

The complaint

Mr O complains that Metro Bank PLC rejected and returned a payment he attempted to make. He'd like the payment re-sent and compensation.

What happened

On 17 December 2022 Mr O made a payment for one euro to a Cuban supporting charity.

However, on 20 December 2022 Metro asked Mr O to contact them about the payment

Mr O argues that he wasn't able to speak with Metro, and they failed to contact him to discuss it.

On 29 December 2022 the payment was returned to Mr O's account.

Mr O complained to Metro about the payment being returned – but the bank advised him they'd acted fairly as the payment was outside of their risk appetite.

Mr O wasn't happy with their response and brought his complaint to our service. He highlighted that there weren't any international sanctions against Cuba. So questioned why the payment wasn't allowed to go through. Mr O advised he was distressed and frustrated by their actions, he wants the payment to be re-sent and to send more funds to support Cubans.

Mr O brought his complaint to our service.

One of our adjudicators looked into his complaint but didn't uphold it – they thought Metro acted fairly in blocking the payment as it was outside of their risk appetite.

Mr O didn't agree and asked for an ombudsman to review it. So it's 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.

Metro are strictly regulated and must take certain actions in order to meet their legal and regulatory obligations.

Metro have advised our service that the payment was rejected and returned due to their legal responsibilities and external sanctions policies. Both of which are available on their website.

I've reviewed both policies. I can see that the external sanctions policy notes Cuba as a high risk country with which Metro won't transact.

The specific section says:

'To manage and mitigate the risk of breaching economic sanctions laws Metro Bank is committed to taking the following action

Not conducting business directly or indirectly with or for the ultimate benefit of, countries subject to sanctions, or countries that are recognised by Metro Bank (based on guidance from relevant external organisations, for example, the Financial Action Task Force or the European Union) as presenting a high risk of financial crime. Such countries, which may be subject to change, currently include ...'

- *Cuba*

I've also considered the terms and conditions of Mr O's account and the relevant sections. The key section here is *4.1.11 When we may refuse to make a payment*

'We may refuse to make a payment or suspend or stop your use of a payment service ...'

I'm satisfied that Metro followed the terms and conditions of Mr O's account in refusing to make the payment, and complied with their external sanctions policy. It follows I think they acted fairly and reasonably in refusing to make the payment sent by Mr O.

I know that Mr O will be disappointed by this, but I won't be asking Metro to do anything further here.

My final decision

My final decision is 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 28 February 2024.

Jeff Burch
Ombudsman