

## The complaint

Mrs A is unhappy with Nationwide Building Society. Mrs A asked for her trustee status to be removed from her children's accounts during the national lockdown. Mrs A was suffering with serious medical issues and undergoing treatment at the time. She was concerned that if the worst happened to her, she wanted to make sure her children still had access to their money if she was no longer around.

## What happened

Mrs A said she was told to complete forms and did so. She said she repeatedly filled in more and more of the same forms and passed them to Nationwide and still Nationwide didn't carry out her request.

Mrs A said she ended up having to go to a branch on a few occasions culminating in taking both her children in with her in the hope of getting the issue resolved. Mrs A said the time when she spoke to a branch manager was extremely awkward. Although she appreciated the branch manager agreeing to hear her situation this was done so without suitable confidentiality. Mrs A said she had to explain her personal situation and circumstances to the manager while the manager was also at the same time completing another customer's account application in their presence. The other customers were complete strangers to Mrs A.

Eventually, as the accounts were not changed over in line with her requests Mrs A asked for her children's accounts to be closed due to Nationwide's failings. Both accounts were transferred to current accounts. And Mrs A was offered £75 for each of the accounts as compensation. Making a total of £150.

Mrs A remained unhappy and as a resolution couldn't be found she brought her complaint to this service.

Our investigator upheld the complaint. She said Nationwide accepted it had given Mrs A incorrect information. She noted Mrs A would have been frustrated and concerned with Nationwide not acting on her instructions while she was dealing with such serious health issues. But our investigator did accept Nationwide's point that there had been no financial loss. Although our investigator did accept Mrs A had to fund her child's driving lessons as he couldn't access his account. Our investigator said £100 per child would be a fair outcome, giving total compensation of £200.

Mrs A didn't accept this and asked for her complaint to be passed to an ombudsman for a decision.

In my recent provisional decision, I said:

*"Mrs A said she had been trying to resolve this matter since 2020. As she described it, during lockdown she contacted Nationwide customer service and asked it to remove her name as a trustee from her children's accounts. This was very important to Mrs A as she*

wanted to make sure her children had no problems getting at their money as she was struggling with life threatening illness.

As this was during lockdown Mrs A was mainly dealing with Nationwide over the telephone. Mrs A was advised she could print off a form online, complete it and send it to Nationwide – it would then do the rest.

Mrs A said she did what she was asked but nothing happened. Whenever she followed up with Nationwide, she was told nothing had been done and she needed to go through the entire process again. This went on repeatedly over a long period.

It's highlighted how long this went on because lockdown ended, and the matter hadn't been concluded. Mrs A tried again to resolve the matter by going into a branch with her children. She asked why her requests hadn't been completed but was told to bring another signed form into branch so it could be resolved. So, this is what Mrs A did – but still her requirements were not met.

I think it's perfectly understandable that Mrs A had lost all confidence in Nationwide by this point. The matter had been dragging on since 2020 and hadn't been resolved at this late stage in 2022. It was at this point Mrs A was told her son's account could have been changed at a branch counter without any need for a form, but that Nationwide staff had failed to do this for her, or even to tell her this was an option.

Mrs A confirmed that at this late stage the accounts were then both changed over to current accounts for both her children. But she turned down the amount of compensation offered due to the long term inability of Nationwide to carry out her instructions. And due to the extreme anxiety and anguish the problems this caused her and her children.

Mrs A was also very upset about feeling forced to share very personal details about her health diagnosis and treatment in front of complete strangers. She also felt Nationwide had done nothing to prioritise her requests from the start, despite her explaining to it how this would impact on her children if anything did happen to her. Mrs A said she was having difficulty sleeping due to the worry about her children accessing their accounts. Because her son was learning to drive and unable to get to his own money Mrs A said she had to pay out of her own funds – even though due to her health she wasn't working herself. Mrs A said she was sometimes having to go without meals and essentials. She said this impacted on her mental health on top of the existing health problems she was already suffering and dealing with.

Mrs A said the continuous and repeated failings of customer service allied to a lack of recognition for vulnerable customers and data breaches over sensitive information meant the offer from Nationwide was too low.

Nationwide said it was inclined to believe Mrs A's complaint in view of the amount of time that had passed, and it could see she had originally made her request in 2020. It accepted it hadn't explained the processes for Mrs A to remove herself from the accounts clearly and had given misleading information.

Nationwide apologised and offered first £50 per child and then increased the amount to £75 per child, totalling £150 for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Nationwide don't appear to have clear records of the issues in this case. But at least it accepted Mrs A did make several attempts to reset her children's accounts and that it gave out incorrect information and made mistakes. I accept it offered compensation too. But it also accepts that for at least one of the accounts it should have been able to carry out Mrs A's

*wishes within a matter of minutes at the counter. Nationwide stated there was no reason for this to be passed on to Head Office. But nobody spotted that throughout the entire period until the very end. I think that's unfair and unreasonable.*

*Further, I've no reason to dispute Mrs A's version of what happened when she spoke to a branch manager and ended up discussing her details in front of total strangers. I haven't heard any useful counter evidence from Nationwide on this point, so I accept what Mrs A said.*

