

The complaint

C, a charity complains that The Co-operative Bank Plc took too long to switch its account from another bank resulting in C paying additional fees.

C is represented in bringing this complaint to us by one of its trustees, Ms S.

What happened

In May 2021, Ms S started the process to transfer C's account to The Co-op from another bank. This was unsuccessful due to the application being lost, so Ms S attempted the process again in May 2022. This was also unsuccessful as C was incorrectly deemed to be ineligible for the account it wished to open with The Co-op.

Following a change of trustees in December 2022, Ms S asked The Co-op to check if C was eligible for an account with them. When The Co-op replied, there was some confusion about the next steps. So Ms S clarified the situation with the trustees at that time to The Co-op who then proceeded to process C's application.

In early January 2023, The Co-op requested additional information from Ms S. After this information was provided, further identification documents were requested, and it was specified that these documents needed to be certified.

All outstanding information was provided by Ms S to The Co-op by 19 March 2023. The Co-op confirmed to Ms S that the application was accepted on 31 March, with the account being opened on 11 April 2023.

Between the start of the process in May 2021 and the account being opened in April 2023, C made three complaints to The Co-op before contacting our service in September 2023. The Co-op issued three final response letters dated 22 March 2022, 9 February 2023, and 26 September 2023.

One of our investigators looked into things for C and explained that he couldn't consider the two earlier complaints as they weren't referred to us within the time limits we must adhere to. He looked into the third complaint and said he thought the £100 paid by The Co-op to C was fair and in line with our approach and he wouldn't be asking The Co-op to take any further action.

Ms S accepted that it was too late for our service to consider the original complaints, but she remained unhappy with the outcome of the last complaint and asked for it to be escalated to an ombudsman.

Ms S told us she would like the fees and charges from C's original bank, covering the period December 2022 to April 2023 and totalling approximately £20, to be covered by The Co-op due to the delays with the third application. She has specifically mentioned an error with the name and postcode of one of the trustees.

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.

The Co-op has provided us with a timeline of everything they did internally in relation to C's third application following Ms S' contact with them in early December 2022.

Having reviewed this information, I'm satisfied The Co-op weren't responsible for any undue delays. I say this as I can see that The Co-op were fulfilling their legal and regulatory obligations by requesting this specific information be provided by C. The Co-op provided a document with their original request for information to C which set out which identification documents could be accepted. And in a follow up email they detailed why they couldn't accept the first set of documents that were provided.

In addition, when any information was provided by C, it was processed in the manner I'd expect to see by The Co-op and I can't see any stage in the process where the application wasn't moving. I appreciate that it is not always easy for a customer to see what is happening to their application behind the scenes, but from the evidence provided to me, I have no concerns that The Co-op caused or were responsible for any additional delays.

So, I don't think The Co-op caused any undue delays nor do I think they were unclear about what information was required from C for the application to be completed and the account opened. As such, I won't be asking The Co-op to cover these fees and charges as I don't think they were responsible for them.

With regard to the errors with the name and postcode, I can't see that this caused any delay to the account opening process. And in The Co-op's latest final response letter, they apologised for any distress and inconvenience their service caused and made a payment of £100 to C to apologise. I think this is a fair amount to reflect the inconvenience The Co-op's actions caused to C, so I won't be asking them to do anything further.

I know that Ms S and her colleagues at C will be disappointed with this outcome, and I understand that Ms S feels strongly about the customer service she received from The Co-op. I also empathise with Ms S for the loss of her friend and fellow trustee. However, in my opinion, The Co-op have done enough to apologise for their customer service failings, and I consider the £100 they've paid to C to be an adequate reflection of this. As such, I won't be asking The Co-op to take any further action.

My final decision

I don't uphold this complaint as I believe The Co-operative Bank Plc have already done enough to put things right.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask C to accept or reject my decision before 4 June 2024.

Tara Richardson
Ombudsman