

The complaint

Mr F complains that Bank of Scotland plc trading as Halifax hasn't provided him with the service it should have.

What happened

Mr F says that on 22 April 2023 he tried to make a room booking online using his Halifax card, but this was unsuccessful. He visited a branch to ask about this and was told that his account hadn't been blocked. He tried again to make a booking but didn't succeed and he says that due to not being able to book a room he had to sleep outside that night. The following morning Mr F called Halifax and after talking to several advisers due to the calls being terminated, he was transferred to the fraud team and was told that his account had been blocked and this was then removed.

Mr F says he made a complaint later that week. As he didn't hear anything back, he contacted Halifax and it wasn't aware of his complaint. So, Mr F logged another complaint. Mr F was then abroad for a period of time and on his return he asked about his complaint and was told it had been closed and £150 had been credited to his account.

Halifax issued a final response letter in which it apologised that Mr F didn't receive the service he should have when he visited a branch to ask about his card. It said the branch should have seen that Mr F's card had been blocked and told him to contact the fraud team. It said that if Mr F provided the name of the branch, it would provide feedback. Halifax didn't uphold Mr F's complaint about the calls on 23 April 2023. It said the quality of the line was poor on the calls and it was confident its agents didn't hang up intentionally. Halifax explained that when Mr F tried to make the hotel booking the transaction was flagged by its fraud systems. It accepted that this was inconvenient for Mr F but it said its fraud systems were in place to protect its customers. Because of the issue with the service Mr F had been provided, Halifax paid him compensation of £150.

Mr F said that his questions hadn't been answered by Halifax and he hadn't agreed to the compensation. Mr F referred his complaint to this service.

Our investigator upheld this complaint. He recommended that Halifax increase the compensation by £100 bringing total compensation to £250.

Mr F didn't agree with our investigator's view. He asked why his account was blocked in the first place and why the calls he made the following day were terminated. He said that Halifax claimed it couldn't contact him by email, but he was receiving Halifax's marketing emails. Mr F said that he was owed an apology. He said he had taken all steps to try to resolve this issue both at the time it occurred and subsequently.

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 F is upset by the experience he had when trying to use his card to book accommodation. And the subsequent issues he has faced since then. My role is to decide whether, based on the evidence provided, Halifax did anything wrong or treated Mr F unfairly and, if so whether it has done enough in response to this.

The initial issue arose as Mr F tried to book accommodation on 22 April 2023 and his transaction was blocked. Halifax is required to have fraud protection systems in place and while these can, in circumstances when genuine transactions are blocked, cause inconvenience, they are set up to protect customers. As the transaction Mr F was attempting was flagged by Halifax's fraud system, I cannot say that it was wrong to apply a block.

Because the transaction was blocked, Mr F visited a branch to identify any issue. Halifax then incorrectly told him that his account was fine. Halifax apologised for this service in its final response letter and said feedback could be provided to the branch if Mr F provided the details. It also paid Mr F £150 compensation.

Mr F says that because he was told his account was fine, he tried again to book a hotel but this was again unsuccessful and he was left without accommodation for the night. While I note this comment, Mr F was able to withdraw cash on his card and he had funds available in his account and so had he wished he could have paid for accommodation in cash. That said I take on board Mr F's comment that the incorrect information provided in branch delayed him taking further action and due to it being the London Marathon the next day, hotel prices were increasing, and so had he booked a room later that evening this would have been at a much higher price.

Mr F says that when he called Halifax the next day several calls were terminated. I have listened to the calls and it isn't clear why the calls were terminated but I cannot say that this was due to the agent's actions. That said, this did cause Mr F further inconvenience and I have taken this into account. When Mr F was able to discuss the issue with the fraud team the block was removed.

Mr F has said that Halifax had said it sent emails when it didn't. I have looked through the contact notes that Halifax has provided and can see that when Mr F raised his complaint on 19 May 2023 he said he would be abroad for a period of time and that it might be difficult to contact him by phone and asked that no mail be sent to the address Halifax held on file. I note that Mr F has said he raised a complaint in April 2023, and this wasn't logged and I have taken that into account. Looking at the response to the complaint that was logged, Halifax sent MR F an SMS and tried to call him on 1 June 2023, but this was unsuccessful. It then sent him an email to the email address it held. While I understand that Mr F didn't receive this, I find that Halifax did take reasonable action to contact Mr F in response to his complaint.

Mr F has also raised a complaint about a recent visit to Halifax where he had to wait to withdraw funds. As this is a new complaint point, I haven't considered this further. If Mr F wishes to raise this directly with Halifax to give it an opportunity to respond then he can do so.

Having considered the issues that Mr F has raised as part of this complaint and noting the inconvenience he was caused, but also that he had access to cash if he had needed it, I agree with our investigator's recommendation that a further £100 compensation should be paid.

Putting things right

Halifax should pay Mr F an additional £100 compensation (bringing total compensation for

this complaint to £250) for the distress and inconvenience he was caused.

My final decision

My final decision is that Bank of Scotland plc trading as Halifax should take the action set out above in resolution of this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr F to accept or reject my decision before 16 February 2024.

Jane Archer
Ombudsman