

## **The complaint**

Mr W is complaining about the handling of his home emergency insurance claim by British Gas Services Limited. Any references to British Gas include their agents.

## **What happened**

In August 2019, Mr W called British Gas to unblock the sewer drain just outside his back door. This was work that was covered under his HomeCare policy. During their visit they damaged Mr W's hosepipe connector and the drain cover. And they didn't clean the area properly, leaving sewage waste on the path.

When Mr W complained, British Gas said they were aware that the drain cover had been broken and were trying to find a replacement cover. But they couldn't find a like-for-like replacement cover and so needed to break out the pathway in order to fit a different drain cover.

British Gas fitted the new drain cover while Mr W was away. But when he returned, he wasn't happy with the quality of the work. And he said the workmen had left a mess for him to clear up. He called British Gas and they arranged to re-do the work two weeks later.

But Mr W remained unhappy. He said although the quality of work was better there was still a repair patch around the new drain cover which is an eyesore because it didn't match the surrounding concrete. And he said there was still concrete smeared on the path.

When Mr W complained to British Gas, they acknowledged that things hadn't gone as well as they might have, and paid Mr W £150 as a goodwill gesture to compensate for the poor service he'd received. But, they disagreed with Mr W's view that his concrete path was now an eyesore and felt that they'd left Mr W in a position as near as possible to that he was in before the initial call-out.

Mr W didn't think this was enough to compensate him, particularly as there was still concrete staining on his path and because the new concrete in the repair patch doesn't match the old concrete. So he brought his complaint to our service.

Our investigator reviewed the matter and said she could see that Mr W's path has lost its visual appeal as a result of British Gas's work. And she said she thought they'd caused Mr W inconvenience as he'd had to clean the area and make repairs and also contact British Gas several times. She initially said she thought British Gas should increase their compensation to £250.

Mr W sent further comments in and a quote from a contractor to fix the area around the new drain cover. This quote said it would cost £174. Our investigator updated her view and said she thought British Gas should increase their compensation to £274. British Gas and Mr W accepted this outcome but when Mr W didn't receive the compensation he became unhappy and asked for an ombudsman's decision – so his complaint has been passed to me.

Mr W added that the £274 settlement would mean he'd only receive £100 after paying for the rectification works, whereas our investigator had originally suggested £250 was a fair and reasonable amount. He thought a settlement of £250 plus the £174 would be fair.

### **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 agree with our investigator and I'm upholding Mr W's complaint. I'll explain why.

From the documents provided it's clear that things went wrong here. British Gas were called out to fix a blocked drain and although the first workman sorted that problem, he caused other issues which took some time to resolve. British Gas have accepted that's the case so it's up to me to consider what's fair and reasonable to compensate Mr W for what's gone wrong.

I've considered what Mr W's been through. After the first workman's visit, he had to clean sewage waste from his path and fix his hosepipe. He needed to call British Gas to tell them about the broken drain cover, and then he had to follow up on this to arrange a second visit for the replacement drain cover to be fitted.

After the second visit, Mr W needed to clean concrete off his gate, fence and path. And he needed to call British Gas to arrange a third visit to sort out the quality of the repairs.

After the third visit, Mr W was still unhappy with the repairs and eventually decided to ask someone else to re-do the job, at a cost of £174. I've looked at the photos of Mr W's path and I can see why he's unhappy. The concrete in the repair patch does appear very different to the rest of the path, in both colour and texture. The repair patch arose because British Gas's workman broke the original drain cover. And British Gas have already tried twice to fix the patch to Mr W's satisfaction – so I think it's fair to ask British Gas to pay for the work to match the patch to the rest of Mr W's path.

I can see from the complaint notes that British Gas's original offer of compensation took into account the *"loss of attraction of the path"*. And our investigator's first suggestion of £250 also took into account the loss of visual appeal. But if British Gas pays for the work to restore the visual appeal of the path, they'll no longer need to compensate Mr W for the loss of visual appeal. And that's why our investigator only increased the compensation by a small amount when Mr W sent in the quote for further repairs. She was effectively saying that £100 would be an appropriate amount for the inconvenience and stress Mr W had experienced.

I agree with our investigator and I'm satisfied £100 is fair compensation. I appreciate Mr W's had to make several phone calls and had to clean up after British Gas. But the area in question was outside (rather than inside) his house and didn't cause him day-to-day inconvenience. And I think British Gas have tried to fix things for Mr W. Of course, it's not an exact science, but on balance I'm happy this is a fair and reasonable amount.

### **Putting things right**

As I've explained, I agree with our investigator that Mr W should receive a total of £274 from British Gas to cover the cost of matching the concrete around his drain to the rest of the path, and to compensate him for the inconvenience they've caused him. They've already paid Mr W £150 – so they need to pay a further £124 to put things right.

**My final decision**

I'm upholding Mr W's complaint. British Gas Service Limited need to pay £124 to Mr W.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr W to accept or reject my decision before 17 November 2020.

Clare King  
**Ombudsman**