

The complaint

Mr O has complained that NATIONAL WESTMINSTER BANK PUBLIC LIMITED COMPANY (“NatWest”) failed to identify, intervene, and provide support in response to clear and escalating signs of gambling-related spending on his account.

Mr O says that this particularly became a problem between January 2025 and April 2025.

What happened

After Mr O raised a complaint with NatWest, via a representative, NatWest closed the complaint because the signature provided on the letter of authority didn’t match the one NatWest had on file.

Unhappy with this, Mr O referred his complaint to this service. After doing so, NatWest told this service that it had now looked into Mr O’s complaint but didn’t find any evidence of wrongdoing by NatWest.

After investigating the complaint further, one of our investigators assessed the complaint and they didn’t uphold the complaint.

As Mr O didn’t accept the investigator’s conclusions, the matter was referred for an ombudsman’s decision.

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.

Having considered everything, I don’t uphold this complaint. I will explain why.

Mr O has complained that NatWest didn’t intervene when he made many payments from his account for gambling transactions over a period of time, and particularly between January 2025 and April 2025. Mr O says that NatWest should’ve intervened or offered him support. However, the starting position here is that a Payment Service Provider such as NatWest is expected to process payments and withdrawals that a customer authorises it to make. This is in accordance with the Payment Services Regulations and the terms and conditions of the customer’s account.

NatWest has explained that it has a number of tools and support available if customers reach out for help or support with problem gambling. NatWest said it would generally offer such support if the customer got in contact to say they have a gambling problem or asks for support. I’m pleased to hear that, since Mr O referred his complaint to this service, NatWest has since reached out to Mr O and provided him with information about organisations that can support him.

After the investigator issued their assessment, Mr O responded to say he’d told NatWest that he had a gambling problem on previous occasions i.e. before he first raised his complaint.

This was the first time that Mr O had mentioned previously raising the matter with NatWest as it was not mentioned in his original complaint. Unfortunately, Mr O was unable to provide any evidence to show that he'd notified NatWest about this before (i.e. before he first raised this complaint). In response to this point, NatWest checked its records, but it couldn't find evidence of Mr O informing NatWest about his gambling problem prior to this complaint either. So based on the evidence I have, there is not enough here for me to conclude that NatWest had been told about Mr O's gambling problem before and therefore had failed to act.

Although I can't see that Mr O had told NatWest about his problem gambling or asked for support until he raised this complaint - Banks do need to have systems in place to identify whether their customers are having problems managing their spending. It is important to note that bank accounts are not, generally speaking, manually reviewed or manually monitored. So, for NatWest to have become aware that Mr O might be having a problem, this would usually only occur if it had been alerted to unusual spending on the account by its anti-fraud systems, or if it identified that the consumer was experiencing ongoing financial difficulties.

In the absence of Mr O telling NatWest about his problem gambling, this could be identified in one of the following ways:

- The transactions themselves being identified as possibly fraudulent.
- Having financial problems, e.g. if the account is frequently or persistently overdrawn.
- Unusual and/or out of character account activity.

Looking at Mr O's statements, I can see that the account was typically managed with a high frequency of payments regularly being made into and out of the account. It was not uncommon for there to have been a number of payments being made in a single day – sometimes to the same payee. So given how the account had been operated, I can't reasonably say that the gambling transactions (especially in the period of time specified by Mr O) were particularly unusual or out of character for how Mr O had generally operated the account before.

From looking through Mr O's statements, I have to say that it's not all that obvious that many of the transactions that Mr O would like NatWest to reimburse him for – were gambling related. Indeed, I note that some of the transactions were made to overseas companies. And I'm aware that some gambling companies are set up in this way so as to circumvent any UK specific gambling blocks that may apply. So, even if Mr O had a gambling block in place, I suspect that some of the transactions in question couldn't have been blocked anyway, as NatWest's systems would have had no way of knowing that the underlying services were gambling related.

I have considered whether NatWest should've intervened due to concerns about fraud or scams. But Mr O had made many payments to various different entities – some of which it is not even clear if the company is linked to gambling or not. So, based on the history of the account, overall there seemed to be little reason for NatWest to suspect that payments being made from the account were unusual or linked to fraud or scams.

There was a particularly high frequency of payments being made from the account around 22 April 2025 and 28 April 2025. Due to the excessive amounts spent on those specific days, arguably this should've prompted NatWest to intervene, to check that they were not linked to fraud or scams. But even if NatWest had intervened on those particular days, given Mr O's compulsion to gamble, I don't find it likely that he would've said anything to NatWest that would've caused it to block the payments. After all, although there was a large amount of transactions made, they were all to a company that Mr O had made payments to before.

And as there is nothing to suggest the payments were linked to a scam, I don't think there was anything that would've prompted NatWest to block those payments.

Looking at statements covering a large part of 2025, it does appear that Mr O was able to manage the account – at least to the extent that he was able to mask any possibly financial difficulties. He regularly credited money into the account to cover his expenditure. And whenever the account balance dropped to near or below zero, Mr O regularly topped it back up again – sometimes with a balance in the thousands of pounds. And Mr O was regularly transferring money to and from the account with another account in his name.

I appreciate that Mr O running the account 'well' may not have been an accurate reflection of his actual financial position. For example, Mr O has said he had to borrow large amounts of money from a number of other sources to maintain such high levels of gambling and to have kept the account in a credit balance. But from NatWest's perspective - based on how he operated the account in question and as Mr O was able to avoid the account from remaining overdrawn for any extended periods of time - there was little to indicate that Mr O was experiencing financial difficulties, particularly between January and April 2025. So I don't think there was anything, in terms of how Mr O operated the account, that ought to have prompted NatWest's systems to have identified that Mr O was possibly experiencing financial difficulties.

Because of this, I'm unable to say that NatWest has acted unfairly or unreasonably because it didn't intervene in Mr O's spending from his account.

I'm sorry to hear about the devastating impact Mr O's gambling problem has clearly had on him. And I wish Mr O all the best in his recovery. But, taking everything into account, I don't think that NatWest can reasonably be held responsible for the gambling losses that Mr O incurred here.

My final decision

Because of the reasons given above, I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr O to accept or reject my decision before 22 May 2026.

Thomas White
Ombudsman