

The complaint

Mr K complains Red Sands Insurance Company (Europe) Limited (“Red Sands”) unfairly declined a claim on his pet insurance policy.

Any reference to Red Sands includes the actions of its agents.

What happened

The circumstances of this complaint are well known to both parties. So, I won’t repeat events here. Rather, I’ll focus on the reasons for my 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.

The relevant industry rules and guidance say insurers must deal with claims promptly and fairly; support a policyholder to make a claim; and not unreasonably reject a claim.

The policy provides cover for vets’ fees but there are some exclusions. Relevant to this case is an exclusion which says the *policy “doesn’t cover the cost of training, treatment or therapy for behavioural issues.”*

The exclusion is clearly set out and isn’t unusual. So, if the claim is for training, treatment or therapy for behavioural issues, it’s excluded. And it’s for Red Sands to show the exclusion applies.

Based on the medical records, I’m persuaded it’s fair for Red Sands to say the treatment Mr K’s cat (“Y”) received, was to treat a behavioural issue. I’ll explain why.

On 12 October 2024, Y was seen by a vet due to scratching, fur loss and a change in behaviour. The vet noted:

“small patches of alopecia missing all down back. No evidence of ectoparasites. No pruritis present. Patient not itchy. Overgrooming ventral abdo. Some hair missing from top of head”.

Following an examination of Y, the vet, notably recorded: *“the clinical signs are likely stress related. Given Gabapentin and stress relief.”*

Later, on 7 November 2024, a remote examination took place regarding Y’s skin, and the vet recorded: *“The symptoms we are seeing may be related to an underlying stress or anxiety”.*

Mr K has said a conclusive behavioural diagnosis hadn’t been made, and that in any event, he only wanted treatment for the alopecia to be covered.

But, from what I’ve seen, the alopecia can’t reasonably be separated from the behavioural issues identified (stress and anxiety) because the vet has said the alopecia is most likely the

result of the behavioural issues.

Furthermore, the vet hasn't put forward an alternative likely cause for the alopecia. Instead, the medical evidence makes clear Y's skin wasn't itchy, and that the alopecia and overgrooming wasn't due to ectoparasites. This, coupled with Y's condition having improved after taking medicine for stress relief (as per the medical notes on 13 November 2024), further supports Red Sand's position that the alopecia was most likely the result of a behavioural issue - which was being treated using stress relief medication.

So, in the absence of persuasive evidence to show the alopecia *wasn't* the result of a behavioural issue, I'm satisfied Red Sands decision to decline the claim was both in line with the policy terms and fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

Mr K has also said Red Sands attempted to unfairly decline his claim because of a disparity with the address connected to the policy and the address held by Y's vet. My observations aren't the same as Mr K. From what I've seen Red Sands took reasonable steps to validate the claim having identified the mismatch in addresses and it brought this to Mr K's attention – asking for clarification on the matter. And once it had done this, it considered the claim in a timely manner. So, I don't consider it to have treated Mr K unfairly in this respect.

Similarly, I consider it was reasonable for Red Sands to contact another veterinary practice which had treated Y in order to obtain Y's full medical history. So, I don't consider this to have caused an avoidable delay in progressing the claim.

From what I've seen once Red Sands had the necessary information to review the claim it provided an outcome in a timely manner. I say this because, even with obtaining the additional information, Red Sands provided an outcome to the claim in approximately two weeks, which isn't unreasonable.

I understand my decision will be disappointing for Mr K and comes at a time when he's concerned about his pet's welfare. I don't doubt that as a prudent pet owner he has Y's best interests at heart. But, based on the available evidence, I'm not persuaded Red Sands has declined his claim unfairly, nor provided poor customer service. So, I won't be directing it to take any action.

My final decision

My final decision is I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr K to accept or reject my decision before 17 July 2025.

Nicola Beakhust
Ombudsman