

complaint

Mr M has complained about the time taken by British Gas Insurance Limited to repair his oven under his homecare policy following a breakdown just before Christmas.

background

Mr M's oven broke down on the Saturday before Christmas (Christmas Day was on the Tuesday). As he held British Gas appliance cover, Mr M made a call to have a repair completed. British Gas was unable to offer an engineer's visit until Thursday, the day after Boxing Day. Mr M was unhappy about the level of service offered, but reluctantly accepted the appointment. When the engineer visited he affected a repair using a stock part rather than an appliance specific part. Mr M did not use the oven until the following day; after a short period of operation, around 10 minutes, it was noticed that the fan was glowing red hot and there was a burning smell.

The oven was switched off and a call placed to British Gas, but it could only offer an appointment the day after New Year's Day. Mr M expressed his dissatisfaction, in particular that he had lost use of his oven over Christmas and was now set to be without it over New Year. Mr M says that he had established that there was an on call engineer living very close to his home and asked British Gas instruct him to visit. British Gas did not agree and, despite Mr M's protests, the earliest appointment for an engineer's visit was 2 January. This appointment went ahead and an appliance specific part was ordered and fitted the following day.

Mr M complained about the level of service offered. British Gas investigated but did not uphold his complaint. However, it did consider that it should have dealt with the complaint itself more swiftly and so it offered him £20 in recognition of the delays. Mr M rejected British Gas' response and brought his complaint to this service. He regarded British Gas to be in breach of its contract with him. He had wanted a next day appointment to have his oven fixed and wanted to be reimbursed for the expenses he had incurred for being without it.

Our adjudicator investigated Mr M's concerns. Whilst he could understand the frustration the timing of the fault caused, he said that British Gas had responded within reasonable time frames. Mr M did not agree. He said that two incidents should not be treated as separate incidents, it was the same fault. As he did not accept our adjudicator's recommendation, this case was passed to me for my consideration.

my findings

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

I should note at the outset that I have reviewed the cover under which Mr M made his claim. It is the case that this is a homecare policy which covers appliances, such as Mr M's oven, but it is not an emergency repair policy. That is not to say that Mr M should not expect a response within a reasonable timeframe (as set out in the policy) but it is different to home emergency cover.

The timing of the failure of Mr M's oven was most unfortunate and I do understand why the breakdown of the oven over the festive period made the inconvenience caused particularly acute. Mr M has explained that his health needs mean that his diet is important to his

wellbeing so, again, I can appreciate the stress this would have caused him. However, I have noted that British Gas states that it gives priority in terms of engineer's appointments to situations that it has classified as urgent, such as faults whereby a policyholder is without heating or hot water or there is a water leak that needs to be stopped. I do not consider this approach to be unreasonable.

The question, therefore, is what should be considered a reasonable timeframe. British Gas responded to the original fault within two working days (albeit this involved more time in calendar days because of the weekend and festive bank holidays). It is more than unfortunate that the first repair was not lasting. A repair was attempted using a stock part. It would be impractical for a visiting engineer to hold appliance specific parts for every appliance and, in the case of a part like a fan, generic parts will often complete an effective repair. However, when the failure was reported an appointment within a further two working days was offered and the final repair completed the following day. Whilst I can understand why Mr M was so disappointed by British Gas' failure to step outside its usual policy on callout timing for oven failure, I do not find its refusal to be wholly unreasonable.

British Gas did not offer service to Mr M outside its normal service standards, but it does not have to do so. Whilst the overall time taken to complete an effective repair was 11 days, when public holidays and weekends are removed, which do not form standard working days for British Gas, I consider the time taken to comply with the reasonable timeframe stated within the repair contract Mr M holds with British Gas.

my final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold this complaint and I make no award against British Gas Insurance Limited.

Helene Pantelli
ombudsman