

The complaint

Mr B says that after he made a claim on his motor insurance policy, First Central Insurance Management Limited unfairly delayed in paying him a settlement sum for his stolen car.

What happened

Mr B's car and a van he used for work were stolen from his driveway on 8 February 2025, after thieves broke into his home and took the vehicles' keys. In late February 2025, Mr B accepted a settlement offer from First Central for the car, plus a sum for personal items left in it and a baby seat. He received payment for the latter items, but as he still hadn't been paid for the car, he made a formal complaint on 20 March 2025.

On 9 April 2025, Mr B pointed out to First Central that it still hadn't given him a reason for not paying the settlement sum. First Central had said it was liaising with the van's insurer, but he said the claim for the van had no bearing on the car's claim. First Central then told him that at the point of settlement, information arose that led to further investigations, which were still ongoing. So it wasn't in a position to either accept or decline the claim.

In its response to his formal complaint, on 11 April 2025 First Central said the claim was with its complex claims team for validation and that it couldn't give a date when the enquiries would be completed. It said it had been told in March 2025 that an investigator for the van's insurer was going to interview Mr B about the van's theft, and that currently it was liaising with the van's insurer. It also said it had sent Mr B's car key off for analysis.

Mr B didn't accept First Central's explanation. So in June 2025 one of our Investigators reviewed his complaint. She didn't think there had been undue delay by First Central up to the point of its final response letter in April 2025. She noted that it had acknowledged his frustration and had paid him £100. In her opinion, it had been investigating the claim actively, and it was fair for it to wait for information from the van's insurer. Mr B told her he didn't agree that the claim was complex or that the claim for the van was relevant to it. He said waiting for details from another insurer wasn't an active investigation. He pointed out that First Central had a duty to handle claims fairly and to settle them promptly, which it had failed to do. As there was no agreement, the complaint was passed to me for review.

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.

I can understand Mr B's frustration with the situation, given that a settlement offer for the car was made early on in the process and he had accepted it. But First Central has explained that information then emerged that meant it had to investigate further.

I think it was reasonable for First Central to liaise with the other insurer, as the claims for the car and the van arose out of exactly the same circumstances. Both insurers were entitled to investigate / validate each claim in their own way, and sharing information about the incident was appropriate, in my opinion. First Central told Mr B about the liaison, which I think any

other insurer would have engaged in given the circumstances here. And I don't think it was unreasonable for First Central to wait for the van's insurer / its investigator to pass on any relevant information it might have that was pertinent to the theft of the vehicles. In my opinion, waiting for what could be useful information is part of an active investigation.

Mr B knew about some of the specific enquiries that were ongoing in March / April 2025. First Central told him on 17 March 2025 and on 24 March 2025 that it was still liaising with the other insurer / its investigator. It asked him for his car key (to be sent for analysis). It also asked Mr B for details of the tracker on the car and its GAP insurance cover. It asked for CCTV footage to be sent to it again, plus photos of the damage done by the thieves. And it enquired whether he'd been given any updates by the police. I think all of that shows there was an ongoing investigation. And I think it's fair to say that if an insurer has to liaise with other parties (such as the police, or in this case, another insurer) that usually adds time to the claims process, as the insurer can't control the response time of other parties.

Insurers have a duty to handle claims fairly, and to settle claims promptly, as Mr B has pointed out. But they also have a duty to ensure that they investigate claims thoroughly. Theft claims can often take longer than other claims to validate. And here, I think the theft investigation was more complex than usual, given that two vehicles were stolen together, so two insurers were carrying out separate but linked theft enquiries. There's no obligation on insurers to give consumers detailed accounts and timelines of their investigations, and I think that may be why it seemed to Mr B that First Central wasn't actively investigating his claim or wasn't doing so at pace.

In this complaint, I can only consider what happened up to the point that First Central issued its response to Mr B's complaint on 11 April 2025. Should Mr B not be happy about what has happened after that, it's open to him to make a further complaint to First Central. If he isn't satisfied with its response, he can make a further complaint to us at that point.

I sympathise with Mr B, as he expected his claim to be finalised quickly, and it's understandable that he was very disappointed when the settlement sum wasn't paid as expected in March 2025. But I don't think he's shown that First Central acted unreasonably or unfairly in the particular circumstances that apply here, so I can't uphold his complaint.

My final decision

My final decision is that I don't uphold this complaint. Under the Financial Ombudsman Service's rules, I must ask Mr B to accept or reject my decision before 5 November 2025.

Susan Ewins

Ombudsman