

The complaint

Mr A has complained that Great Lakes Insurance UK Limited (Great Lakes) unfairly dealt with a claim under a home contents policy.

What happened

Mr A contacted Great Lakes to make a claim when his home was burgled. Great Lakes declined the claim. So, Mr A complained to this Service. Our Investigator didn't uphold the complaint. He said it was reasonable that Great Lakes declined the claim and that if Mr A had further evidence to support his claim, he should contact Great Lakes.

Mr A provided Great Lakes with further information related to his claim. He then complained because of the amount of time Great Lakes took to assess the information. When Great Lakes replied, it said it had taken time to assess all the information provided. It said it remained fair for it to decline the claim.

So, Mr A complained to this Service again. An Investigator looked at the complaint and didn't uphold it. He said Great Lakes had asked for further evidence to support the claim because the police report said there was no evidence of forced entry. It had also asked for further evidence to show ownership of the items stolen and the funds used to pay for the items. He said it was reasonable for Great Lakes to decide this didn't sufficiently explain the inconsistencies and for it to decline the claim.

As Mr A didn't agree, the complaint was referred to me.

I issued my provisional decision on 17 December 2024. In my provisional decision, I explained the reasons why I was planning to uphold the complaint. I said:

My decision only relates to Mr A's second complaint, which Great Lakes responded to on 14 May 2024. I'm aware of the previous complaint this Service considered but it doesn't form part of this decision. I also haven't looked at Great Lakes' decision to continue to decline the claim, as it wasn't part of the more recent complaint made to Great Lakes.

Following Mr A's earlier complaint, Mr A sent a lengthy email to Great Lakes answering a series of questions it had asked him. Mr A also sent some documents in support of his claim. Mr A later complained because he was concerned with Great Lakes' service and by the lack of updates in response to the further information he had provided. So, I've looked at what happened.

A couple of days after Mr A provided the additional information, Great Lakes sent Mr A the same claim decline letter it had previously sent. Mr A was unhappy about this and phoned Great Lakes because he was concerned the new information hadn't been reviewed. Great Lakes apologised and said it would review the new information and then call Mr A in a few days' time. However, Great Lakes didn't contact Mr A when it said it would, so Mr A continued to contact Great Lakes to ask for an update. Over a month after Mr A provided the additional information, the only responses he seemed to have received were that his claim was still being reviewed. I think Great Lakes could have been more proactive about keeping

Mr A up to date. It seemed to rely on Mr A requesting an update for him to be given any information. I can see from the records that Great Lakes also didn't seem to be aware of what progress the claims handler was making on assessing the claim. So, I think there was a general lack of information or clear sense that the claim was being progressed.

When Great Lakes responded to the complaint, it said the Claims Team had five working days in which to review correspondence, action the claim as required and then provide an update. But I haven't seen evidence that it was working to these timescales. I'm aware there was a large amount of information to assess, but I also haven't seen evidence that the updates Mr A was given were informed by any contact with the Claims Team about how the claim review was progressing.

About two months after Mr A provided the additional information, Great Lakes told Mr A the claim would still be declined. The records showed Mr A was told this on the phone and that he asked for it to be sent to him in an email. When Great Lakes sent the email it said "I can confirm that the claim has been reviewed and the decision is to remain with the decline of the claim". While I was looking at the complaint, I asked Great Lakes whether it had told Mr A why it had decided to continue to decline the claim. Following this, Great Lakes wrote to Mr A to explain its reasons. Given the recent action taken by Great Lakes, I think this shows that at the time it declined the claim, and while the complaint was still ongoing, it didn't properly explain to Mr A why it had done so.

So, overall, I think Great Lakes' customer service was poor when Mr A provided the additional information. I think Mr A had to chase for updates and only seemed to receive general updates that didn't seem to be informed by the Claims Team. From what I can see, he also wasn't told why his claim continued to be declined. If Great Lakes hadn't recently written to Mr A to explain why it had declined the claim, I would have told it to do so. But, there is no purpose in me asking it to do so now. If Mr A isn't satisfied with what Great Lakes said in its recent letter, he would need to raise this with Great Lakes.

I've also thought about compensation. I think Mr A was caused distress and frustration by the lack of meaningful updates from Great Lakes. It also didn't seem to provide updates within its normal timescales or set Mr A's expectations properly. When Great Lakes provided the claim outcome it also didn't explain its reasons for continuing to decline the claim. So, thinking about this, I currently intend to say Great Lakes should pay Mr A £200 compensation because of its poor customer service. I think this fairly reflects the impact on Mr A based on the complaint raised and the information I've considered.

I asked both parties to send me any more information or evidence they wanted me to look at by 31 December 2024.

Great Lakes replied and said it would accept my decision. Mr A replied and, in summary, said:

- When his claim was first declined, Great Lakes told him to complain to this Service, which he did. He also provided further evidence to this Service. He was told he needed to provide that evidence to Great Lakes.
- He provided Great Lakes with all the supporting evidence, but it continued to delay and decline his claim, as I was aware.
- The main reason for his complaint to this Service was that he wasn't happy with the outcome and believed that Great Lakes had been unfair in declining the claim for the second time.
- He was still disappointed that the claim had been declined. He understood that I had upheld the complaint in his favour. However, the reason for his complaint was that Great

Lakes and their file handlers had wasted a lot of unnecessary time and the request to this Service was mainly to look at the claim and the supporting evidence so the claim should be reinstated and further progressed and for this Service to make a decision about the unfair manner in which the claim had been declined for the second time. He wanted to know the next steps in regard to his claim.

- He wanted his complaint looked at again. The purpose of his complaint was that he wasn't happy that the claim had been unfairly declined on two separate occasions. He wanted this Service to look at the main point of the complaint.

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 uphold this complaint and for the reasons given in my provisional decision. As part of that I've thought about Mr A's comments, but this hasn't changed my view about what I think is a fair outcome to this complaint.

I'm only able to look at issues that a consumer has already made to the business being complained about. When I made my provisional decision, I looked carefully at what Mr A had complained to Great Lakes about. This was about the delays in getting a response about the additional evidence he had provided to Great Lakes following its first claim decline. As I explained in my provisional decision, I didn't look at the decision to decline the claim for a second time because Mr A hadn't complained to Great Lakes about that.

I've looked at the claim and complaint records again and can't see evidence that Mr A complained to Great Lakes about its decision to decline the claim for a second time. The complaint was about Great Lakes poor service, including its lack of contact and updates. When Great Lakes declined the claim for the second time, a couple of days later, Mr A contacted this Service and asked for his complaint to be looked at. However, I can't see evidence that he raised his concerns with Great Lakes about the second claim decline so that it could respond to them. So, I remain of the view that it was reasonable that I only looked at the issues raised in the complaint, which was about the delays in receiving an update on his claim and poor customer service.

Mr A now has the reasons why his claim was declined. If he disagrees with what Great Lakes has said and its decision to continue to decline the claim, he would need to contact Great Lakes and raise a new complaint about the second claim decline. Great Lakes would then consider it.

Based on everything I've seen, I remain of the view that it's fair that Great Lakes should pay Mr A £200 compensation for the delays in it considering the new evidence Mr A provided and its poor customer service.

My final decision

For the reasons I've given above and in my provisional decision, my final decision is that this complaint is upheld. I require Great Lakes Insurance UK Limited to pay Mr A £200 compensation.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr A to accept or reject my decision before 4 February 2025.

Louise O'Sullivan

Ombudsman