

## **The complaint**

Ms B complains that AIB Group (UK) Plc has not supported her through difficulties she has faced with her bank account and cards.

## **What happened**

Ms B said she has experienced ongoing issues with her AIB current account, starting when her credit card was stopped due to a suspect transaction. She said she was on holiday when the bank queried this, and she didn't receive its message/call and her card was cancelled.

Ms B used an alternative card and got a new card when she got home. She was unaware a security watch was on her card until a transaction was blocked and this was more expensive the next day. Ms B also lost online access as she hadn't logged on for 90 days and restoring this took time and effort, particularly as AIB called her outside of the times she had specified, and its online team didn't contact her. Ms B said that AIB hadn't addressed these issues.

Ms B said her new card was rejected for travel and other transactions. She doesn't know why these attempted transactions don't show in AIB's records, but thought there would be a record of her calls about this. She said AIB won't acknowledge the issue and says she can order a new card, but she's reluctant to do so as this may lead to further problems.

Ms B said AIB doesn't appear to have any concern for personal banking, and doesn't take responsibility for customers' problems. She wants a better service and compensation for her time dealing with the issues and her stress and embarrassment. She said she hadn't received compensation although it was offered, as her issues hadn't been resolved.

AIB responded to Ms B's complaint by saying the security watch was put on her account to ensure its safety by ensuring that she had authenticated payments from her account. AIB apologised for the inconvenience of her blocked transaction and said she had missed its text requesting confirmation of the payment. AIB said it hadn't identified any issue with Ms B's new card and requested her to call to discuss account problems. AIB apologised for writing to Ms B in the wrong name and offered her £50 compensation for her inconvenience.

Ms B wasn't satisfied with AIB's response and referred her complaint to our service. She included details of two transactions to show they were rejected, one of which stated, 'Credit card not in good standing'.

Our investigator didn't recommend the complaint be upheld. She said AIB's records show the blocks applied, but not any other rejected transactions or attempted purchases. She said AIB's 'Stronger Customer Authentication' has also been adopted by other banks to adhere to their regulatory obligations and protect bank accounts. The investigator said AIB could have provided a better service to Ms B when she tried to resolve her issue. But she thought the compensation of £50 is in line with what we would suggest in these circumstances.

Ms B disagreed with the investigator and requested an ombudsman review her complaint. She understood her card had to be stopped when she couldn't verify a transaction, but thought a card on her joint account would allow her to access cash. She said AIB advised

her she'd put a block on the card herself, but this was incorrect as this would have required access to online banking which would have prevented it from being blocked for non-use.

Ms B said phone contact could only be made Monday to Friday during working hours. She gave AIB the specific times she could be contacted but was called outside of this time, and eventually got this sorted by obtaining permission to take a call during work hours.

### **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.

Ms B complains about problems with her AIB account, namely blocked transactions, and loss of access to online banking and difficulties resolving this with AIB's customer service.

I've looked carefully at the issues Ms B has raised and the record of communications between the parties to see if AIB has acted in accordance with the terms and conditions of her account and to see if it has treated her fairly.

The first difficulty that Ms B faced was when her card was blocked following a transaction. It appears that AIB deemed the transaction to be potentially suspicious and blocked it pending confirmation from Ms B, however Ms B doesn't appear to have received AIB's text message about the transaction and when she didn't respond AIB cancelled her card. I think this was a reasonable precaution for the bank to take in the circumstances.

Ms B was frustrated that the card on her joint account was also blocked. And following receipt of her new bank card Ms B found a time-sensitive transaction was blocked. It doesn't look likely this was due to her blocking the card as AIB suggested, but appears to be connected to the security measures AIB was applying to her accounts, which it says followed the introduction of its 'Strong Customer Authentication'.

Ms B understands the reason for security measures to protect accounts from fraud, but says the explanations from AIB don't make sense. Banks are required by regulations to take steps to protect customers' accounts from misuse and some of the most vulnerable accounts are those that have become dormant. AIB suspended Ms B's online access when she hadn't used this facility for 90 days. This is set out within the terms and conditions of the account, and I think it is a reasonable measure for AIB to take in order to provide protection to its customers.

I note that Ms B's card also failed to work on various occasions, but AIB said it has no record of this. Ms B has provided details of two rejected transactions, one of which stated, 'Credit card not in good standing'. This standard readout of a transaction failure doesn't really help the customer get to the bottom of the problem, which appears to be that the contactless function has not been recognised for some transactions. However, AIB has acknowledged that Ms B was experiencing difficulty with cards for online purchases.

AIB has offered to send Ms B a new card. I can see that she is reluctant to accept a new card due to all the issues she has experienced, but I think AIB's suggestion acknowledges that there has been an issue with the card and may provide the solution. As Ms B will be aware, it's not uncommon for there to be issues with contactless bank cards and a new card provides a means of overcoming problems.

Ms B found it difficult to communicate with AIB. I agree with the investigator that AIB might have been a bit more accessible to Ms B when she tried to make contact to resolve the issues with her account. However, I do think it was possible for the issues to be discussed and resolved. This would in our experience generally involve the issue of a new bank card and until a new card is used and account issues remain, it would be unfair to hold AIB responsible for the problems Ms B has raised.

For this reason I can't uphold Ms B's complaint, although I can well understand her embarrassment at the failure of her some contactless transactions. I recommend she contacts AIB to accept its offer of £50 compensation, which I think is fair for the difficulties she experienced in communicating with AIB.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons I have given it is my final decision that the complaint is not upheld.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Ms B to accept or reject my decision before 22 November 2023.

Andrew Fraser  
**Ombudsman**