

## The complaint

Mr C complains on behalf of himself and Mrs C that HSBC UK Bank Plc (“HSBC”) didn’t advise him about a cost of living payment which was available when he asked for help. Mr C says that HSBC instead told him to apply for a loan, which was rejected, impacting his credit file. Mr C says that HSBC gave him a £200 overdraft but refused to increase it and used inappropriate language about his wife’s health.

## What happened

In or around June 2023 Mr C’s wife was taken seriously ill and admitted to hospital. Mr C was worried about the financial impact this would have and applied online to increase his overdraft from £100 to £200. Mr C wasn’t able to increase the overdraft online, so he called the customer service department to see what help was available.

Mr C says that the customer service department failed to advise him that he could get cost of living help of up to £500 and instead told him to apply for a loan.

Mr C applied for a loan, but this was declined, which affected his credit rating.

Following this, Mr C tried to increase his overdraft again, but this was declined. HSBC later agreed to increase the overdraft to £200.

Mr C made a complaint online. He was unhappy about the response that he received because he felt that an inappropriate comment had been made about his wife’s health.

HSBC didn’t uphold the complaint. It said it recognised that Mr C was dissatisfied about the information he’d received about the cost of living support but said it had widely advertised the support online and had sent emails directly to customers. HSBC said it regretted that the standard of service Mr C had received via telephone banking hadn’t met his expectations but said it was unable to conclude that an error had been made. HSBC acknowledged that Mr C was unhappy about the words which had been used during his live chat interaction but said it was satisfied that the agent was attempting to show empathy towards Mr C’s circumstances. It said it hadn’t intended to cause any concern to Mr C.

Mr C remained unhappy and brought his complaint to this service. He wants compensation for the distress caused by the bank’s failure to advise him about what help was available.

Our investigator didn’t uphold the complaint. She said that whilst she appreciated Mr C’s perspective on things, she thought that HSBC had done enough to make Mr C aware of what help was available to him.

Mr C didn’t agree. He said he should’ve been offered a suitable option which didn’t place him further into debt. He said the bank advised him to apply for a loan which was declined and affected his credit rating. He said the bank should have explained about the cost of living support.

## **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.

Mr C has said that he wasn't advised about cost of living support. I've reviewed the information provided by HSBC and this shows that it sent emails to Mr C in August 2022, and October 2022 about the support available during the cost of living crisis. These emails contained links to the cost of living support hub which outlined the support available. In addition to the emails, there was information displayed on the bank's website.

I appreciate that the agent didn't specifically mention cost of living support when Mr C called to increase his overdraft. I've taken account of the fact that Mr C called specifically about his overdraft, so I don't think it was unreasonable that the agent didn't advise about cost of living support during the call.

Mr C has said that he was told to apply for a loan. I've reviewed the call recording. During the call, Mr C explains that he's got a £100 overdraft and that he's trying to increase it to £200 for the month because his wife has been taken to hospital. Mr C explains that he wasn't able to increase the overdraft via the app. The agent discusses with Mr C that the overdraft is very recent and says that Mr C won't be able to increase it until three months have passed. Mr C asks the agent what he can do in the meantime. Then agent asks Mr C whether there is any possibility that he could apply for a loan because he appears to need the money urgently. Mr C replies that he could apply for a loan. The agent explains that this can be done online and says that Mr C will receive a reply within two to five days.

Based on what I've seen, I'm not persuaded that the agent told Mr C to apply for a loan. I think the agent explained that a loan was an available option which could potentially help Mr C.

Mr C has said that he's unhappy about the language used in an online chat on 13 June 2023. I've reviewed the chat. I agree that the agent's choice of words could have been better, but I'm not persuaded that there was any bad intent. HSBC has apologised for the words used and I don't think it's necessary for it to do anything further here.

Taking everything into account and for the reasons I've explained, I'm unable to uphold the complaint.

## **My final decision**

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

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs C and Mr C to accept or reject my decision before 14 February 2024.

Emma Davy  
**Ombudsman**