

The complaint

Mr S complains about Metro Bank PLC not making three payments as he wanted and the service it provided around this situation.

What happened

In March 2022, Mr S tried to make three payments from his account with Metro. These payments weren't made immediately though, as Metro contacted Mr S by text message to ask him to call and discuss the payments before it would release them. Mr S called Metro but says he was kept on hold for over two hours, so he didn't continue with the call and didn't speak to Metro. The next day, Mr S tried to make the payments again. This time, they were made with no need for him to call and discuss them.

Mr S was unhappy about this and went to a branch to try to resolve the issue, but says that the branch staff were dismissive and unhelpful. So he complained to Metro, which said that the payments were held because they were identified as high risk on the first attempt. On the second, they weren't identified in the same way and so they were paid. Metro said it had no record of a branch visit but acknowledged that Mr S had been on hold for a long time when he called, so offered him £30 to make up for this.

Mr S wasn't happy with this as a resolution to his complaint so he came to our service. Our adjudicator said that we couldn't tell Metro to change its systems which stopped the payments being made. Nor could they say much about the branch visit where there are no records of this. But they did acknowledge that the customer service Metro provided here fell short of what Mr S could have expected. So they said Metro should increase the compensation offered from £30 to £75 in total.

Metro agreed with this, but Mr S didn't. He felt that the compensation should be more significant for what he felt was a breach of security by Metro. So the complaint has been passed to me to decide.

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.

Metro has explained that the payments weren't made when Mr S first tried to make them because they were flagged by its internal systems. Such checks and processes are intended to protect customers from making payments that look like they might be high risk, or possibly fraudulent. Checks like these will cause some inconvenience for customers by their very nature, but that's not to say that Metro weren't entitled to make them. These checks were ultimately being made in Mr S's best interests, even if I realise he won't see it the same way.

So Metro was entitled to ask Mr S to contact it before making these payments and I'm satisfied it acted fairly in doing so. The issue was that when Mr S called, he had to wait for a very long time to speak to Metro. He says – and Metro accepts – that he was likely on hold for over two hours. So I can understand why Mr S didn't continue with the call at that time.

That would have been frustrating and inconvenient for Mr S. These payments weren't made when he wanted them to be and despite reasonable efforts, he wasn't able to contact Metro to find a solution. Fortunately, Mr S was able to make the payments the next day – so any inconvenience was short lived.

It is odd that the payments were flagged on one day, but not another. Metro has explained that this is an effect of the systems it uses, which I accept. But the impact of this here wasn't to Mr S's detriment. Instead - he was able to make the payments he wanted, in the way he wanted, just a day later than he wanted to make them. So even if this does seem strange, I'm not persuaded that it had an unfair impact on Mr S.

Mr S has said that he visited the branch to try and resolve this matter, but that the branch staff were dismissive and unhelpful. There is no clear evidence of this – but in any event, I still have to look at this matter impartially and when I consider that the payments were ultimately made just a day after the initial instruction, I think the £75 compensation that our adjudicator recommended and that Metro has agreed to pay is fair in all the circumstances here.

My final decision

Metro Bank PLC should pay Mr S £75 in total for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 9 June 2023.

James Staples
Ombudsman