

## **The complaint**

Mr N complains that British Gas Services Limited (British Gas) asked him to pay an invoice in relation to his home emergency policy that wasn't owed.

## **What happened**

In November 2018, an engineer attended Mr N's home to carry out a service check on his boiler under his Homecare 200 policy. At the same time, he also carried out a repair to a leaking radiator. As a repair was completed in line with the terms of the insurance policy, Mr N paid the £60 excess.

Around a week later, an engineer visited Mr N again and carried out a repair on the same radiator. British Gas raised a further invoice of £60 for the policy excess for this work. It sent a reminder to Mr N in December 2018. Mr N says he never received this. He cancelled his policy in December 2018.

In August 2020, British Gas sent Mr N a further letter asking him to pay an invoice of £60 within seven days. Mr N says he received this on a Friday in September, and because of this he couldn't call until the following Monday as he says, when he called, the phone line said British Gas were closed for the weekend. He said he hadn't been a customer of British Gas for two years, so he didn't know what the payment was for. He explained the matter caused him a great deal of worry, upset and chest pain.

Mr N later spoke with British Gas who updated their records and cancelled the invoice. They offered Mr N £20 in compensation for the inconvenience caused, and later increased this to a total of £40. Mr N didn't accept this offer because he says the invoice had caused him a significant amount of distress and worry over the weekend. And he said it had caused him to have sleepless nights, so he thought British Gas should pay him around £5,000 in compensation.

Our investigator was of the opinion that the offer made was fair. She explained to Mr N that, although he had received the letter on a Friday, British Gas' phone lines were open over the weekend meaning he could have called them on the Saturday. While the investigator appreciated that the matter would have been extremely worrying for Mr N, she felt the offer made was enough to compensate Mr N.

Mr N disagreed. He feels an amount of £500 should be paid given that British Gas is such a large organisation. Because of this, the complaint has been passed to me for review.

## **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.

Having looked at everything, I agree with the investigator, for the same reasons. I know this will come as a disappointment to Mr N, but I will explain why.

I should first set out that the Financial Ombudsman Service is not a regulator of the insurance industry, but we are a dispute resolution service. It's not our role to fine and punish a business, but our role is to look to put things right where something has gone wrong.

British Gas incorrectly looked to charge Mr N an excess for the follow up work it carried out in November 2018. I can appreciate that receiving a letter almost two years later asking him to pay £60 within seven days would have been very out of the blue and worrying. Mr N has said the matter caused him a great deal of stress, upset and chest pain.

My role in this decision is to assess whether I think British Gas took reasonable steps to put things right. In this instance I can see British Gas immediately recognised the error it had made and cancelled the invoice. I appreciate Mr N thinks British Gas should pay a significant amount in compensation because they are such a large company. But as I said above, it's not our role to fine and punish a business. We look at the individual circumstances of the complaint and decide what we feel is fair.

Mr N has said he had to wait for the weekend to pass before he could call British Gas. But their phone lines are open on a Saturday meaning Mr N could have called them without needing to wait for the following Monday.

It's not disputed British Gas shouldn't have asked Mr N to pay the excess. But I think this was a simple administrative error. While I note what Mr N has said about the stress and worry this caused him, I'm satisfied British Gas did immediately look to put things right as soon as Mr N called to ask about the invoice. They apologised for the stress and worry this matter caused and offered Mr N a total of £40 in compensation. This is in line with what I would have awarded, so I think it's a fair amount.

Because of this, I won't be asking British Gas to offer anything further.

### **My final decision**

For the reasons I've set out above, it's my final decision that British Gas Services Limited's compensation offer of £40 is fair in the circumstances of this complaint. They should pay it to him directly if they haven't already done so.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr N to accept or reject my decision before 28 April 2021.

Danielle Padden  
**Ombudsman**