

## **The complaint**

Mr S complains that Bank of Scotland Plc trading as Halifax failed to intervene and support him when he experienced a period of excessive spending on his account.

## **What happened**

Mr S holds a Halifax account.

Between 27 October and 5 November 2025, over a period of three non-consecutive days, Mr S spent around £2,500 on gambling transactions. He says these were the first gambling transactions he'd ever made.

Mr S complained to Halifax. He felt it should have recognised his vulnerability and stepped in to support him without waiting for any formal disclosure from him.

Halifax didn't think it had done anything wrong. It explained to Mr S that it can only stop payments in very specific circumstances. Those include where there are specific restrictions in place such as a gambling block; where it had previously been made aware of particular support needs, or where there are clear signs of fraudulent or suspicious activity.

It said that at the time of the transactions, there were no indicators on Mr S' account to suggest he needed support and neither were there any signs of fraud. Therefore, the payments were processed as authorised transactions in line with Halifax's usual procedures. Further, it said that as the transactions were largely made by faster payments, they were processed almost immediately and were authorised.

Halifax set out some of the practical support it could offer Mr S if necessary. The options included the ability to deregister from online banking if necessary, so Mr S could no longer make faster payments. Or he could delete the names of companies he no longer wanted to use. Further, it said Mr S could place restrictions on his account to stop him making payments to the same companies again. Or, via its banking app, he could set a monthly limit for gambling transactions.

Mr S didn't accept Halifax's response, so he complained to the Financial Ombudsman Service. His complaint was assigned to one of our Investigators to consider. Whilst the Investigator empathised with Mr S' position, she didn't think Halifax had done anything wrong or had treated Mr S unfairly.

Mr S didn't agree and made various comments in response. Those included that his complaint wasn't simply about declared vulnerability, but about foreseeable harm particularly given the behavioural pattern he'd demonstrated. He remained of the opinion that Halifax should have stepped in to help him.

Mr S asked an Ombudsman to consider his complaint afresh. It's been passed to me to determine.

## **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 done so, I have the utmost empathy for the position Mr S finds himself in. I'm grateful to him for his honest account when describing the impact these events have had on him.

Although I've considered everything Mr S has said very carefully, I won't comment on each individual point made. Instead, I'll focus on those that I believe go to the heart of Mr S' complaint and the reasons for my decision.

I'll explain that in broad terms, the starting position in law is that a bank is expected to process payments and withdrawals that a customer authorises, in accordance with the Payment Services Regulations and the terms and conditions of the customer's account.

Banks aren't generally expected to monitor accounts on a day to day basis. That means they wouldn't be expected to routinely look out for signs of gambling. I think that's an important point here. Mr S acknowledges that Halifax wasn't aware of any particular vulnerabilities until he contacted it around 5 November 2025 – by which time the gambling activity he's highlighted had stopped. But he's clearly of the opinion that Halifax should have identified foreseeable harm of its own accord, given the behavioural pattern he displayed. And he clearly thinks that if Halifax had stepped in, it would have made a difference. At the very least he thinks Halifax should have instigated a welfare check with him and restricted the payments pending further review.

I thought about Mr S' arguments carefully. According to his statements, he was largely making his gambling transactions via faster payment. I note Halifax's point that faster payments are processed almost immediately. I understand that there are certain circumstances in which a bank *may* delay a payment – for instance if it needs to carry out anti-fraud or some other form of check. But bearing in mind what I said above about banks not being expected to routinely monitor accounts, before I could reasonably say that Halifax should have intervened in the way Mr S thinks, I'd need to be satisfied there were clear signs and reasons for doing so. On balance, having given this matter very careful thought, I'm not persuaded there were.

Mr S' statements show that the gambling activity he's highlighted happened over three non-consecutive days within an overall period of about ten days between 27 October 2025 and 5 November 2025. As Mr S has himself indicated, according to the specific statements I've seen, there's no suggestion of similar activity before 27 October 2025 or after 5 November 2025. So, I accept, in that sense, it doesn't appear 'typical' of the activity on Mr S' account. But that alone doesn't mean it was so out of the ordinary that Halifax ought to have stepped in. I say that for a few reasons.

First, there were no obvious signs of stress on the account. For instance, there's no evidence of Mr S regularly using an unplanned overdraft or of regular payments and commitments being missed. These might be the type of situations where a business like Halifax might be expected to offer some level of support. But the evidence shows that Mr S' account was largely in credit – even if the balance was relatively small until additional funds went into it. Here, I'd likely only expect Halifax to examine Mr S' payments in more detail if it suspected fraud or if Mr S was showing clear and prolonged signs of financial difficulty. And I haven't seen any evidence to suggest Halifax should have deemed the gambling transactions to relate to fraud nor anything to show Mr S was struggling to fund the transactions. So, in these circumstances it seems unlikely Halifax would have had a reason to examine the payments in detail.

It's also apparent that Mr S regularly used his own savings to top up his account to help fund the gambling activity. And there's evidence of other credits too, some of which appear to be winnings from gambling. Mr S feels the fact he was regularly transferring funds from his savings account in itself should have been a trigger for Halifax to step in. But I think this would have required Halifax to be proactively monitoring Mr S' account. And for reasons I

gave earlier, I'm not persuaded it's reasonable to expect Halifax to monitor the account in the manner in which Mr S might think. So, I don't think it's reasonable to expect Halifax to have acted because Mr S was topping up his account from his savings.

Again, as I touched on above, I think it's important to note these payments were made in a very short space of time - just over a week in total. And account holders are entitled to spend their money as they see fit. Without an account showing signs of financial difficulty or evidence of fraudulent activity or a potential scam, it is difficult to expect a business to monitor seemingly legitimate account activity to the degree that it could step in and ask questions - particularly in such a small window.

I've also noted Mr S' suggestion that some form of intervention would have had a positive impact. But I think that again assumes there would have been proactive monitoring on Halifax's part in order for it to identify that intervention might be needed. I've already said why I'm not persuaded that could reasonably have been expected here. And even if there had been intervention, that it would have been early enough to have made a difference. Given the short period over which the gambling happened, realistically, I think there was little opportunity for Halifax to help or support in the way Mr S has suggested whilst the gambling was taking place.

In summary, whilst I can entirely understand Mr S' concern, I'm not persuaded that his situation and the losses he's suffered arose as a result of something that Halifax did wrong or because it otherwise treated Mr S unfairly. I'm satisfied that once it became aware of the issue, Halifax did the right thing by telling Mr S of the support and tools available to help him and that it updated its system to note Mr S' vulnerabilities. I'm satisfied those were reasonable things to do in the circumstances.

I recognise that this will likely come as very disappointing news for Mr S, but I won't be directing Halifax to do anything else here.

### **My final decision**

I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 30 April 2026.

Amanda Scott  
**Ombudsman**