

complaint

Mr and Mrs S complain that HSBC Bank Plc incorrectly debited £650 from their account twice in October 2017. Mr and Mrs S also complain about the costs they incurred as a result of resolving the issue.

Mr and Mrs S are represented by Mrs S' father in bringing their complaint.

background

Mr and Mrs S live abroad. Following a visit to a branch, while in the UK in October 2017, HSBC incorrectly debited two payments for £650 from Mr and Mrs S' account. HSBC has ultimately said the error was caused because the cheque reference number was incorrectly keyed by the branch.

But the problem wasn't initially identified by HSBC. It came to light when Mr and Mrs S looked at their statement and contacted the bank as they didn't recall issuing two cheques for £650. HSBC went on to send copies of the cheque.

In January 2018 Mr S flew to the UK and visited the branch to find out what'd happened. The problem with how the cheque had been processed was then identified and HSBC refunded £650. HSBC also took steps to refund interest Mr and Mrs S had paid as a result of its error.

Mr and Mrs S complained to HSBC and it responded several times. Mrs S' father represented them during this process. HSBC's final response accepted it'd made a mistake and offered £250 for the trouble and upset caused. But Mr S wanted HSBC to cover the cost of having to fly to the UK. HSBC didn't agree to that.

As Mr and Mrs S remained unhappy with how HSBC had handled their complaint it was referred to this service and an adjudicator looked at what'd happened. The adjudicator agreed HSBC had made mistakes and that the service Mr and Mrs S received was poor. But he felt its offer of £250 was fair and didn't recommend HSBC cover the costs of visiting the UK.

As Mr and Mrs S didn't agree with the adjudicator's view the complaint's been passed to me to make a decision.

my findings

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

The circumstances of this complaint have been set out in detail by Mrs S' father and the adjudicator in their correspondence. I hope Mr and Mrs S won't take it as a discourtesy that I've not repeated them in detail again here. From what I've seen, there's no debate about what happened – HSBC accept it made a mistake by debiting Mr and Mrs S' account twice – so I've focused on whether what it's offered to resolve the complaint is fair.

But in brief, like the adjudicator, I agree that HSBC made a mistake in branch. And I agree HSBC should've identified that problem and taken steps to sort it out before Mr and Mrs S

got in touch. So I think it's clear the service Mr and Mrs S received was poor and it's possible that if they hadn't noticed the additional debit they could've lost out.

However, we don't look at what might've happened when assessing complaints. We take into account what did happen. And in this case Mr and Mrs S contacted HSBC about a month later and began asking questions. This led to HSBC sending out information to Mr and Mrs S which showed something had gone wrong.

Once HSBC refunded the £650 and covered off the additional interest Mr and Mrs S were charged there wasn't a financial loss to the account. But I've thought carefully about whether Mr S' costs for visiting the UK should be covered by HSBC.

Having done so, I've reached the same conclusion as the adjudicator – I'm not persuaded it'd be fair to tell HSBC to pay these costs. I appreciate how important this was to Mr and Mrs S but I think they could've dealt with the situation while abroad.

Mrs S' father says HSBC should've done more in November and December 2017 when Mr and Mrs S got in touch with HSBC and I agree with his view. But I've not found the only option remaining to them was to fly to the UK and deal with matters in person. As a result, I've not been persuaded that telling HSBC to cover those costs would be fair.

HSBC's offered to £250 to resolve what happened. While I understand Mr and Mrs S' strength of feeling on this point, I think the offer is fair and reasonable in all the circumstances of this complaint and it's very much in line with what I'd have told HSBC to pay had no offer been made.

Mrs S' father used to work for HSBC and has raised concerns over the business practices that have been highlighted during this complaint. But we don't set the rules and can't tell businesses how to operate, that's the role of the Financial Conduct Authority, the regulator.

We're an informal dispute resolution service. If we think a business has made a mistake we'll tell it how to put things right. And if we think a business has dealt with a complaint fairly we'll explain that to the consumer.

As I've said above, I've taken on board all of Mr and Mrs S' comments as well as everything Mrs S' father has said. Having done so, I'm satisfied the £250 HSBC has paid in addition to the interest refund is fair so I'm not telling it to do anything further.

my final decision

My decision is that I don't uphold this complaint beyond what HSBC Bank Plc's already paid. Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr and Mrs S to accept or reject my decision before 6 January 2019.

Marco Manente
ombudsman