

The complaint

Mr R complains that British Gas Insurance Limited's engineers failed to correctly diagnose a problem with his boiler following a claim on his home emergency insurance.

What happened

On 26 January 2025, Mr R called British Gas and said his boiler had broken down. He bought a central heating 'Repair and Cover' policy, and British Gas arranged for its engineer to visit the same day.

The engineer diagnosed a system circulation issue caused by sludge. He found that the pump was worn and replaced it. He advised Mr R to arrange a powerflush. This is a chemical cleaning process that removes sludge from the heating system, taking several hours and costing several hundred pounds, and not covered by Mr R's policy. Mr R was unhappy with this. He said an engineer friend had told him the heat exchanger needed to be replaced and wanted the engineer to do this. British Gas said its engineer left after Mr R became "*rude and hostile*".

Mr R continued to ask British Gas to replace the heat exchanger. Two more British Gas engineers visited him on 27 and 28 January. Both diagnosed the same problem as the first engineer and recommended the same solution. The third engineer quoted Mr R £800 for the powerflush. This engineer also left when Mr R became aggressive.

Mr R complained that British Gas refused to replace the heat exchanger. This left him and his family – which included vulnerable people – without heating or hot water for four weeks in winter. He cancelled his policy and paid another company to replace the heat exchanger. He says his boiler has been working "*perfectly fine*" ever since.

British Gas said, in summary:

- Under the policy terms, it didn't have to replace the heat exchanger before carrying out a powerflush.
- It would honour its engineer's £800 quote for the powerflush, even though this should cost £1,500.
- It offered to refund the cost of two temporary heaters and £100 compensation to apologise for its agents giving him some incorrect information about his cover and the confusion this caused.
- It later cancelled the policy at no cost and refunded his premium.

Mr R didn't accept this and brought his complaint to this service. He told us British Gas "*deliberately misdiagnosed*" the problem to avoid having to fix it under the policy. Instead it wanted to "*upsell*" the powerflush and a new boiler. He wants British Gas to cover the cost of his repairs and compensate him for having no heating for four weeks.

Our investigator didn't recommend that the complaint should be upheld. He explained that the policy covered the cost of repairs but not the powerflush. He was satisfied that British Gas couldn't complete an effective repair without the powerflush, so he thought its decision

not to replace the heat exchanger was reasonable. He thought its refunds and £100 offer to apologise for its agents providing poor information was fair.

Mr R didn't agree, so the complaint was passed to me.

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'm not going to uphold the complaint. I'll explain why.

- Mr R bought a 'Repair and Cover' policy. This offered both emergency and standard repairs to his central heating system, including the boiler.
- British Gas told us this cover has the same policy terms as its Central Heating Cover with two relevant exceptions: the exclusions for pre-existing faults and faults within the first 14 days of the policy don't apply because the purpose of the policy is to fix an existing issue.
- However, I think it's relevant that British Gas was being asked to repair an existing problem and hadn't previously inspected or serviced the boiler. I also note the first engineer's comments that he found *"a drain hose fitted to the magnetic filter and drained into a bucket half full of central heating water containing elements of sludge/magnetite."* Mr R hasn't disputed that there had been earlier work by a third party to try to fix the problem, or that this showed evidence of sludge.
- Page 10 of the policy booklet shows he isn't covered for – among other things – *"Damage caused by limescale, sludge or other debris if we've told you before that you need to carry out repairs, improvements or a British Gas Powerflush, or a similar process, but you haven't done so."* Sludge is defined in the policy as *"the natural build-up of deposits in your boiler or central heating system as it corrodes over time."*
- Mr R hasn't provided evidence to show the original problem with his heating was the boiler's heat exchanger. For example, he hasn't provided a statement or report from the engineer who told him this.
- In the circumstances, I'm satisfied that the first engineer acted reasonably by inspecting the boiler and reaching his own conclusion about the problem. He found that the water was dirty and the pump had failed, and the system was *"sludged up."* I find no evidence that suggests his decision to replace the pump was an unreasonable first repair.
- Two more British Gas engineers diagnosed the same issue: a circulation issue affected by sludge. I think their assessment that replacing the heat exchanger would be a short-term fix and would likely become blocked and damaged again was reasonable.
- British Gas asked its National Technical Support Team to review its engineers' actions. It found *"the heat exchanger is likely to have been blocked with sludge/magnetite as this will have been circulating around the full system and a heat exchanger is a main water carrying component."* It confirmed a powerflush was first needed to clean the system, and it would then replace the heat exchanger under Mr R's policy. It explained that replacing the heat exchanger without addressing the wider issue was a short-term fix

“which will, in time, become affected by the sludge still circulating in the system.”

- I'm satisfied that damage caused by sludge is excluded from cover. I'm also satisfied that a powerflush is an appropriate treatment for this. In the circumstances, I think British Gas' decision not to replace any more water-carrying components until it carried out a powerflush was reasonable and in line with the policy terms..
- Mr R hasn't provided any evidence from the company that replaced the heat exchanger to show that British Gas' findings were incorrect.
- In the absence of any independent or expert evidence from Mr R, I think the evidence from the British Gas engineers and its technical support team is persuasive. It follows that I don't think British Gas needs to cover the cost of the repairs Mr R had carried out by another company.
- British Gas accepts that it gave Mr R conflicting information about whether the heat exchanger was covered by his policy and failed to contact him as promised on 29 January.
- While I recognise this was poor advice and claims handling, I don't think it made a difference to the claim. The engineers diagnosed a problem that meant British Gas wouldn't replace the heat exchanger until it carried out a powerflush. So I don't think this advice or missed call delayed resolving the problem with Mr R's heating.
- I've thought about the costs British Gas covered. It refunded Mr R £59.98 for temporary heaters and refunded his £31.50 premium when he cancelled the policy. It also offered him £100 to apologise for its agents' incorrect advice.
- I think it's worth saying that I don't think it needed to refund the premium given it attended and carried out repairs. In the circumstances, I think British Gas' actions were reasonable and its compensation is fair. I'm not going to order it to do any more.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold the complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr R to accept or reject my decision before 16 October 2025.

Simon Begley

Ombudsman