

## **The complaint**

Mr F complaint relates to Citibank UK Limited's decision to close his US dollar account and its level of customer service in assisting him in transferring the balance from the account.

## **What happened**

Citibank wrote to Mr F in May 2023 to tell him that following a review of its business it would be closing his US Dollar account in July. Mr F didn't think this was fair. He'd held the account for a number of years and couldn't see any alternative for keeping the account or guidance on how to get his money out and close it.

Mr F says he spent several hours online trawling through his account before realising he'd have to transfer the funds out online. But when he attempted this, he was blocked from accessing the account, forcing him to go through security.

Mr F had a query about whether he should transfer the money out in US Dollars or in Sterling as it would be going to his main bank account in the UK. He asked Citibank about this and the payment process but says the service he received resulted in several calls, taking up even more of his time as he was transferred between departments, repeating security verification. He says the sound quality of the calls was poor so he couldn't hear what was being said. One of the calls also got disconnected. Eventually after having spent several hours dealing with the issue, he gave up and called his other bank. He says that it answered his question in one short call.

Mr F transferred his funds out. But he raised a complaint, as he thought Citibank's customer service had been woefully poor and the situation was exacerbated because this had begun due its decision to close the account. He wanted Citibank to listen to his feedback, take on board his comments and improve its service.

Citibank investigated and issued a final response. In summary, it didn't think it had done anything wrong. It accepted a block had been placed on the account initially, but this was for a legitimate fraud check to ensure it was an instruction from its genuine customer. It felt it had followed its processes. Mr F didn't agree so he referred matters to us.

When the complaint was referred to us, Citibank looked at the case again and offered Mr F £100, accepting there had been some problems in relation to its customer service in helping with the transfer of his funds, highlighting the call quality. We put the offer to Mr F, but he rejected it.

One of our investigators looked into the case further and recommended that the complaint be upheld in part. She was satisfied Citibank was entitled to make the decision to close the account and it had given the appropriate amount of notice. However, she felt there were shortcomings in the level of service that had been provided when Mr F had contacted it for help in transferring his balance out. She suggested Citibank increase its offer of compensation to £175 to reflect the actual impact this had had on him.

Citibank disagreed. While it accepted there was a poor connection in the calls. It said it had

called Mr F back, but he'd decided not to avail himself of its help. In the circumstances, it considered its offer of £100 fair. The investigator didn't change her mind, noting the account had remained blocked after Mr F had already cleared security.

Both Citibank and Mr F requested a decision from an ombudsman.

Mr F said this was never about the money but Citibank's response. He considered it was making excuses when it needed to listen and take steps to improve, for example, include proper instructions for customers when closing accounts, improve the quality of its phone lines and train staff to deal with queries. He added that he had been taken aback that its response to his complaint was final, with no opportunity to discuss things further.

### **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.

#### *Account closure*

On the first part of the complaint, I'm satisfied Citibank was entitled, by the terms and conditions of the account, to close it in the manner that it did. I have gone on to consider whether it was unfair and unreasonable for it to do so but I haven't found any unfairness. This was a commercial decision it took as a business and it gave the required amount of notice, to allow Mr F to make alternative arrangements.

#### *Transfer of funds*

The communication Mr F received told him that he needed to transfer his account balance out. It gave him a date by which to do this. It went on to say that if Mr F had any difficulties, he could contact it by phone. Given, Mr F had a currency account, I can understand why he'd have some questions about how to retrieve that money into his UK account and I think it would have been helpful for Citibank to have included some additional information about that in the communication. Also, for Citibank staff to have then been armed with the relevant details if they got any queries about this. I've listened to the calls provided, and it's disappointing the information wasn't readily available and agents were unsure and struggled. The bank was the expert here and so talking the customer through the type of payment should have been straight forward.

I do appreciate why Citibank flagged the first attempt to transfer the funds. Because it needed to check this was a transfer from its genuine customer. But once Mr F spoke with it and verified himself, there shouldn't have been any further issues around verification. However, this wasn't the case and so Mr F was left feeling annoyed and inconvenienced in having to call back and go through things again.

Citibank's position is that the amount it offered is fair given what happened and because it did call Mr F back when the last call disconnected, and it's also looked at our guidance on awards. But I don't agree with its analysis. I've thought about the specific impact of the service on Mr F. This issue was already unnecessarily drawn out as outlined above. The level of service compounded his frustration. Mr F was losing his patience having tried very hard to resolve the transfer. Weighing everything up, I find that £175 fairly reflects the distress and inconvenience caused and Citibank should pay this.

Finally, I do understand Mr F was unhappy the finality of the response to his complaint. I think this was mostly because Citibank didn't initially accept it had caused Mr F any difficulty. However, in terms of marking it as 'final' that was so he could refer his complaint to our

service. But I understand his sentiments given his overall experience.

### **My final decision**

My final decision is that Citibank UK Limited should pay Mr F £175.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr F to accept or reject my decision before 26 February 2024.

Sarita Taylor  
**Ombudsman**