

The complaint

Ms B complains that TSB Bank plc (“TSB”) closed her local branch early on the day she had pre-arranged a visit to it.

What happened

The details of this complaint are well known to both parties, so I have just provided an overview of key events here.

Ms B planned to travel abroad in April 2024 and wanted to withdraw just under £6,000 cash from her TSB account to take with her. She contacted her local TSB branch and arranged to visit it late in the afternoon before she was due to travel abroad. Ms B went to her local branch as arranged but found it had unexpectedly closed early on that day.

Ms B rang TSB and was told she should be able to pick up her money when the branch opened at 10am the following day. Ms B complained to TSB at the same time. It acknowledged the branch had closed unexpectedly early that day and offered and paid Ms B £100 compensation. Ms B was able to pick up her money the following day as planned.

Soon after, Ms B asked TSB to look again at her complaint. She added that she had also intended to do a currency exchange elsewhere but forgot to because of how upset she was feeling. Ms B felt the compensation offered was not enough, considering the stress and anxiety she experienced. TSB agreed to review her complaint but did not offer further compensation.

Ms B remained unhappy and so brought her complaint to this Service. She said that she felt stressed and panicked when she wasn't able to collect the money she needed for her trip. She said she had been feeling very stressed prior to travelling abroad, to the extent that she was physically sick, and being unable to pick up her money as planned made this significantly worse. Ms B said she was on the phone for some time following the branch closure, trying to ensure she would be able to pick up the money the following day before she needed to leave for the airport. Ms B said the £100 compensation offered by TSB was not enough, taking into account the upset caused.

Our Investigator didn't uphold Ms B's complaint. She said that while it was clear Ms B was understandably frustrated and anxious, TSB had already offered £100 compensation, and this was in line with what this Service would suggest for the distress and inconvenience she experienced.

Ms B did not agree with what our Investigator said, so this came to me for 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.

It does appear that TSB had not planned in advance to close Ms B's local branch for the half day in question. It seems the decision was taken on the day of the closure due to unforeseen circumstances. What this means is that I don't think the adviser Ms B spoke to the previous day could have known that the bank wouldn't be open at the time Ms B had arranged to visit. So the visit was arranged by the TSB adviser in good faith.

But responsibility for the early closure of the branch and for Ms B making an unnecessary journey to her local branch and not being able to make her withdrawal as planned lies with TSB. While it's understandable that unforeseen circumstances can arise that mean a decision like this has to be made, the fact is that the decision caused Ms B both distress and inconvenience.

TSB has acknowledged its shortcomings here and has already paid Ms B £100 compensation. It feels important to say here, for Ms B's benefit, that this Service doesn't punish financial institutions for shortcomings with the service provided. That's the role of the regulator. What we do is look at the distress and inconvenience caused by TSB to decide on a fair amount of compensation. And I'm satisfied the £100 already offered by TSB is fair. I'll explain why I say that.

There's no doubt Ms B was inconvenienced here, in that she had to make an extra, unplanned journey to the bank. Ms B also told this Service that she spent around an hour discussing her predicament with a TSB adviser by phone, trying to make sure there would be no further problems the following day when she visited, again, to withdraw her money. I can see that everything did go to plan the following day, and Ms B was able to withdraw the money she needed.

It's also clear being unable to withdraw the money she needed the day before her holiday made the anxiety Ms B was already experiencing, about travelling abroad alone, worse. She told this Service that she made the arrangement with the bank to visit it the day before her holiday to give herself peace of mind, and I appreciate that additional stress was caused to her as a result of the bank being closed.

Ms B also said that the upset this matter caused resulted in her forgetting to make a visit elsewhere on the day before her holiday to do a currency exchange. While I understand the distress she experienced, I don't think it would be fair to hold TSB responsible for Ms B forgetting to run a different errand.

So, although I know my decision will disappoint Ms B, I think that the compensation already offered by TSB is fair given the particular circumstances of this complaint. While, as I said, there's no doubt this matter caused Ms B both stress and inconvenience, I have to take into account that it was dealt with by TSB in a timely way.

My final decision

It's my final decision that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms B to accept or reject my decision before 19 September 2024.

Martina Ryan
Ombudsman