

The complaint

Mr K complains that Nationwide Building Society unreasonably refused his request to withdraw cash after his card was retained by its ATM. And that it unfairly placed a VAB (verbal and aggressive behaviour) report against his record.

What happened

In July 2024 Mr K attempted to withdraw £250 cash from his account from an ATM at a Nationwide branch. The ATM retained his card so he went into the branch and asked the teller to provide him with the £250 cash. As he didn't have appropriate ID, he was told that he could only have £50. They offered to apply for a new card for him. The manager spoke to him and reiterated that without ID they couldn't allow Mr K to withdraw the full amount he'd requested.

Subsequently he was told by Nationwide that it had entered a VAB report against his record because it alleged that he'd shouted at and was verbally abusive towards members of staff and that he had hit the ATM. It explained that its policy was that retained cards couldn't be given back to the customer without ID. For the amount of cash he was requesting, it also required ID which Mr K was unable to produce. It explained that the VAB report would remain visible to members of staff for six months.

Mr K was unhappy with this as he didn't have any other ID apart from the retained card. He felt that there would have been no need for the manager to confront him had they been reasonable towards him. Even though the visible marker had expired he still thought it unfair that it remained on his record.

On referral to the Financial Ombudsman Service, our Investigator said that they didn't think that they could fairly ask Nationwide to remove the marker.

Mr K disagreed and the matter has been passed to me for an Ombudsman's consideration.

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.

Where the evidence is incomplete or contradictory, as some of it is here, I have to make my decision based on what I think is most likely to have happened. But it may be that I can't make a finding and if this is the case I shall say so. I have a duty to be impartial so I have to assess both parties' evidence fairly.

In respect of the retention of Mr K's card by the ATM, I accept that Mr K was not at fault here. However when cards are retained by an ATM, Nationwide has to follow a strict policy. This is that the card can't be released to the customer without photo ID. This is a fraud prevention policy and is applied to all customers, so I can't say that Mr K was unfairly singled out here.

As regards taking cash out in the branch, looking at Nationwide's online guidance it says:

"You can also withdraw cash in person at your local bank branch. Simply talk to a teller: Money can be withdrawn directly via a bank teller. You will need to provide proof of identity, such as your debit card and PIN, or a government-issued ID."

So whilst I appreciate that Mr K's card had been retained and he didn't have documentary ID, again Nationwide was following here its general policy. As a compromise it offered to provide Mr K with £50 cash. I don't think it would be reasonable to expect Nationwide to have provided Mr K with the full amount of the cash he wanted to withdraw, without the necessary ID. I'm sorry that this caused him inconvenience, but with the amount of fraud banks and building societies are subjected to, it's not unreasonable for it to be cautious. And again I don't think that Mr K was being singled out here.

As regards the VAB report, I should emphasise that I am considering here whether Nationwide's action was fair and reasonable, not judging Mr K's behaviour. Nationwide says that its decision to put the marker on Mr K's record was based on the fact that it says he raised his voice in the branch, was abusive towards members of staff and hit the ATM. As I've said my decision is based upon what I think is most likely to have happened. I note Mr K's reference to CCTV, but to my knowledge Nationwide doesn't retain CCTV recordings for more than one month.

As I think it's unlikely that Nationwide invented the report because Mr K made a complaint, as he has asserted, I don't think that it acted unreasonably in placing a marker on Mr K's record. That marker is no longer visible to members of staff and there's no reason for me to think that it would prejudice them against him. From the point of view of GDPR, I don't think there is an issue here. However if Mr K feels that there is, he is free to report the matter to the ICO (Information Commissioner's Office).

My final decision

I don't uphold the complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr K to accept or reject my decision before 22 April 2025.

Ray Lawley
Ombudsman