

## **The complaint**

Mr S complains about the problems he is having in making payments with his debit card. He is also unhappy with the difficulty he says he's experienced with The Co-operative Bank Plc ("Co-op") when raising these problems with it.

## **What happened**

Mr S says on a number of occasions including 30 August and 12 September 2022, he tried to use his debit card to make purchases and the transactions failed.

Mr S contacted Co-op in January 2023 by secure message and complained that he was trying to make a purchase over the phone but was unable to do this with his debit card as the merchant had told him the debit card had been declined. So Mr S used his credit card to make the transaction which was successful.

The Co-op explained it had no record for a transaction attempt on Mr S's debit card with the merchant at the time in question and so was unable to provide a reason for the transaction being declined. It explained that Mr S was able to successfully use his debit card with the merchant in the previous month and that Mr S's card was approved for in-person transactions where the chip is presented but that extra layers of security are needed when using his card online.

Mr S queried why the card failed on the phone and Co-op explained that the only payments it could see that were declined were online, but this may be because the merchant Mr S attempted to pay over the phone has processed the payment wrong. Mr S then requested a call back which the Co-op explained it didn't have the facility to do but provided Mr S with a number he could use to call its customer service line on.

The Co-op didn't think it had made an error and had acted in line with its processes and didn't uphold Mr S's complaint.

Mr S was dis-satisfied with this and brought his complaint to this service. He wants to know why the transactions that required the extra security measures failed, as he believes this to be a bank system problem.

The Co-op has further explained that the transactions that failed in September and August above were subject to extra security measures that it had introduced which required password verification in conjunction with a one time password (OTP) sent via text. The Co-op says Mr S has been able to successfully transact with these added security measures which indicates that on the occasions the transaction failed it was due to Mr S incorrectly entering information.

One of our investigators looked into Mr S's concerns and reached the conclusion that Mr S had had issues with making payments with his card but there wasn't enough evidence to show that it was due to an error on the Co-op's part.

They also explained to Mr S that Co-op was strengthening its security measures around how customers transact when using their cards remotely to reduce fraud and that Co-op's approach to this is in-line with regulatory guidelines. Whilst these changes may be different to what Mr S is used to – it is not our role to tell a bank what processes to use or change them.

Furthermore, they didn't think Co-op had treated Mr S unfairly when using a secure message to communicate with Mr S rather than over the phone.

Mr S disagreed and has asked for an ombudsman's 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 considered everything provided, I've decided not to uphold Mr S's complaint.

I hope that Mr S won't take it as a discourtesy that I've condensed his complaint in the way that I have. Our investigator has already explained that we are unable to look at all of Mr S's complaint points as he didn't raise them within six months of when Co-op issued its final response letter in February 2022. So I've concentrated on what I consider to be the crux of the complaint. Our rules allow me to do that. And the crux of Mr S's complaint is that on occasion he was unable to use his debit card to transact on his account and that he wasn't provided with an explanation as to why.

It might be helpful for me to say here that, as we are not the regulator, I cannot make the bank change its systems or processes – such as how transactions are processed. We offer an informal dispute resolution service and we have no regulatory or disciplinary role.

My role is to look at the problems Mr S has experienced and see if the Co-op has done anything wrong or treated them unfairly. If it has, I would seek – if possible - to put Mr S back in the position he would've been in if the mistakes hadn't happened. And I may award compensation that I think is fair and reasonable.

In this case it is not disputed that there have been occasions when Mr S wasn't able to use his debit card to transact, in particular over the phone in January 2023. What is in dispute is whether this is due to an error on Mr S's part or the Co-op's. And unfortunately, from the evidence I've seen, I don't think I can provide Mr S with an answer that will satisfy him.

The Co-op understandably has no record of the transaction in question as it never reached it – so it is not possible for the Co-op to give a reason why the transaction failed. It is possible Mr S entered his details incorrectly or that the merchant processed the transaction incorrectly. Again, from the information we have it is not possible to tell. And as Mr S has been able to successfully use his debit card in the past - and my understanding on more occasions than when it failed – I think it's more likely the issue is with something the merchant has done or Mr S himself.

In any case, things don't always go smoothly. And not every mistake warrants compensation. Here, were I to find the transaction failed due to something Co-op did wrong I wouldn't make an award, as I don't consider the detriment Mr S alleges sufficient to justify

one. Indeed, Mr S was able to mitigate the problem by using his credit card and he has told us that he hasn't been affected financially or otherwise.

Finally, I understand that Mr S is unhappy at having to contact Co-op using secure message and that he wishes for Co-op to communicate over the phone. But Co-op has told us Mr S has successfully used secure message in the past and I'm not persuaded as to why Mr S has to have issues he's experienced addressed over the phone. Mr S was given a number he could use to call the Co-op's customer services but chose not to. And as Co-op is under no obligation to communicate with its customers over the phone, I don't think Co-op has treated Mr S unfairly.

So overall and having considered everything I do not uphold Mr S's complaint.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons I've explained I've decided not to uphold Mr S's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 17 October 2023.

Caroline Davies  
**Ombudsman**