

## **The complaint**

Mrs C complains that Nationwide Building Society (NWide) cannot trace her savings account.

## **What happened**

Mrs C had a savings account with the Dunfermline Building Society (DBS). DBS was acquired by NWide and DBS accounts were transferred into it in 2014.

Mrs C's account was opened in 1998 and she has a passbook which shows she built up savings of £1,192.96 by February 2002. She says the passbook was then left at her father's house and rediscovered in early 2023. She approached a branch of NWide and was told the account cannot be traced on their systems.

Mrs C says she is certain the money must lie somewhere within NWide. She says the money must be due to her. And she explained to us the circumstances as to why the money she saved also has an emotional connection for her. She says NWide cannot simply say its systems cannot find it.

NWide said to Mrs C (in April 2023) that her account couldn't be located. NWide said the account closed within DBS before it merged with NWide. After Mrs C complained to NWide, the firm sent Mrs C a final response in August 2024 which related to another customer's accounts. So Mrs C didn't recognise any of the information she was sent and was confused by that.

Mrs C brought her complaint to us. Our investigator contacted NWide to see what had happened. He didn't uphold Mrs C's complaint and said:

- NWide apologised that they'd sent wrong information to Mrs C in its final response – this related to another person's account. For that, NWide offered compensation of £100.
- The fact that a passbook exists doesn't mean the account is still open.
- Given the passage of time, and the requirement of firms to hold records for six years, the evidence is limited.
- NWide had identified an account in Mrs C's name in its records up to 2008.
- NWide checked its database using Mrs C's name, address, previous address and DOB, but found nothing.
- Our investigator said that the compensation offered by NWide for the errors the firm made in its final response was reasonable.

Mrs C didn't agree and asked that an ombudsman look at her complaint, and so it has come to me.

### **I reached a provisional decision which upheld Mrs C's complaint in part:**

I appreciate Mrs C's strength of feeling about her complaint, including the background to her savings account and what the money means to her.

In circumstances such as these, our role is to ensure that NWide have done all they reasonably can to try to locate Mrs C's account.

NWide showed us:

- The issue here is that NWide (and other firms) only retain records for six years. So – NWide's searches for this account are only valid from 2018 to 2024.
- Given this, NWide showed us they'd searched to see if an account has been held – the firm searched on Mrs C's DBS account number; Mrs C's maiden name; her father's address/postcode; and her DOB. And found nothing – which indicates that the account must have been closed between 2008 and 2018, given that records aren't held for that period.
- To be certain everything has been covered off, I asked NWide to search also on Mrs C's married name, her existing address, and on the alternative account number (as shown on the DBS transfer records). Nothing was found in the various searches.
- But what NWide's further research showed was:
  - o That Mrs C (in her maiden name) reported the passbook as lost in August 2002. The balance was £1,142.96 – so this was almost the same balance that Mrs C says was in the account at the time. I have seen the form signed by Mrs C.
  - o The balance was transferred to a new account number with DBS.
  - o Then, on 23 March 2009, DBS' records show the account was closed.
- So, it seems clear that this is what likely happened – Mrs C reported the passbook as lost in 2002; the balance was transferred to a new account with DBS, and Mrs C then closed the account in August 2009.

I'm satisfied that NWide have now given evidence to show what happened to Mrs C's money. Because this evidence is new to both our service and Mrs C – I am issuing this as a provisional decision to enable Mrs C to comment if she wishes. Separately, we will send to Mrs C the evidence I've referred to.

I agree that the compensation offered by NWide is a reasonable way to settle Mrs C's complaint. **(continued)**

*Responses to the provisional decision:*

We sent Mrs C the evidence I referred to in the provisional decision and she said she had no more evidence to offer. NWide agreed with what I said.

### **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.

Because Mrs C had no more evidence to offer; and NWide agreed with what I said – my final decision is unchanged from the provisional decision.

And so NWide must pay the compensation it proposed.

### **My final decision**

I uphold this complaint. Nationwide Building Society must:

- Pay compensation of £100 for distress and inconvenience.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs C to accept or reject my decision before 13 February 2025.

Martin Lord  
**Ombudsman**