

The complaint

Mr J complains that HSBC UK Bank Plc trading as first direct wouldn't allow him to withdraw a significant amount of cash from a branch, despite calling ahead to arrange this.

What happened

Mr J called first direct on 3 February 2023 and asked to make a significant cash withdrawal from his account. First direct said it wasn't prepared to do and Mr J complained. First direct didn't uphold the complaint and said it didn't authorise this withdrawal as it was concerned about the reasons Mr J provided for withdrawing a considerable sum when other alternative payment methods could be used.

Mr J brought his complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service and one of our Investigators looked into things. The Investigator didn't think first direct had treated Mr J unfairly in the circumstances of this case. Mr J asked that an Ombudsman decides the complaint.

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.

I understand that Mr J was disappointed that first direct decided not to authorise the cash withdrawal on this occasion, but for very much the same reasons as the Investigator I don't think first direct treated Mr J unfairly. I will now explain why.

Mr J believes that his account offers a free counter service and that it isn't convenient or cost effective for him to transfer funds to another bank or financial services business as this would involve exchange rate costs and other fees. I have some empathy with Mr J here, but I'm satisfied that first direct is entitled to decline a request for a cash withdrawal in certain circumstances. In this case first direct made it clear to Mr J that it had security concerns about him carrying such a significant amount of cash to another country. First direct also explained to Mr J that there were alternative options available to him.

First direct has in place a protocol for dealing with request such as the request Mr J made. I wouldn't expect first direct to publish the protocols it uses, nor would I expect it to tell customers what the protocols are. Doing this would in itself leave first direct open to fraudulent activity on accounts. I can't tell first direct what it must do or what its protocols should be – that's a matter for first direct - but I can consider whether first direct treated Mr J unfairly in this case. In Mr J's case, first direct made it clear that a request for a cash withdrawal would be considered at any time but that a decision whether to authorise a cash withdrawal is based on the information Mr J disclosed at the time. I don't think this is unfair as first direct would be able to assess the risk to Mr J and itself at the time of a request.

For the avoidance of any doubt, I've listened to the telephone call between Mr J and first direct on 3 February. First direct wasn't prepared to authorise a withdrawal for the amount Mr J requested and it provided the reasons in this call. First direct also suggested alternative

options to Mr J, but Mr J didn't feel these were suitable because of potential costs. In the telephone call First direct made it reasonably clear to Mr J that its decision was based on the information he'd provided and that it wouldn't be prepared to authorise any other amount to be withdrawn in cash at that time. Mr J has since commented that first direct has declined other withdrawal requests from him. My decision only addresses the complaint Mr J made about the withdrawal attempt on 3 February, but it seems more likely than not that first direct would have followed the protocols it has in place – as it has in this case. Mr J says he wants to make many cash withdrawals like this one in the future. That may be the case, but first direct is more likely than not going to follow the protocols it has in place at the time. These may be different to other banks, but that is a matter for first direct.

Taking all of the above into account I'm satisfied that first direct followed the protocols it has in place for cash withdrawals and that it hasn't treated Mr J unfairly.

My final decision

I've decided not to uphold Mr J's complaint against HSBC UK Bank Plc trading as first direct.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr J to accept or reject my decision before 22 January 2024.

Paul Lawton
Ombudsman