

## **The complaint**

Mr B and Mrs B complain about the poor service they encountered when they switched their bank account to Nationwide Building Society (NBS), in particular the switch of their direct debits. For ease of reading, I'll refer only to Mr B.

## **What happened**

In December 2023, Mr B applied to switch his account from his existing provider who I'll refer to as A, to NBS. A switch date was agreed as 14 December 2023 but this was rejected. Mr B called in response to this to chase up NBS and it was agreed they would call him back, but they didn't. He subsequently discovered that the switch was rejected as he had provided some incorrect information to NBS, so a new switch date of 2 January 2024 was agreed.

The account with A was closed and direct debits were set up with NBS. However, Mr B began receiving correspondence from several of the companies with whom he had direct debits saying the instructions had been cancelled and that he must make contact with them individually to make a new arrangement. As Mr B expected that NBS would do this on his behalf – as this was part of the switching service - he complained to NBS.

NBS investigated the complaint and upheld the point regarding the call back they agreed but did not make, and they apologised for it, crediting Mr B with £25 to say sorry. In terms of the direct debit issue, NBS explained that after they received a list of all Mr B's direct debit providers, NBS contacted them all to let them know of the switch and provide them with the new account details. As it was the responsibility of those providers to amend the account details, they didn't uphold this aspect saying NBS had made no errors.

Unhappy with this outcome, Mr B responded to NBS saying more direct debit companies had made contact, but NBS said they wouldn't be changing their complaint decision, reiterating that they had not made any errors.

Mr B brought the complaint to our service. In his complaint, he stated he was also unhappy about the time this had taken, and inconvenience caused. Our investigator looked into the complaint and considered that the service provided by NBS could have been better. They said that due to the number of direct debit companies who contacted Mr B, it was reasonable to assume something went wrong. To that end, they recommended that NBS pay an extra £75 compensation, bringing the total to £100.

Whilst Mr B accepted our investigator's view, NBS did not, which meant that an ombudsman would review the complaint.

## **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 have looked at the information NBS has supplied to see if it has acted within its terms and conditions for switching the account, and to see if it has treated Mr B fairly.

I was sorry to learn that what should have been a straightforward switching process has turned into a prolonged and drawn-out experience. Part of my role is to determine whether what took place was reasonable and whether NBS followed the process correctly.

One aspect that's not in question is the error that was made when Mr B called to query the switch. I'm glad that NBS acknowledged they didn't make the call back as agreed and apologised.

There has been a significant amount of correspondence sent by NBS to this service showing the mechanics of the switch, including computer reports and emails all provided as evidence that NBS were not at fault, but two aspects remain concerning. Firstly, the number of direct debit companies who made contact with Mr B for the same reason. And secondly, the lack of action on the part of NBS when Mr B made them aware of his predicament.

As our investigator said in their view, they felt it was reasonable to assume that something went wrong considering more than ten companies contacted Mr B to say there was a problem. I do believe that rather than accept that all ten unconnected companies all made the same error, it's more likely on the balance of probabilities that they were affected by an error made elsewhere.

Regarding my second concern, when Mr B made contact with NBS on more than one occasion, I've not seen any evidence to show that NBS made efforts try and help, only reiterating they had found no errors. Mr B expected a comprehensive level of service within the switch that he agreed to and looking at this complaint through the regulatory expectations on businesses of setting higher standards for financial services customers, I don't believe the service he received met that expectation.

Had NBS put the same amount of effort into trying to look for a way to help and support Mr B with his direct debit issue as they did defending their position, I firmly believe the complaint would have been resolved much sooner without reference to this service.

In conclusion, whilst I acknowledge the evidence submitted by NBS in terms of their actions towards the switch, I do believe they could have done more to treat Mr B fairly and reasonably when he brought his complaint to them.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons I have given it is my final decision that the complaint is upheld. I require to Nationwide Building Society to pay Mr B a total of £100 compensation for his inconvenience less the £25 already paid.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B and Mrs B to accept or reject my decision before 29 May 2024.

Chris Blamires  
**Ombudsman**

