

## **The complaint**

C, a limited company, complains about the service it received from National Westminster Bank Plc after it applied to open a business account.

C has been represented in this complaint by its director, Mr E.

## **What happened**

C applied for an account with NatWest at the end of March 2024. Mr E received an email from NatWest a few days later to say that it needed to clarify some information in order to progress the application. It asked Mr E to reply to the email to let it know when would be a suitable time to speak.

Mr E says he provided the information that NatWest asked him for promptly. But it was only after he'd spent a lot of time chasing things up that the account was finally opened in mid-June, around two and a half months after C first applied. He says the account-opening process took a very long time and he received very poor and rude customer service from NatWest. Among other things, it repeatedly failed to contact him when it said it would. He wasn't told the case handler dealing with the application had left, and he was generally left in the dark about what was happening.

In its final response to C's complaint, NatWest apologised that C hadn't been told that the case handler had left, and that it had taken some time for a new one to be appointed. And it apologised more generally for the shortfall in the service C had experienced. It said it would credit C's account with £100 compensation once it was open. Ten days later, Mr E said C hadn't received the £100, but would decline the offer in any event, as he didn't consider it to be fair.

On the same day that NatWest sent C its final response, the new case handler emailed Mr E to say that they needed to clarify some information in order to progress the application. Mr E spoke to NatWest that day and NatWest followed up the call with an email setting out what information and documents it needed. The account was open less than a week later.

After the account was opened, NatWest increased its offer of compensation to £200. But Mr E considers the offer to be far too low. He says the situation caused him distress and affected both his personal confidence and the running of C. He says C's reputation with customers and suppliers was damaged. He believes compensation of more than £1,000 would be appropriate.

One of our investigators considered the complaint, but thought that what NatWest had already offered to do was fair.

Mr E didn't agree with the investigator's view, so the complaint's been passed to me.

## **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.

In reaching my decision, I've taken into account everything Mr E has said. But I hope he won't regard it as a discourtesy that I've focussed on what I consider to be the key aspects of the complaint, in keeping with our role as an informal dispute resolution service.

NatWest has accepted that it provided C with poor service when it applied to open the account. I'm satisfied that it's likely that the application process took longer than it would have done if oversight of the application had been handed over promptly to a new case handler when the original one left. And it's not in dispute that NatWest failed, more than once, to call Mr E when it said it would. This delayed things further, and meant that Mr E had to spend time chasing the application up.

Mr E hasn't provided evidence of any financial loss or damage to C as a result of the delay in opening the account. And more than two months after it was opened, C's account still hadn't been used.

I acknowledge that Mr E says he's experienced personal distress as a result of the service he received from NatWest, and the time it took to open the account. But the complainant in this case is C, a company, which can't itself feel distress. I'm unable to award compensation for Mr E's personal distress or inconvenience.

I accept that C experienced some inconvenience as a result of the time Mr E spent chasing up the application, which he could otherwise have spent on C's affairs. But taking everything into account, I consider the £200 which NatWest offered C to be fair, and in line with our approach to compensation awards. It should pay C that amount if it hasn't done so already. But I can't fairly require it to do more than that.

### **My final decision**

My decision is that I uphold this complaint. If it hasn't done so already, National Westminster Bank Plc should pay C £200 as it has offered to do.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask C to accept or reject my decision before 15 November 2024.

Juliet Collins  
**Ombudsman**