

The complaint

Mr L is unhappy that Lloyds Bank PLC closed his local branch without consulting him.

What happened

Mr L raised a complaint with Lloyds as he was unhappy that they had closed his local branch without consulting him. Lloyds responded to Mr L and confirmed that they had taken the decision to close the branch in question. Lloyds also explained to Mr L how he could view the Closing Branch Review documents that they'd produced surrounding the branch closure. Mr L wasn't satisfied with Lloyds' response, so he referred his complaint to this service.

One of our investigators looked at this complaint. But they didn't feel that Lloyds had acted unfairly in how they'd managed the situation and so didn't uphold the complaint. Mr L remained dissatisfied, so the matter was escalated 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.

The decision on whether to close a branch is a commercial decision that Lloyds are entitled to make. And Lloyds were under no obligation to consult with Mr L before they made that decision.

Lloyds have explained that they advertised the impending closure of the branch within the branch for twelve weeks prior to the branch closure. And Lloyds have also confirmed that they sent out leaflets advising of the branch closure to customers who used the branch regularly, the criteria for receiving a leaflet being that a customer had to have transacted at the branch three or more times within the last twelve months.

Again, how Lloyds choose to advertise the branch closure and select which customers to send notifying leaflets to are commercial decisions that it's for Lloyds to make.

It's unfortunate that Mr L didn't meet the criteria to have received a leaflet and didn't attend branch during the twelve weeks that the branch closure was being advertised, which meant he only became aware of the branch closure when he went to attend the branch and found it closed. However, speaking generally, I don't feel that Lloyds acted unfairly by taking the approach to informing their customers about the impending branch closure that they did.

Mr L has said that he's unhappy with how Lloyds have handled his complaint about this matter. But this service, the Financial Ombudsman Service, can only consider points of complaint about financial matters. And how a business handles a complaint is not itself a financial matter – even when that complaint is itself about a financial matter. In short, this service cannot consider a complaint about how a business has handled a complaint.

However, having reviewed Lloyds' response to Mr L's complaint, I note that it confirms the closure of the branch and explains to Mr L how he can view the Branch Closure Review

documents, which would provide him with some context as to how Lloyds had reached their decision to close the branch. This seems reasonable to me, given Lloyds' right to close the branch at their decision, and given that Mr L had no right of consultation beforehand.

Ultimately, as previously stated, Lloyds were entitled to make the decision to close the branch in question, and Lloyds were under no obligation to consult with Mr L before making that decision. And while it's unfortunate that Mr L wasn't made aware of the branch closure beforehand, I don't feel that that was unfair, especially given that the branch was always going to close at Lloyds' decision and that Mr L's prior knowledge of the branch closure wouldn't have had any impact on whether the branch closed or not. Accordingly, for these reasons, I won't be upholding this complaint.

I realise this won't be the outcome Mr L was wanting. But I hope he will understand, given what I've explained, why I've made the final decision that I have.

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 L to accept or reject my decision before 30 July 2024.

Paul Cooper
Ombudsman