

The complaint

Mr N complains National Westminster Bank Plc (NatWest) provided poor customer service when he visited the branch to make a cash withdrawal.

What happened

Mr N says he visited a branch of NatWest in late May 2023 to make a cash withdrawal of £5,850. Mr N says after initially agreeing to his request the member of staff then referred the matter to another staff member who refused the cash withdrawal. Mr N says although NatWest allowed him to withdraw £4,950 after asking him various questions, he felt that as it was his money he should be able to complete the withdrawal, as he'd explained it was for personal use.

Mr N was unhappy with the service he received at the branch and NatWest wasted his time causing him stress.

NatWest says the first cashier needed to refer the large cash withdrawal to another colleague, who under its standard procedures needed to establish the purpose of the withdrawal. NatWest says as the member of staff wasn't satisfied with the reason for the withdrawal Mr N provided, under its standard process for customer protection checks it could only allow a cash withdrawal of £4,950. NatWest explained these checks are in place to protect its customers from fraud and scams and although this may have inconvenienced Mr N, it had done nothing wrong.

Mr N wasn't happy with NatWest's response and referred the matter to this service.

The investigator looked at all the available information but didn't uphold the complaint. The investigator felt NatWest hadn't acted unreasonably when it asked Mr N for further details regarding the cash withdrawal, as this was part of its process for large cash withdrawals, and these were in place to protect customers from potential fraud and scams.

The investigator says NatWest has an obligation to protect its customers money and he didn't feel it had done anything wrong by refusing the full cash withdrawal when Mr N refused to elaborate further on the purpose of the withdrawal.

Mr N didn't agree with the investigator's view and asked for the matter to be referred to an ombudsman for a final 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 done so, I won't be upholding this complaint and I will explain how I have come to my decision.

I can understand it would have been frustrating for Mr N to visit a NatWest branch to withdraw cash, only to be told he couldn't withdraw the full amount he requested. When

looking at this complaint I will consider if NatWest acted unreasonably when it refused to allow Mr N to make a full cash withdrawal of £5,850. I can see Mr N has also requested call recordings from NatWest, but these haven't been forthcoming, so the investigator has directed Mr N where to separately lodge a complaint about this specific issue.

The main issue that Mr N has raised with this service concerns the problems he faced when he visited a NatWest branch to make a cash withdrawal of £5,850. Mr N says the initial member of staff agreed to the withdrawal and then on reference to another member of the branch staff this was refused, and he was subjected to questions about the purpose of the cash withdrawal. Mr N feels he explained this was for personal use and that should suffice.

While I understand the points Mr N makes here, I'm not fully persuaded by his argument. I say this because although I do understand having to go through various questions about a cash withdrawal may seem unnecessary to him, and would result in some inconvenience, banks like NatWest are obliged to ensure it takes necessary steps to protect its customers from potential fraud and scams.

NatWest have provided this service with its internal process for large cash withdrawals for sums over £5,000. As NatWest previously explained to Mr N, it would generally need 24 hours' notice to be given and certain questions would need to be raised with the customer surrounding the transaction, to satisfy itself as to the authenticity of the transaction.

I should say that it's not my role to tell NatWest what systems and processes it must have in place, but I would expect for a cash transaction of this amount to be subject to a reasonable level of questioning, to establish its authenticity and I'm satisfied that's what happened here. After all, while Mr N may not agree, I'm satisfied these questions raised by the cashier were asked to safeguard his bank account against any potential scam or fraud, so that is why even though the first cashier may initially have agreed to the withdrawal, after raising this with a colleague, that member of staff correctly carried out its standard customer protection checks.

So as I said earlier, while Mr N may have suffered some inconvenience here, I'm satisfied NatWest acted reasonably asking the questions it did, and when Mr N refused to elaborate further it wasn't unreasonable for it to limit the amount of the cash withdrawal in line with its customer protection check process.

I can see NatWest allowed Mr N to withdraw £4,950 under the branch managers discretion for amounts under £5,000 and I am satisfied that was a reasonable action for it to have taken here in the circumstances. Mr N then visited the branch again the next day to withdraw the remaining amount of cash which was approved.

While Mr N will be disappointed with my decision, I won't be asking anymore of NatWest.

My final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr N to accept or reject my decision before 13 March 2024.

Barry White
Ombudsman