

complaint

Mr and Mrs L's complaint relates to the length of time it took British Gas Insurance Limited to diagnose a problem on their boiler during a claim under their home emergency insurance policy.

background

Mr and Mrs L made a claim to British Gas in early October 2012 because the pressure on the boiler had dropped and it would only work if the pressure was increased manually by adding more water to the system.

The engineer recharged the expansion vessel which did not resolve the problem. He then apparently advised that the problem could be the result of a leak to pipework under the floorboards. I understand that Mr and Mrs L did not want the floorboards taken up and so no further work was done at that time. There were several further attendances over the following few months, detailed as follows:

Early December 2012 - a second British Gas engineer attended and replaced a valve and recharged the expansion vessel again to increase the boiler pressure. Ten days later a third engineer applied leak sealant to the boiler.

February 2013 - another engineer from British Gas attended and replaced a thermostatic radiator valve and added more leak sealant to the boiler.

Early March 2013 - British Gas fitted a new expansion vessel

Mid -March 2013 – a new heat exchanger was fitted. British Gas' engineer did not apparently believe a new heat exchanger was required but Mrs L explained that a third party engineer had confirmed this may be the problem, so he fitted it to see if this would work but it did not resolve the pressure problem.

Early April 2013 - British Gas found a leak under the floor and repaired it. However, their boiler was still losing pressure.

Mid-April - another engineer carried out some work on a valve. A leak was found in the conservatory and finally the conservatory radiator was isolated and found to be the cause of the problem.

22 May 2013 – the radiator was repositioned which finally resolved the problem.

Mr and Mrs L are unhappy that it took so long to finally resolve the problem and they say that over that period of time, Mr L was having to go into the loft to take pressure readings every day, and sometimes re-pressurise the boiler in order for it to work. This caused inconvenience as he was not well. They also say that one of the engineers was rude to them. Mr and Mrs L want £2,000 compensation for the way British Gas handled the claim.

British Gas says that the policy does not cover repositioning radiators but carried it out as a gesture of goodwill. If Mr and Mrs L had allowed it to isolate the system and investigate the under floor pipework the problem could have been diagnosed a lot quicker. It did however, pay the sum of £200 by way of compensation for the time taken to finalise the repairs.

British Gas also agreed to reimburse the cost of a private engineer instructed by Mr and Mrs L of £300, once it receives a suitable copy of the engineer's report, detailing the work carried out. I understand that this has not yet been provided but British Gas has confirmed that this offer remains open.

Our adjudicator did not recommend that the complaint should be upheld because she was satisfied that the offer already made was reasonable. She did not consider that the time taken to deal with the repairs was due to any wrongdoing on British Gas' part. The adjudicator also did not feel that she could recommend compensation be paid for Mr L going into the attic each day, as British Gas had not asked him to take any pressure readings at any point.

Mr and Mrs L do not accept this and the matter has therefore been passed to me

my findings

I have considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what is fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

It is clear that it took some time to resolve this problem but I have not seen any evidence that British Gas did not act reasonably on each attendance.

Mr and Mrs L sought a second opinion from their own engineer but he was apparently unable to diagnose the problem either. His invoice says that he spent 15 hours trying to locate the leak causing the problem but was unable to do so. He did apparently suggest that the heat exchanger be replaced, which I note British Gas did even though it did not think it was the cause of the problem.

It is sometimes difficult to diagnose such issues and I note that British Gas did suggest taking up the floorboards and investigating the pipework early on but Mr and Mrs L did not want this. It seems likely to me that the problem would have been resolved a lot sooner if they had been able to do this, given that leaks were eventually found, including one in the conservatory which would seem to be the main cause of the problem.

I am satisfied that British Gas attended on each occasion and tried its best to resolve the problem. It also re-positioned the radiator for Mr and Mrs L free of charge as this is not covered under their policy terms and conditions.

On the basis of the evidence available to me therefore, I do not consider that the time taken to finally resolve this is due to any incorrect action on the part of British Gas.

Even if I were satisfied that British Gas were at fault and it should have been able to diagnose the problem earlier the compensation requested by Mr and Mrs L is not reasonable. The boiler was working during this time but was losing pressure which would mean it turned off periodically, until it was topped up with water. Although topping it up would have been inconvenient, if Mr L had difficulty doing it due to health reasons they could have called British Gas to do it but there is no evidence they asked it to do so. So while it took some time to finally resolve the problem, Mr and Mrs L had heating and hot water during this time.

Mr and Mrs L have also said that he went in to the attic daily to record the pressure, even if had not switched off. However, I am not persuaded that this was necessary and it was not

requested by British Gas. I feel unable therefore to require British Gas to compensate them for the inconvenience of carrying out this daily task.

I also consider that British Gas' offer to pay Mr and Mrs L's private engineer's bill is reasonable, particularly as he does not seem to have helped advance matters. It is entitled to proper proof of the work carried out before making payment and it remains open to that.

While I can see that this matter would have been inconvenient and frustrating I am not persuaded that British Gas should be required to make any further payment to Mr and Mrs L.

my final decision

I do not uphold this complaint against British Gas Insurance Limited.

Harriet McCarthy
ombudsman