

The complaint

Mr M complained about the actions taken by Barclays Bank UK PLC when it declined to approve a payment he wanted to make and blocked his account until he satisfactorily completed security checks.

What happened

In January 2025, Mr M used Barclays' telephone banking service to arrange a five-figure transfer from his account to a third-party. Barclays automated fraud profiling system flagged the payment for further security checks.

Barclays contacted Mr M to confirm the payment was legitimate. Mr M was asked security questions which he was reluctant to answer.

There were a number of calls with Barclays' fraud team about this and due to continuing concerns, Barclays declined to approve the payment and blocked the account. Later the same day, Mr M called the fraud team again and after successfully completing security, the payment was authorised.

When Mr M complained to Barclays about the questions he'd been asked by the fraud team, Barclays didn't uphold his complaint. Barclays told Mr M that one of his payments was flagged for additional security checks as part of its fraud prevention process and it was required to carry out checks as part of its regulatory requirements. Barclays said it was sorry if Mr M felt the questions asked were intrusive.

Mr M brought his complaint to us. Our investigator thought that Barclays hadn't done anything wrong or acted unfairly or unreasonably.

Mr M disagreed with the investigator's view and asked for an ombudsman to review his complaint. He mainly said that he'd acted throughout in good faith and Barclays had called into question his integrity by questioning the payment. He felt that some of the questions he was asked were '*...superfluous and intrusive despite my explanations.*' He said: '*...I did not deserve to have all my accounts stopped*'. And he was concerned that the person for whose benefit he was making the payment had effectively had their right to privacy removed by Barclays' '*intrusive questioning*'.

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.

This includes listening to call recordings provided.

I can appreciate why this was such a distressing and frustrating experience for Mr M. And I'm sorry for how what happened made him feel. But I've decided not to uphold Mr M's complaint. I'll explain my reasons.

Barclays should carry out customers' lawful instructions but it must also balance this against its obligation to protect customers' money and prevent fraud.

Sometimes this can mean a financial business identifies and blocks legitimate payments that a customer wants to make. Understandably, this can cause distress and inconvenience to a customer – but it doesn't necessarily mean the financial business has acted incorrectly or unfairly.

Barclays is required to have processes in place to comply with legal and regulatory obligations aimed at keeping customers' money safe and preventing fraud. How Barclays chooses to operate and its internal processes come under the oversight of the regulator - the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA). So it's not up to me to tell Barclays how it should verify payments or what questions it can ask.

Barclays' fraud prevention system identified the need for a check before Mr M's payment could be authorised. In this situation, Barclays couldn't simply rely on Mr M providing his own assurances about the legitimacy of the payment - even when he explained its purpose. It makes no difference that the payment was being sent to another Barclays' account.

The relevant account terms and conditions, which Mr M would've agreed to in order to be able to use his account, allowed Barclays to take this action in these circumstances. Nonetheless, Barclays needed to act in a fair and reasonable way – and I've thought carefully about this.

The money was sent when Mr M answered Barclays' questions and Barclays was able to be satisfied that it could safely approve the payment. Mr M feels Barclays' process compromised the privacy of a third-party. But in my view Barclays had reasonable grounds to be concerned when Mr M was reluctant to engage with its fraud process and so failed to satisfactorily address its security concerns, especially bearing in mind this was a substantial payment. Banks can take action to protect themselves, as well as their customers and their money. And listening to the call recordings provided, I am satisfied that Barclays' questioning was pertinent and clearly directed towards establishing what it needed to know for the purposes of its security process.

The circumstances Mr M was describing had similarities to a well-known type of scam. A payment to a fraudster or scammer cannot necessarily be recovered. In these circumstances, I don't think it was unreasonable for Barclays to continue to decline the payment and temporarily block Mr M's account to protect the money in it.

Mr M has asked me to take into account the way Barclays responded to a Data Subject Access Request ('DSAR'). But this was not part of his original complaint that I am dealing with here so this is outside the scope of my decision. Mr M has mentioned that the DSAR aspect of his complaint is being looked at elsewhere so I don't need to say more about this.

In order to uphold Mr M's complaint I would have to find that Barclays made an error or acted unfairly or unreasonably. After taking into account everything that Mr M and Barclays have told me, I haven't seen enough to show that Barclays did anything wrong or that it treated Mr M in a way that wasn't fair and reasonable. So I can't uphold this complaint.

If I have not referred to everything mentioned during the course of the correspondence, that's because I have nothing useful to add to what the investigator has said already and I've concentrated on what seem to me to be the core issues I need to address when deciding the complaint. This reflects the fact that we provide an informal complaint handling service as a free alternative to the courts. I hope that setting things out as I've done helps explain how I've reached my conclusions.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr M to accept or reject my decision before 10 October 2025.

Susan Webb
Ombudsman