

The complaint

Mr and Mrs T are unhappy about the way Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance Limited (“RSA”) dealt with a claim they made on a buildings insurance policy for blocked and damaged underground pipes.

What happened

Mr and Mrs T noticed problems with their drains and registered a claim with RSA. After a short delay, RSA sent out a contractor to inspect the drains. The report provided to RSA showed that two drains were blocked due to tree root ingress but a third, was blocked due to it having pitch fibre pipework that had deteriorated over time. RSA offered Mr and Mrs T a cash settlement to put right the damage on the two drains it would cover.

Mr and Mrs T were not happy to accept the cash settlement and discussed the matter further with RSA. There were some further delays in RSA’s consideration of the claim and by the time it instructed a contractor to undertake repairs, Mr and Mrs T had already arranged for them to be done privately.

Mr and Mrs T complained to RSA about how the claim had been handled. RSA accepted there were delays and instances of poor communication and offered Mr and Mrs T £250 compensation. Mr and Mrs T remained unhappy and brought their complaint to this service.

Our investigator looked at the complaint and thought RSA should increase the compensation amount to £350 as he didn’t feel RSA had taken into account the impact it’s delays had had on Mr and Mrs T. However RSA disagreed and, after reconsidering the complaint, the investigator let Mr and Mrs T know he no longer thought they should receive an increased amount of compensation.

Mr and Mrs T disagreed with the investigator and asked for an ombudsman to review the complaint.

My provisional findings

I wrote to both parties on 4 November 2022 letting them know I intended to uphold the complaint and direct RSA to pay an increased amount of compensation of £350. I said this for the following reasons:

- There would have always been a delay in a contractor being able to visit Mr and Mrs T’s property initially, so I think RSA arranged this as soon as it was able to.
- The decision RSA made on the claim and extent of repairs was made quickly. From the evidence available on file, I’m persuaded this was the correct decision. And, I think the cash settlement offered was also a fair amount.
- I don’t think RSA communicated with Mr and Mrs T clearly and there were delays and confusion caused. Contractors should have been instructed at the start of September to contact Mr and Mrs T to offer to repair the covered drains, but RSA didn’t do this

promptly. When it did do so, the repairs had already been arranged privately by Mr and Mrs T. An email Mr T had sent to RSA explaining the action he was taking wasn't received by the case handler and therefore the contractor still attended the property when it didn't need to – causing further confusion for Mr and Mrs T.

- Mrs T was suffering from mobility issues and it was important the repairs were undertaken quickly. This didn't happen and therefore I'm satisfied further inconvenience was caused.

RSA responded saying it was happy to accept my recommendation. Mr and Mrs T did not respond or provide any further comments for me to consider.

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 done so again, I see no reason to change the conclusions I outlined in my original findings. I'm satisfied RSA reached the correct outcome regarding the drainage claim Mr and Mrs T made. However, I'm not satisfied it dealt with the claim in a reasonable manner and as such, this caused Mr and Mrs T trouble and upset.

So, for the reasons above, and those set out in my provisional findings, I uphold this complaint and direct RSA to pay £350 compensation to Mr and Mrs T.

My final decision

My final decision is that I uphold Mr and Mrs T's complaint against Royal & Sun Alliance Insurance Limited. I direct it to make a payment of £350 compensation to Mr and Mrs T.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr and Mrs T to accept or reject my decision before 15 December 2022.

Alison Gore
Ombudsman