

The complaint

Mr S has complained about the way his claim under his Property Owners insurance policy with Covea Insurance plc for damage to his holiday home has been handled.

Any reference to Covea includes its agents.

What happened

Mr S's holiday home was damaged by a fire in July 2023. He informed Covea on 17 July 2023 and it started an investigation. Mr S has said he chased the parties involved for Covea for an update without success. And he eventually emailed for an update on 15 September 2023. Covea then arranged an interview with Mr S on 6 October 2023. Mr S has said that at the end of the interview he was told the claim investigation was ongoing and that it would take a further two to three weeks. Mr S emailed Covea on 7 October 2023 asking for a copy of the statement from the interview and the audio recording of it. Covea sent Mr S a copy of the statement on 10 October 2023 by email and Mr S responded to say Covea didn't need to send him the audio recording at that stage.

Mr S then emailed Covea on 12 October 2023 to say the interview had been mentally demanding and that he wished to expand on his statement. Around 13 weeks after providing this statement he emailed Covea because he hadn't heard anything. He has said he was informed a statement was needed from the site owner and that this was to be taken in January 2024. Mr S then heard the site owner had died and he contacted Covea's investigator on 28 February 2024 for an update. He didn't receive a reply, so he sent a letter of complaint to Covea on 15 March 2024. Mr S then received Covea's final response letter on his complaint dated 9 May 2024. This said Covea was satisfied that its claim validation enquiries had been justified and had been carried out in the manner it would have expected. It said that in view of this it was unable to uphold Mr S's complaint.

Mr S asked us to consider his complaint on 26 May 2024. One of our investigators did this. She said that Covea didn't keep Mr S properly informed during the course of its claim investigation and that this caused him distress and inconvenience. She said that, in light of this, it should pay Mr S £200 in compensation.

Covea doesn't agree with the investigator's view and has asked for an ombudsman's decision. It's said Mr S was updated several times on the fact it was making validation enquiries, which were necessary in light of discrepancies with his version of events surrounding the fire at his holiday home. It's said that the sort of investigation it carried out can take time and it is wrong to make them pay compensation when the investigation was necessary due to concerns about the circumstances giving rise to Mr S's claim. And Covea has asked for the complaint to be referred to an ombudsman for a decision.

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, I've decided to uphold it for the same reason as our investigator.

I should make it clear that I've only considered what happened up to the point Covea issued its final response in May 2024. Although, I do understand Covea has now made a decision on Mr S's claim and he is unhappy about this and has made a new complaint about it.

I do of course appreciate Covea had concerns about the circumstances leading to Mr S's claim and needed time to carry out a thorough investigation. But it still had an obligation to keep him properly informed and updated. But there was a gap of around nine weeks between Mr S reporting the damage and Covea arranging the first interview with him with no meaningful communication from Covea in this period. There was then a period of around 22 weeks between this interview and Mr S's letter of complaint with no meaningful communication from Covea in this period either. And, even after Mr S complained, it took Covea a further eight weeks to provide its final response with no meaningful communication on the progress of his claim in the meantime.

Whatever Covea's reasons, its communication was poor and it provided a very poor level of customer service. And this clearly caused Mr S distress and inconvenience, as he had no real idea why it was taking so long to investigate his claim. And the only way he even got an update was to keep chasing Covea. In the circumstances, I consider the distress and inconvenience he experienced as Covea's customer warrants a compensation payment of £200, irrespective of the outcome of Mr S's claim, and Covea's reasons for deciding on this outcome.

Putting things right

For the reasons set out above, I've decided to uphold Mr S's complaint and make Covea pay him £200 in compensation for distress and inconvenience.

My final decision

I uphold Mr S's complaint and require Covea Insurance plc to pay him £200 in compensation.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr S to accept or reject my decision before 27 December 2024.

Robert Short
Ombudsman