassment. She's also unhappy with Vanquis' security processes overall.

background

Miss B contacted Vanquis to discuss a transaction on her account. During the call, Vanquis asked for the password on her account, which she couldn't provide. The call disconnected without Miss B completing the security questions. Miss B said Vanquis terminated the call.

A few days later, Miss B tried to use her card but it was declined. Although she was able to use another card, she said this was embarrassing. Miss B called Vanquis to find out why and was told a block had been placed on her account because security checks hadn't been completed on the previous call. She then answered the security questions correctly and the block was removed. Miss B feels Vanquis should have contacted her to tell her about the block, which would have avoided her embarrassment.

Miss B is also unhappy that Vanquis said she must have a password on her account. She doesn't think this is as secure as asking full data protection questions. Vanquis agreed that she could answer additional security questions instead going forward, but advised her that she may still be asked for a password in future calls. Miss B doesn't think this is acceptable.

Our investigator didn't recommend that the complaint should be upheld. He thought Vanquis acted in line with its security processes when placing a block on Miss B's card following the disconnected call, and by sending a SMS message to the mobile number on her account to try to let her know about it. He also explained Vanquis has a duty to protect its customers and it's for them to decide how to do this, so he didn't think Vanquis did anything wrong.

Miss B disagreed, so the case was referred to me for a decision. Miss B said the SMS message was sent to a number she hasn't used for over seven years – and Vanquis should have asked her to update her details during that time. Miss B also believes it should have contacted her using her other details to make sure she knew about the block, and she questioned whether the SMS was even sent because Vanquis first said they hadn't contacted her at all. Miss B feels Vanquis failed her as a consumer by not protecting her, and by not telling her about the block on her card.

my findings

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint. Having done so, I've decided not to uphold this complaint. I'll explain why.

I've listened to the call between Vanquis and Miss B that was disconnected. I'm unable to conclude which party ended the call. However, after two failed attempts at giving the correct password, the call handler explained Miss B had one last try and, in response, Miss B said "don't worry about it, that's fine" just before the call terminated. The adviser was still speaking when the call ended. So, on balance, I think it was reasonable for Vanquis' call handler to assume Miss B ended the call, and to then follow the procedures Vanquis has in place for when this happens and security hasn't been completed successfully – especially as

Miss B wasn't calling from one of the numbers on her account (she was on holiday at the time and had a different mobile number).

Vanquis' processes are clear in these circumstances: a block is placed on the account and it will send a SMS message to the customer to let them know. This is to protect their customers from fraud. I appreciate Vanquis didn't initially tell Miss B it had sent her a text message, but based on the evidence it has since provided, I'm satisfied that it did. I also find Vanquis acted reasonably by sending the message to the number it held on the account, given Miss B hadn't yet updated it.

Miss B argues that Vanquis should have asked her to update her contact details over the years. However, the terms and conditions of Miss B's account say that it is her responsibility to keep Vanquis informed of any changes to her contact details. And I note it was in the process of checking and updating her details during the call that disconnected. So I don't think this is a failing on Vanquis' part. Miss B also feels that Vanquis should have contacted her using her other details. I appreciate this may have avoided the declined transaction, but Vanquis acted in line with its policies and procedures by attempting to contact Miss B by SMS, and I'm satisfied it treated her fairly by doing this. The block was then removed as soon as she contacted Vanquis and completed the additional security questions. So, overall, I'm satisfied Vanquis acted reasonably and in line with its security processes.

I appreciate it must have been embarrassing for Miss B when her card was declined, but in my view this wasn't as a result of any error on the part of Vanquis – it followed its security procedures correctly. I also acknowledge Miss B is unhappy with Vanquis' security checks and feels she shouldn't need to provide a password on her account. However, I agree with the investigator that it's up to Vanquis to decide what security measures it has in place to protect its customers. I can also see that Vanquis has tried to accommodate Miss B's wishes by noting on her account that she doesn't have to use a password, and can go through additional security questions instead. I find Vanquis acted reasonably in doing this, so I'm not recommending it does anything further.

my final decision

For the reasons explained above, I don't uphold Miss B's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Miss B to accept or reject my decision before 30 April 2019/

Joanna Brown
ombudsman