

The complaint

Ms M complains that Wise Payments Limited won't refund money she lost to a scam.

Ms M is represented by a firm, but for ease I have only referred to Ms M in my decision.

What happened

The details of this complaint are well known to both parties so I won't repeat it all again here. In summary, on the 16 September 2024 Ms M made two international payments totalling £10,700 to a third party.

Ms M said she became friendly with someone she was speaking to on social media. The scammer said they worked in the United Nations military based in Yemen. They later asked Ms M to look after documents for them which she agreed to. Ms M was asked to pay for customs and clearance to receive the documents. She was then asked to make a second payment for insurance certificates. After making the payments, Ms M said she asked the scammer to talk via video chat, but it was a recording and it was not the same person she thought she was speaking to. It was at this point she realised it had been a scam. Ms M reported the matter to Wise but it did not refund the money she lost or uphold her complaint.

Our investigator didn't think the complaint should be upheld. He thought Wise ought to have found the payments suspicious and intervened earlier than it did but he didn't think it would have changed things as when it intervened in the second payment, it provided warnings but Ms M chose to proceed with the payment.

Ms M didn't accept our Investigator's opinion, as such the complaint has been passed to me for a final 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.

We have not been provided evidence of how the scam occurred, and even if I were to be satisfied the payments were made as a result of a scam, I do not find this is a complaint I would uphold for similar reasons to our investigator. I know this will be disappointing to Ms M but I'll explain my reasons why.

Taking into consideration the relevant regulatory rules and guidance, codes of practice and good industry practice, Wise should have looked at the wider circumstances surrounding the transaction before making the payment and taken steps to keep its customer's accounts safe. Therefore, it ought to look out for payments which might indicate that its customer is at risk of financial harm due to fraud.

I accept this was an account that Ms M had not used since its opening, Wise therefore didn't have information about her typical account usage to rely on. Nevertheless, it had information about the payments themselves that it ought to have considered.

The first payment was for £5,700; it was to an international bank account and considering the value of the payment, I think Wise ought reasonably to have been aware of the heightened risk of fraud the payment carried and intervened. In the circumstances I think an appropriate intervention would have been for it to provide a written warning during the payment process.

I've thought about whether a written warning during the first payment would have had a positive impact on Ms M, and I am not persuaded it would. Wise intervened when Ms M made the second payment and provided warnings. The warning given during the second payment advised to "Stop – this sounds like a scam! Scammers often create fake online profiles to trick people into giving them money. It's hard to get your money back once you send it. So if you haven't met payee in real life, it's best to cancel this transfer." However, Ms M opted to proceed to make the payment.

It follows that had Wise intervened in the first payment as I think it ought to have done, on balance I think it is likely Ms M would have responded as she did during the second payment.

Ms M's thinks Wise ought to have phoned her to enquire about the payment but I do not agree. Although Ms M said she had not met the person she was paying, she went on to confirm that she had not received an unexpected call asking her to make the payment, so I think this would have alleviated the concerns the bank had. Any intervention should be proportionate and I don't think there was enough going on here to warrant human intervention by a member of staff.

I find Wise ought to have attempted recovery sooner than it did, but I'm not persuaded there were any prospects of recovering the funds. This is because the payments were sent internationally, and Wise said it has not received a response from the receiving bank.

I've thought carefully about all that happened, I understand that Ms M has lost a significant sum of money. However, I can't fairly or reasonably ask Wise to reimburse the loss.

My final decision

For the reasons outlined, my final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms M to accept or reject my decision before 8 October 2025.

Oluwatobi Balogun
Ombudsman