

The complaint

Mr B, a sole trader, is unhappy that National Westminster Bank Public Limited Company ('NatWest'), trading as Mettle, blocked his business account.

What happened

In February 2025, Mettle restricted Mr B's account. Mr B got in touch with it on 25 February 2025 and Mettle informed him that his account was blocked.

Mr B informed Mettle he was unhappy and the account block was having a significant impact on him. He said he couldn't make purchases for important items he required, and he wanted to know why Mettle had blocked the account. Mr B subsequently made a complaint to Mettle about the issue.

Mettle issued its final response to the complaint in February 2025 and explained it had controls in place to keep accounts secure. Mettle said this could lead to transactions being declined and a block being applied to an account, which was in line with the account terms and conditions. It added that Mr B would be contacted when there was a further update on the matter.

Mettle wrote to Mr B on 4 March 2025 to confirm his account was going to be closed in June 2025 and Mr B was able to withdraw his funds from the account, before it was to be closed. Mr B subsequently removed his funds from the account.

Mr B referred his complaint to our service. He explained he has autism and the block on his account caused him additional distress and anxiety. Mr B added that the account block had prevented him from making an investment and he wanted Mettle to compensate him for this.

One of our Investigators looked into things and didn't uphold the complaint. In summary, they said:

- Mettle's legal and regulatory obligations were in place to protect it and its customers from financial risk. This can mean that Mettle may decide to carry out an account review
- Having looked at the reasons why the account review was conducted, the account block was applied fairly to Mr B's account and the review was concluded quickly
- The terms of the account allowed Mettle to close an account with at least two months' notice. In Mr B's case, three months' notice was provided
- Mettle didn't need to provide the reason it had decided to close Mr B's account. Mr B had used the account to conduct cryptocurrency transactions, which was a breach of the account terms. So, Mettle was entitled to close the account and did so in line with the account terms

Mr B disagreed. He said Mettle's actions had caused him financial losses and Mettle should compensate him for them.

As no agreement could be reached, the matter has been passed to me to decide.

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.

It might be helpful if I begin by explaining that it is the role of the Financial Ombudsman Service to resolve individual complaints and to award redress where appropriate. We do not punish businesses or perform the role of the industry regulator, and it is not our role to comment on how businesses conduct their operations - that's the role of the regulator, the FCA.

Banks in the UK are strictly regulated and must take certain actions in order to meet their legal and regulatory obligations. They are also required to carry out ongoing monitoring of an existing business relationship. That sometimes means banks need to restrict, or in some cases go as far as closing, customers' accounts.

Mettle has provided me with information to show why it reviewed Mr B's account. Having carefully considered this, I'm satisfied that it acted in line with the account terms and obligations it must follow. And I consider Mettle's reasons for carrying out this review were fair and reasonable. I understand Mr B might want to know more about why this review was carried out, but Mettle is under no obligation to tell Mr B the reasons behind the account review and block.

I would add too that our rules allow us to receive evidence in confidence. We may treat evidence from banks as confidential for a number of reasons – for example, if it contains security information, or commercially sensitive information. Some of the information Mettle has provided is information I consider should be kept confidential.

I'm aware Mr B's complaint centres around the account block but I've also thought about Mettle's decision to close his account.

Mettle is entitled to close an account with Mr B just as Mr B is entitled to close his account with Mettle. But before Mettle closes an account, it must do so in a way which is fair and complies with the terms and conditions of the account.

I've looked at the terms and conditions and they state that Mettle could close the account by giving at least 60 days' notice. Mettle provided 90 days' notice to Mr B, so I'm satisfied that it complied with the account terms.

I've considered whether Mettle's reason for closing the account was fair. I acknowledge that Mettle is entitled to set its own policies and part of that will form its risk criteria. It's not my role to say what policies or risk appetite Mettle should have in place. I can however, while considering the circumstances of individual complaints, decide whether I think customers have been treated fairly.

Having carefully considered Mettle's reason for closing Mr B's account, I'm satisfied Mettle acted appropriately in the circumstances and closed the account in line with its terms and it did so fairly. I understand Mr B might like Mettle to provide the reasons for its decision to close his account. But Mettle isn't obliged to provide this information to Mr B.

I recognise Mr B feels strongly that Mettle should cover financial losses he says he incurred whilst his account was blocked, although Mr B hasn't provided evidence of all the losses he's mentioned. And I appreciate the abrupt restriction of the account would've caused Mr B stress and anxiety and it affected his wellbeing. But as I find Mettle fairly blocked the account and did so for a reasonable amount of time, I don't agree that Mettle should compensate Mr B for any losses he may have suffered or distress and inconvenience he experienced.

Having considered everything, I think Mettle have acted reasonably in the circumstances of the complaint - so I won't be directing Mettle to do anything to put things right.

My final decision

For the reasons above, I have decided not to uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B to accept or reject my decision before 7 January 2026.

Khadijah Nakhuda
Ombudsman