*And finally, there's no doubt that Mrs A was dealing with life threatening illness throughout the whole period, and I think Nationwide were aware of this. Nationwide's handling did nothing to relieve Mrs A's worries, in fact she has pointed out the delays and difficulties made her situation worse. So, I think Nationwide needed to do more in view of the impact on Mrs A.*

*I think Nationwide could have resolved the whole situation easily and quickly to Mrs A's satisfaction. Many opportunities were missed, and this took its toll on Mrs A increasing her upset and frustration at a time when she needed better support. I don't think that's fair or reasonable.*

*I think Nationwide should pay Mrs A total compensation of £500 for the distress and inconvenience caused."*

### ***Responses to my provisional decision***

Mrs A accepted the provisional decision. She asked for the compensation amount to be split equally between her children and paid into their current accounts.

Nationwide responded to say the member of staff that had previously dealt with this complaint no longer worked for Nationwide. It asked for an extension in time to respond to the provisional decision.

Later Nationwide responded and said it didn't accept the provisional decision. It said from the contact back in August 2020 there was no discussion about arranging the account transfers to the children at that stage.

Nationwide said it located forms that were sent in June 2021. It said it thinks these forms were uploaded to the wrong queue and didn't reach the relevant team to process them. It said no action was taken. Nationwide claimed there was no further contact until September 2022 when Nationwide confirmed Mrs A would need to complete the forms again. The accounts were then closed in October 2022 and the complaint set up.

Nationwide said there wasn't any records of Mrs A constantly chasing it or providing more copies of the forms or numerous calls. Nationwide said in the call in September 2022 Mrs A didn't mention sending more forms or chasing up action.

Nationwide said Mrs A mentioned her son not having money for driving lessons but said as they had visited a branch, he could have accessed his funds then. Nationwide said Mrs A's points were "*slightly contradictory.*"

Nationwide said it was unaware of the problems with privacy during a discussion about Mrs A's private circumstances. It said it hadn't been aware of this so hadn't investigated or responded to this point. It went on to say staff are cautious around sensitive and personal information. It said, "*privacy is of the upmost importance.*" Nationwide concluded "*we don't believe the Branch would have made the consumer discuss their private matters in front of*

*others or put the consumer in a difficult or awkward position.*” It concluded due to the time period the branch was unable to recall the interactions. It maintained details wouldn’t be discussed in front of other customers. It said if a customer wasn’t comfortable, it would offer alternative options or book a private room.

Nationwide did accept it should have explained the Smart Saver account couldn’t be in a child’s sole name, and it should have sent a response to Mrs A after receiving the forms requesting the change. It said it was now willing to offer £300 for the trouble and upset caused.

Regarding the calls Nationwide said if Mrs A had used another telephone number to contact it then if this number was provided it would go back over its call records again.

Nationwide said if Mrs A is suggesting the first request to transfer the accounts was in advance of March 2020 it would need more information to look into that further.

It said it couldn’t find any further calls made through the second number provided.

### **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 was slightly surprised by Nationwide’s first request for more time. But as the person reviewing the complaint now was new to it and wanted to review it in full, it felt fair to grant the time extension.

And after a further phone number was provided to Nationwide for it to search for more calls, it again asked for another time extension, but that request was declined.

Nationwide has given the impression through the effort put in to find evidence at this late stage that it didn’t effectively investigate the complaint when Mrs A first raised it. It seems to me that it suddenly decided to make further effort and request more time to do it as it didn’t like the higher amount of compensation suggested in my provisional decision. That doesn’t feel like good customer service – or fair and reasonable considering Mrs A’s circumstances. It doesn’t follow for me that Nationwide now said it knew nothing of the problem until June 2021 when its previous position accepted Mrs A had made the initial request in 2020.

As it suggested it wasn’t previously aware of the privacy problem it was offered the opportunity to break that element of the complaint away from the complaint about the accounts and consider it separately. But after raising the point it then decided it was ok to deal with it as part of this complaint. I don’t feel it really has dealt with it. Although I take its point about what would normally happen it seems to have spent all the extra time it asked for trying to disprove what Mrs A said about calls and forms. It hasn’t provided any evidence from the branch managers calendar, or work record to show any evidence about the meeting to prove Mrs A was seen individually or to show there were no other customer discussions taking place with the branch manager at the same time. Again, I don’t think that feels fair or reasonable.

I think that’s all a little bit disappointing on the part of Nationwide. I accept evidence it has provided does suggest Mrs A didn’t perhaps chase up and provide forms for the transfer of the accounts as often as she originally suggested. But it does confirm she sent these in 2021 and nothing happened. It hasn’t spoken further of her being vulnerable or struggling. So, Nationwide would have been better advised to focus on its own failings I think rather than to

try and undermine Mrs A who it is accepted was suffering terribly with her health during this time.

I see no reason to change my provisional decision.

### **Putting things right**

Pay Mrs A £500 compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused.

### **My final decision**

I uphold this complaint.

I require Nationwide Building Society to:

- Pay Mrs A £500 compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs A to accept or reject my decision before 17 March 2025.

John Quinlan  
**Ombudsman**