

## **The complaint**

Ms G complains Santander UK Plc locked her account due to a transaction she attempted to make.

## **What happened**

Ms G attempted an online transaction using her Santander current account to buy silver, but the transaction was declined so she contacted Santander. She says she was told the account was blocked as they believed the transaction was fraudulent. Ms G says she was told the block could last up to 48 hours, but she says it lasted weeks, during which time she contacted Santander in the branch and over the phone. Ms G says she had been weeks without access to her account. Ms G made a complaint to Santander.

Santander partially upheld Ms G's complaint. They said that all payments can be subject to additional banking checks regardless of payment amount, frequency or destination. Santander told Ms G that additional security checks are only enforced with her best interests in mind. They said that the time taken for the payment to be cleared was longer than what would be expected, so as an apology for this they credited her account with £75. Ms G brought her complaint to our service.

Our investigator did not uphold Ms G's complaint. She said the payment was suspended correctly and in line with the terms and conditions of the account. She acknowledged there were delays in referring further concerns to a different department and then picking it up and working it, which resulted in additional stress for Ms G. Our investigator says because of this stress, Ms G made the decision to call Santander for updates. She said during the time of the delay, access to the funds within the account were maintained and Ms G was able to continue utilising them.

Ms G asked for an ombudsman to review her complaint. She made a number of points. In summary, she told us about the impact of what happened on her health, and the stress this caused her. She said she was unable to use her card at all, and she felt certain things were cancelled or declined.

## **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.

Ms G has made a number of points to this service, and I've considered and read everything she's said and sent us, including everything she's said about her health. But, in line with this service's role as a quick and informal body I'll be focusing on the crux of her complaint in deciding what's fair and reasonable here.

I'd like to explain to Ms G that it is not within this service's remit to tell a business how they should run their security procedures, such as when to block attempted online payments or when to refer these attempted payments for additional checks. It would be the role of the regulator – the Financial Conduct Authority, who have the power to instruct Santander to

make changes to their policies and procedures, if necessary.

Banks and building societies have an obligation to try and keep their customers' accounts safe and prevent fraudulent transactions. Sometimes they identify and block legitimate payments that a customer wants to take place. They can also ask customers to provide additional information about the transaction or complete additional checks themselves if they remain concerned. This can cause distress and inconvenience to a customer – but it doesn't necessarily mean they have acted incorrectly.

I'm not persuaded that Santander acted against the terms and conditions by blocking this payment as they had concerns that Ms G was being the victim of a scam with the transaction she attempted to make. So in these instances, I would expect them to block the payment until they were satisfied that it was genuine. Sometimes a customer can be coerced and tell a bank the payment is genuine, even if it isn't, so on occasion, a bank may need to ask for further information to validate this, or they may refer these transactions to a specialised team to investigate this.

So while Ms G says she was told it could take up to 48 hours, as additional checks needed to be completed, this took longer. This is not uncommon for the checks to take longer. But here, the checks took longer than I would expect before the block was removed.

I've considered what Ms G has said about her health, and I hope she is now making progress with her health issues. I've considered what Ms G has said about her not being able to use her card at all, and she felt certain things were cancelled or declined. So I've looked at her bank transactions from 4 May 2023, the date when the online transaction for the silver was attempted.

But I can see that Ms G's account wasn't blocked as she used her debit card frequently. In the two weeks after 4 May 2023, for example, she used her card on average more than once a day to make debit card payments, which included purchases at what appears to be a health store, and food retailers. So while she may have felt stress by the block of the attempted silver transaction, I can't fairly say that her account was locked or that she couldn't make purchases with her card during the time the investigation was continuing into the attempted silver purchase.

I can also see that Ms G received credits into the account, including a direct credit, a faster payment into her account and a refund from a retailer between 4 May and 7 May 2023. So the investigations into the silver did not affect her receiving money either. I've also been provided with evidence of attempted cash machine/merchant transactions during this period, and this shows that while the silver purchase on 4 May 2023 was declined, there are payments after this which don't show a declined response code. Direct debits are also shown debiting her account while Santander were continuing their investigations into the silver purchase. So I've seen no evidence that Santander had cancelled or declined Ms G's ability to use the funds in her account.

But that's not to say that Santander didn't let Ms G down at all. Due to their delays in their investigations into the attempted silver purchase, this would be distressing for Ms G to find this out, even if this didn't affect her being able to use her card/pay her regular payments/receive payments into her account. I agree that their investigations took longer than I would expect, due to the delay in this being picked up after it was referred for additional checks.

So I've considered what would be a fair outcome for this complaint, and I've thought about what Ms G has said about her health. As Ms G was still able to use her card, receive regular credits, and pay direct debits without interruptions even though the investigation was going

on in the background, this should mitigate a large part of distress which would have been caused had Ms G's account been totally restricted while they investigated the attempted purchase. So I'm persuaded that Santander's compensation of £75 which I can see was paid into her account on 30 May 2023, was proportionate for the delays that occurred. So it follows I don't require Santander to do anything further.

### **My final decision**

I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms G to accept or reject my decision before 26 February 2024.

Gregory Sloanes  
**Ombudsman**