

The complaint

Mr A complains about the service he received from Handelsbanken plc trading as Handelsbanken when he enquired about opening an account.

What happened

Mr A contacted Handelsbanken with a view to opening an account. He had some discussions with its staff about the process, but no account was opened. Mr A says that Handelsbanken's approach towards him during these interactions wasn't transparent, open or fair. He says it gave him contradictory information which made him feel he couldn't trust it with his banking affairs. He says its business model isn't clear and isn't common within the banking industry in the UK. He raised a complaint with Handelsbanken but says this wasn't logged until he contacted its Chief Executive Officer.

Handelsbanken responded to the complaint soon afterwards. It didn't uphold it. Handelsbanken said it had given Mr A relevant information about opening an account and that its staff had acted in a professional manner. But Mr A remained unhappy about the situation and came to this service seeking compensation.

Our Investigator didn't think Handelsbanken had done anything wrong. But Mr A didn't agree and asked for the complaint to be reviewed by an Ombudsman.

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.

Where the evidence is incomplete or inconclusive, as some of it is here, I reach my decision on the balance of probabilities – that is, what I consider is most likely to have happened, in light of the evidence that is available and the wider surrounding circumstances.

I realise Mr A feels strongly about this complaint and has been dealing with difficult personal circumstances, so I'm sorry to disappoint him. But I'm not going to ask Handelsbanken to do anything here. I'll explain why.

Handelsbanken has extensive obligations under the Proceeds of Crime Act, Money Laundering Regulations and related legislation. This legislation, together with other regulations and guidance, includes rules about customer identification and due diligence. Handelsbanken is required to have systems and processes in place to comply with these rules. It's not the role of this service to tell businesses how they should meet these obligations and they have some discretion as to how they apply the regulatory requirements. So, it's for Handelsbanken to decide exactly what policies and procedures it puts in place. However, I think its approach was reasonable here and it made its requirements clear to Mr A. So, I don't think it acted unfairly in this respect.

Mr A says that Handelsbanken's business model isn't clear and its approach seems to be different from other banks. It's not the role of this service to tell businesses how to operate.

Our role is to resolve complaints and to decide them by reference to what is fair and reasonable in all the circumstances. Mr A says he felt he couldn't trust Handelsbanken with his banking affairs. That is of course his decision. But I haven't seen anything untoward in Handelsbanken's approach and I don't think it did anything wrong here. I haven't seen anything which makes me think Handelsbanken treated Mr A unfairly.

I understand that Mr A is unhappy about an account management fee which Handelsbanken said it would charge. I don't think Handelsbanken acted unreasonably in this respect and I'm satisfied it made Mr A aware of this charge before he opened an account (which he never did).

Finally, Mr A says that the branch staff didn't log his complaint. He says that Handelsbanken only responded after he contacted the Chief Executive Officer. I'm satisfied that the branch staff acknowledged Mr A's request to log a complaint. They told him they would need his postal address in order to do this. I think that was reasonable. I can't see that Mr A provided this. But, around two days later, he sent an email to the Chief Executive Officer. That was acknowledged by email the next day and a complaint was logged. Handelsbanken sent its final response to Mr A, also by email, within a fortnight. I think that was a fair approach.

Overall, I don't think Handelsbanken acted unfairly or unreasonably here. So I'm not going to ask it to do anything.

My final decision

For the reasons above, I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr A to accept or reject my decision before 21 December 2023.

Katy Kidd
Ombudsman