

The complaint

Mr and Mrs O complained about the service they received under their home emergency policy with British Gas Insurance Limited (“British Gas”).

What happened

Mr and Mrs O made a claim to British Gas when their boiler broke down in late May 2021. Mr and Mrs O said British Gas made four appointments before attending to fix their boiler, with two of these appointments having been cancelled on the day of the appointment meaning Mr and Mrs O took time off from work when it wasn’t necessary. Mr and Mrs O said British Gas were no help whatsoever.

By the time British Gas honoured its appointment, Mr and Mrs O said they’d been unable to use their boiler to heat up water for around a month. Instead, Mr and Mrs O had to use their immersion heater which they said was expensive. Mr and Mrs O said they were unable to have their grandson visit during the month as they had no heating.

British Gas apologised for its poor service and paid Mr and Mrs O £250 in compensation for the distress and inconvenience caused by the cancelled appointments and delay in getting the boiler fixed. British Gas tried to accelerate the fixing of the boiler during the month by invoking its “*Winter contingency plan*”, whereby British Gas would reimburse Mr and Mrs O the costs to fix the boiler if they chose to appoint their own engineer. Mr and Mrs O decided not to do this as they said they couldn’t afford it.

Our investigator decided not to uphold the complaint. He thought the compensation paid by British Gas was fair for the distress and inconvenience suffered when he took into consideration that Mr and Mrs O had access to hot water via their immersion heater. Mr and Mrs O disagreed and asked for £450 in compensation, so the case has been referred to 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.

The facts of the case are agreed by both parties, so my role is to decide whether I think the compensation paid by British Gas is fair for the circumstances of this complaint. I will consider the impact of British Gas’ poor service on Mr and Mrs O when considering the distress and inconvenience they have suffered.

I can see over the course of May/June 2021, British Gas failed to honour three appointments – on two of these occasions Mr and Mrs O weren’t informed until on the day. I understand this would’ve been frustrating for them, given they took some time off work for the purpose of allowing the appointment to go ahead. Fortunately, Mr and Mrs O still had access to hot water using an immersion heater during the period the boiler was broken. They said this was expensive for them. Mr and Mrs O haven’t been able to provide any evidence of the additional costs they incurred, so it’s difficult to put a figure on this. In the absence of this,

I've done my own research and estimate that additional costs for an average household of using an electric source to heat their water compared to a gas source would be around £20-30 for the month.

In reviewing the complaint, I see British Gas were prompt in offering its "*Winter contingency plan*" soon after the complaint was raised. Whilst not ideal, I do think it has taken reasonable steps in trying to mitigate the impact of the broken boiler by offering Mr and Mrs O an alternative route to get their boiler fixed at no extra cost. Mr and Mrs O said to our service they couldn't afford the upfront cost of this, but there is no evidence in the complaint file that Mr and Mrs O notified British Gas that this was a significant issue for them. So, I don't think British Gas were given the opportunity to consider how it might have supported Mr and Mrs O better in this situation.

In considering the full impact of the cancelled appointments on Mr and Mrs O and British Gas' attempt to mitigate the delays early in the process, I think the £250 compensation British Gas has paid is fair and is also enough to cover the level of additional costs Mr and Mrs O may have incurred in using their immersion heater. Our service considers compensation in the round, rather than looking at each aspect separately. When I consider the cost of the premium Mr and Mrs O paid, I think £250 is a proportionate level of compensation and is reasonable based on the circumstances of this complaint. And Mr and Mrs O will still have had access to potential benefits from the policy for the remainder of the year. The award is in line with what our service would recommend.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold this complaint. I don't require British Gas Insurance Limited to do anymore.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs O and Mr O to accept or reject my decision before 18 November 2021.

Pete Averill
Ombudsman