

The complaint

Mr H complains Santander UK plc (Santander) says he closed his old building society savings account in 2001, despite him still holding his passbook for that account.

What happened

Mr H says when he went into a local branch of Santander to have his savings account passbook updated, he was told the account was no longer held with them. Mr H says he was then provided with a telephone number to trace the account by Santander but was informed later by letter that the account was closed back in July 2001 and the balance withdrawn.

Mr H says Santander couldn't provide him with any evidence to show where the monies were paid back in 2001 or what identification was used in the absence of the passbook. Mr H says he would have needed to provide the passbook before the savings account could have been closed.

Mr H wants Santander to pay him the balance of the savings account as shown in his passbook, which was £1,594.17 at that time.

Santander says the account in question was a savings account held with a building society it took over, but this particular account was closed prior to that take over and subsequent merger into one back-office system in 2010. Santander says it has searched the old legacy system which shows Mr H's savings account was closed and the balance withdrawn on 25 July 2001, Santander says given the time that has passed it no longer has access to information regarding the transaction.

Mr H wasn't happy with Santander's response and referred the matter to this service.

The investigator looked at all the available information but didn't uphold the complaint. The investigator says Santander have shown Mr H's savings account was closed and the balance withdrawn in 2001. The investigator says due to the length of time that has passed, Santander wouldn't be expected to hold information about the specific transaction.

The investigator felt the account could have been closed without the passbook being present at the time and in all likelihood the funds on the savings account were withdrawn without it.

Mr H didn't agree with the investigator's view and asked for the matter to be referred to an ombudsman for a final decision.

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 done so, I won't be upholding this complaint and I will explain how I have come to my decision.

I can understand it would be upsetting for Mr H to hold a savings account passbook with a

balance showing on it, only to be told by Santander the account had been closed over 20 years ago.

When looking at this complaint I will consider if Santander have done enough to establish the whereabouts of Mr H's old savings account balance.

The first thing to say here is the savings account Mr H refers to was held with another building society that was subsequently taken over by Santander in 2004 and its back-office systems merged in 2010. This would explain in part why Santander's branch staff at the time weren't able to immediately access these account details.

Mr H was informed by Santander that after searching through old legacy records, his savings account balance of £1,594.17 was withdrawn and closed in July 2001. Mr H is unhappy that Santander are unable to provide a copy of any documentation relating to the withdrawal and closure of the account, and is insistent his passbook, which he still holds, would have been required before any withdrawal or closure.

While I understand the points Mr H makes here, I'm not fully persuaded by his argument. I say this because it's reasonable to say banks like Santander wouldn't be expected to maintain individual transactional details and account closure records going back over 20 years. The expectation of this service is that businesses should hold onto records like these for six years.

What is important here is Santander have shown this service it did carry out searches on its legacy records, which have evidenced the savings account balance was withdrawn and the account closed on 25 July 2001 – given the fact over 20 years have passed here I can't say it would be expected to do much more than that in these circumstances.

I understand Mr H feels strongly about the fact he still holds the passbook for the account, and this would have been essential before an account withdrawal or closure could be actioned.

While I understand the points Mr H makes about identification requirements back in 2001, that doesn't mean the old building society who held the savings account back then wouldn't allow a withdrawal or closure in the event a passbook couldn't be made available. I say this because there would be occasions where its customers may for example, have mislaid a passbook and still be permitted to carry out transactions with the provision of other forms of identification.

So, on balance I am satisfied that simply holding a passbook for a savings account dating back over 20 years isn't clear evidence the account is still open with that balance remaining, for the reasons I have already stated.

While Mr H will be disappointed with my decision, I won't be asking anymore of Santander.

My final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr H to accept or reject my decision before 30 January 2024.

Barry White
Ombudsman