

The complaint

Mr W is unhappy with the service The Co-operative Bank Plc provided after it placed a fraud block on his account.

What happened

On 26 June 2021 The Co-op Bank placed a fraud block on Mr W's account. It called Mr W and left a voicemail asking him to call back. When he later spoke to the bank he asked the adviser to call him back. She did so but not on the number he expected. For this and other reasons Mr W became concerned about the legitimacy of the call, and so decided to end the call and ring the bank's general number. By the time he did this it was too late to speak to the fraud team and so he had to call back the following day, when he says call waiting times were long.

When he spoke to the right team he felt the adviser wasn't precise when describing his transactions. He says this nearly led him to deny transactions he had actually made. He then raised a complaint about the process to unblock his account, and the service he had experienced, on that same call. Mr W says he was uncomfortable he had to make his complaint to one of the people that had caused his dissatisfaction. He also says his complaint wasn't investigated in full, for example, no explanation was given as to why his account had been frozen or why the bank had not made more effort to contact him.

Mr W says the matter caused him distress – as he did not have access to his money - and inconvenience - from all the calls he had to make. He feels the bank should offer the same 'out of hours' support to customers with fraud blocks as it does to those with lost and stolen cards. All staff should give their name on voicemails, and all staff should take notes of all calls. Also complaint calls should not involve anyone who is a subject of the complaint.

Our investigator upheld Mr W's complaint in part. He found the bank made no error when it applied the block, and there were no failings in the steps it took to lift the block. He explained that much of Mr W's dissatisfaction related to the processes the bank has in place around fraud blocks but we cannot interfere in a bank's policies. And the bank is obliged to have such processes to protect itself and its customers. He noted some of the delay was caused by the choices Mr W made. Overall, he felt the bank should pay Mr W £75 for the distress and inconvenience he had suffered as the final stage of the matter could have been handled better.

Unhappy with this assessment Mr W asked for an ombudsman's review.

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 am upholding Mr W's complaint in part. I'll explain why but first want to reassure Mr W that I have considered all aspects of his complaint carefully. If I don't reference a certain point it is because I am focusing on the issues I find to be material to the

outcome of his complaint. This is in keeping with our role as an informal dispute resolution service and as our rules allow.

I can see Mr W is most unhappy with what happened after the block was placed. He feels the bank should have worked harder to get in touch and provided better service when it did. But in the round I am satisfied the steps it took were fair and reasonable, and in line with how it treats all customers that need a block to be lifted. I know Mr W has issues with aspects of the process but I don't think there were any failings in the bank's conduct at each of Mr W's points of dissatisfaction.

I won't comment in detail on each one but to summarise, the bank promptly called Mr W after placing the block; notes weren't left after he spoke to the first adviser as they did not go through security – this also meant the adviser would, and should, not have discussed Mr W's recent interactions with the bank, and Mr W then ended the call; Mr W did not specify the number he wanted a call back on and the adviser did offer to call back on his mobile; it was Mr W's choice to call the general number; and whilst the second adviser was not as precise as possible when listing transactions Mr W still successfully authenticated the spend as needed – and the block was lifted.

I can understand that Mr W felt uncomfortable complaining about someone to that person directly, but the bank is entitled to define its complaints process, and Mr W could have called back if he preferred. I do find that the adviser should have listened to the calls between the bank and Mr W before reaching a conclusion, but having listened to the calls I don't think that this would have changed the complaint outcome.

I also note Mr W had access to funds at all times via cash machines, and whilst I accept his point that life was still restricted at that time due to the pandemic, I think had he made different choices the block would have been lifted that same day. That said, I don't want him to think I am in any way being reductive about his decision to be cautious, rather that I can't fairly find it was the bank's fault the block wasn't lifted that same day.

Mr W has also raised that he was never told why the block was placed but we wouldn't expect a bank to give specific details as to why its systems had identified a transaction as a fraud risk. The terms and conditions of Mr W's account allow the bank to act in this way.

Our investigator has already explained that it is not within our remit to look at a bank's processes, policies or systems. To expand on this, that would be the role of the regulator, the Financial Conduct Authority. Our role is to look at the merits of individual complaints, to decide whether the bank has made an error, and if so how it should put things right.

Overall, I acknowledge the steps Mr W had to take to have the block lifted and to make a related complaint caused him a level of stress and inconvenience. Whilst I think there were decisions he could have made that would have minimised the impact, I think it's reasonable that The Co-op Bank recognises it could at times have done things better and for this it should pay him £75 compensation.

Putting things right

The Co-op Bank should pay Mr W £75 compensation in full and final settlement of this complaint.

My final decision

I am upholding Mr W's complaint in part. The Co-operative Bank Plc must put things right as set out above.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr W to accept or reject my decision before 30 December 2022.

Rebecca Connelley
Ombudsman