

The complaint

Mr B complains that he wasn't provided with the service he should have been by Bank of Scotland plc trading as Halifax after his card was blocked while on holiday abroad.

What happened

Mr B was using his Halifax card abroad but following an issue with a point of sale terminal his card was stopped. Mr B contacted Halifax through its webchat and says there were substantial delays resulting in the webchat lasting several hours. He was then told his card had been blocked due to three incorrect PIN attempts. He explained the issue he had encountered and that he was certain he had the correct PIN. He was then told he would need to wait for the 'overnight run' for his card to become active again. Mr B says he had chosen to use this card as his source of funds while on holiday and this issue caused him significant distress and inconvenience.

Halifax issued a final response letter dated 14 June 2023. It apologised for any inconvenience that Mr B had been caused by his card not being able to be used for a transaction on 31 May 2023 but said its fraud team had confirmed that Mr B entered an incorrect PIN for the transaction. It said that Mr B was able to use his card the following day without issue and it confirmed there wasn't a block on his account.

Mr B referred his complaint to this service. Our investigator didn't uphold this complaint. He said that Mr B's PIN was blocked as it was entered incorrectly. He said that while Mr B chose to contact Halifax by webchat he could have called Halifax which would have been a more appropriate way of resolving the issue. He noted that the PIN was unblocked overnight.

Mr B didn't accept our investigator's view. He was frustrated by the service provided through the webchat and said he should have been told to call if that was the only way to unblock the PIN. He reiterated that the issue with the PIN wasn't his fault but an issue with the terminal. He didn't accept that it was reasonable that he had to wait overnight for the PIN to be reset or that he was on the webchat for hours without a resolution.

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 can understand why Mr B was frustrated by the issue with his card and the time taken to resolve this, but for me to uphold this complaint I would need to be satisfied that Halifax had done something wrong or treated Mr B unfairly.

Halifax has explained that the transaction on 31 May was declined due to the PIN being entered incorrectly. I note Mr B's comment about this being an issue with the point of sale terminal rather than his mistake, but as the PIN wasn't correct I cannot say that Halifax did anything wrong by declining the transaction. The account terms and conditions set out that card usage can be blocked and given the issue involved in this case I find that the action

taken was reasonable.

Mr B is unhappy about the time it then took to unblock his PIN. I understand that this was frustrating, but Halifax has confirmed its process is for its systems to unlock the PIN overnight if blocked. As Mr B's PIN was unlocked overnight and so he was able to use his card again the next day I do not find I can say that Halifax did anything wrong. I note Mr B's comment about the process involved but my role is to determine whether Halifax did anything wrong or treated Mr B unfairly and, in this case, it followed its usual process and so I cannot say it treated Mr B unfairly.

Mr B has also raised a complaint about the service provided by the webchat. I understand that this was his preferred means of communication and I appreciate it must have been frustrating that he experienced delays. I think it reasonable that Halifax would take this feedback onboard. Our investigator noted that Mr B could have also contacted Halifax by phone, and I agree this was an alternative option available to him but in this case, Halifax has confirmed that his PIN wouldn't have been unblocked any sooner had he made contact by phone.

I understand the upset and frustration Mr B experienced but as I do not find that Halifax was wrong to take the action it did, and it then followed its usual process to unlock the PIN overnight I do not find I can uphold this complaint.

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 B to accept or reject my decision before 1 March 2024.

Jane Archer
Ombudsman