

The complaint

L's director (Mrs W) complains that Handelsbanken plc changed the address linked to its business account without permission. Mrs W also complains that Handelsbanken sent her correspondence that indicated she was still liable for a personal guarantee she gave.

What happened

Mrs W is the director of L and another business I'll call B. Both businesses hold bank accounts with Handelsbanken.

In February 2023 Handelsbanken says it received notification from Companies House that there had been a change in ownership and registered office for B. On 2 March 2023 Handelsbanken wrote to Mrs W and asked her to respond confirming changes to B's structure.

On 20 March 2023 Handelsbanken wrote to Mrs W in relation to both L and B's accounts. Handelsbanken said it understood the correspondence address for L and B had changed and asked Mrs W to contact its branch to confirm the correct correspondence address for both businesses. Handelsbanken added that it had taken the step of retaining the bank statements in branch pending Mrs W's instructions.

Mrs W emailed Handelsbanken and asked where the information that L's address had changed had come from. Mrs W also raised some concerns in relation to a personal guarantee she'd given.

Handelsbanken issued a final response on 10 May 2023 and said it had become aware it may not be appropriate to continue to send confidential information to the address linked to L's account. Handelsbanken says it wrote to Mrs W on 20 March 2023 to check the correct address for future correspondence and apologised for any inconvenience caused. Handelsbanken requested Mrs W confirm the correspondence address for L to use going forward.

Mrs W responded to Handelsbanken and said it had failed to answer her questions. A follow up final response was issued on 31 May 2023. Handelsbanken said the correspondence address for L had been saved as Mrs W's home address. Handelsbanken added that no instruction to change L's address was received but a branch decision had been taken to retain statements until a formal request to amend it was received.

Mrs W referred L's complaint to this service and it was passed to an investigator. The investigator upheld L's complaint and asked Handelsbanken to pay £75 for the inconvenience caused and said the information it gave Mrs W could've been clearer. Handelsbanken agreed but Mrs W asked to appeal L's case to an ombudsman. Mrs W said that at no time had L's registered offices changed on Companies House and that she is unaware of anyone giving instructions concerning a potential change. As Mrs W asked to appeal L's case, it's been passed to me to make a 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.

I'm aware Mrs W has raised concerns about issues relating to a personal guarantee she gave Handelsbanken. The investigator recently contacted Mrs W and explained that as the guarantee was in her personal name we can't deal with it in this decision. Mrs W confirmed she understands this decision will only relate to L's complaint about Handelsbanken.

In response to the investigator, Mrs W asked to see an instruction or letter Handelsbanken had received concerning a change to L's address. But Handelsbanken didn't receive an instruction of that nature. I recently contacted Handelsbanken for more information and it explained that it received a Companies House notification in relation to B, which Mrs W is also a director of. Handelsbanken has explained that it is aware that Mrs W is the director of both B and L so took a precautionary step to redirect L's correspondence to the branch. But there was no specific instruction received from Companies House or anyone else that said L's registered address had changed.

I agree with the investigator that Handelsbanken didn't clearly explain why L's correspondence was redirected to the branch. But I accept Handelsbanken was looking to ensure private correspondence wasn't sent to an out of date address. And because Handelsbanken knew B's details had changed and Mrs W is linked to both businesses, I think it was reasonable for it to temporarily restrict correspondence and request confirmation of the correct address.

The investigator upheld L's complaint and asked Handelsbanken to pay £75 for the inconvenience caused. I agree there was some inconvenience caused to L and I think a payment of £75 reflects what happened and is a fair way to resolve this complaint.

My final decision

My decision is that I uphold this complaint and direct Handelsbanken plc to pay L £75.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask L to accept or reject my decision before 31 October 2023.

Marco Manente
Ombudsman