

The complaint

Mr B complains that Secure Trust Bank Plc caused unnecessary delays when it dealt with an ISA transfer request from another provider.

What happened

Mr B submitted an ISA transfer request to another provider as he wished to move the ISA to an account that would pay higher interest. Secure Trust declined and then returned the transfer request from the other provider because there was a difference in the address on the form. Mr B complained to Secure Trust that this caused a loss of interest along with distress as he had to chase both Secure Trust and the other the other ISA provider to complete the transfer.

Secure Trust didn't uphold Mr B's complaint. Secure Trust said it has 15 working days to process an ISA transfer request and provided Mr B with details of the actions it had taken when it spotted the discrepancy in the request it had received.

Mr B brought the complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service. One of our Investigators looked into things and thought Secure Trust had acted reasonably when it identified a discrepancy in the transfer request form it had received, and that it had told the other ISA provider of the discrepancy within a reasonable timescale.

Mr B asked that an Ombudsman decides the complaint.

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 understand Mr B will be disappointed but for very much the same reasons as the Investigator, I've decided not to uphold the complaint. I will now explain why.

I acknowledge that Mr B had calculated he could transfer the ISA from Secure Trust and even with the penalty it would apply, that he would still be in a better position financially. Secure Trust has provided notes from Mr B's ISA account and Mr B has provided a timeline of events. By comparing these documents I'm persuaded the request for an ISA transfer was received by Secure Trust on 12 December. It was rejected on 20 December due to a discrepancy in the address for Mr B. I understand that Mr B feels that the discrepancy was only minor, but it's not the role of the Financial Ombudsman Service to tell Secure Trust that it should have accepted the transfer form as it was. It's a business decision for Secure Trust to make so that it can maintain the levels of security it feels are reasonable to protect its customers. There was a difference in Mr D's address, so it wasn't unreasonable for Secure Trust to ask the new ISA provider to resolve this issue before it could make a transfer.

Mr B says Secure Trust should have realised sooner that there was a discrepancy, and it should have told him by a secure messaging service and communicated with the other ISA provider more effectively than it did. I've considered this very carefully as I know this is at the

crux of Mr B's complaint. There are rules on www.gov.uk website laying out how long a cash ISA transfer should take - at present this is 15 working days. Secure Trust received the transfer request on 12 December and wrote to the new ISA provider on 20 December to explain why it was returning the transfer request. So, as frustrating as it may have been for Mr B - I don't think Secure Trust acted outside of these rules.

Mr B says Secure Trust could have told him the transfer form had been returned by other means. I accept this is something Secure Trust could have done, but it did what I would reasonably expect it to do in this situation and notified the new ISA provider within a reasonable timescale. I understand Mr B feels that Secure Trust should have returned the transfer form to the new ISA provider electronically, but it had received the form by post, so I don't think it was unreasonable for it to be returned using the same means. Regardless of this, Mr B did speak with Secure Trust the day after it had returned the transfer form and was made aware why the transfer hadn't progressed. The account notes provided by Secure Trust also record that it emailed the new provider on 21 December saying that it could re-send the amended transfer form by email. The same account notes record there was no further transfer request until mid-January, and that this second request had a completion date in February. This is because Mr B had decided to defer the transfer so as not to incur the financial penalty.

I empathise with Mr B that the transfer didn't complete as quickly as it might have, but I can't say this is because Secure Trust did anything wrong. I think it dealt with the initial transfer request reasonably, bearing in mind there was a discrepancy, and it told the new provider it could re-submit the transfer form by email the day after it had sent the transfer back by post. Secure Trust did all of this within eight working days, which I consider is fair and reasonable.

My final decision

For the reasons I detailed above, I've decided not to uphold Mr B's complaint about the service Secure Trust Bank Plc provided.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B to accept or reject my decision before 11 October 2023.

Paul Lawton
Ombudsman