

complaint

Mrs W has complained that plumbers from British Gas Services Limited's ("British Gas") caused damage when carrying out a repair at her home.

background

Mrs W had a water leak at her home, so she claimed on an insurance policy she had with British Gas. She says British Gas didn't fix the problem properly, which led to damage to some of her furniture and other items in her house.

British Gas accepted that damage had been caused and made several offers to pay different amounts. Their last offer was to pay £4,000 in compensation. Mrs W didn't think this was enough, so she brought her complaint to this service.

Shortly after British Gas increased their offer to £4,500, including £200 compensation because of the time it had taken to deal with the complaint. Mrs W got a number of quotes for the work needed and British Gas changed their offer. They offered to pay a total of £6,631 directly to Mrs W, plus a further £622.40 for VAT when Mrs W gave them VAT invoices for some of the work.

One of our investigators looked at what British Gas had offered and thought it was fair. Mrs W disagreed and thought it should be more, in particular she thought British Gas should pay to replace her fridge.

As Mrs W didn't agree with the investigator's view, the complaint has been passed to me for a final decision.

my findings

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint.

British Gas have recorded what Mrs W said when she first made her complaint. They say Mrs W told them her fridge had been scratched when a plumber leant a ladder against it. She also complained that water had leaked on to the sofa as no dust sheets were used and that the plumber used unacceptable language.

British Gas asked someone to look into the damage caused and they got a report setting out some of the costs. Mrs W also got some different people to provide quotes as she preferred to get the work done herself. For the avoidance of doubt I'll set out British Gas' offer in full.

- To repair leather sofa: £2,459
- To replace handbag: £415
- To replace fruit bowl: £245
- To clean piano: £1,000 (plus VAT)
- To repair wooden floor: £750 (plus VAT)
- To repair ceiling: £1,362 (plus VAT)
- For cleaning costs: £100
- For the upset caused to Mrs W: £200
- For the damage caused to the fridge: £100

This came to a total of £6,631 which British Gas would pay to Mrs W now. But they would also pay £622.40 for VAT on the piano, floor and ceiling costs when Mrs W sent them an invoice showing the work had been done and that VAT was being charged.

I've looked at the amounts offered and I can see that they are based on quotes that either British Gas or Mrs W got. Mrs W isn't saying the amounts are too low, apart from what British Gas are offering to pay for the damage to the fridge. I've taken into account the evidence I've seen and I think all of the quotes obtained look reasonable. I also think British Gas have caused Mrs W upset by causing damage to her home and I think it's reasonable that she get £200 compensation for this.

British Gas have said they will pay up to £622.40 for VAT when Mrs W sends them invoices for the piano, floor and ceiling showing that work was done and VAT charged. Mrs W said she might 'shop around' for this work, so I think it's fair that British Gas pay VAT up to the amounts shown in the quotes Mrs W sent them. If she manages to get the work done for less I think it's fair that British Gas only pay the VAT that is actually charged.

Mrs W says British Gas should pay for a replacement fridge. I've seen a photo of the damage caused and it looks like there is some scratching to the door of the fridge. As the door to the fridge is stainless steel British Gas aren't able to repair the scratches. Our investigator checked with the fridge supplier and it's not possible to replace the door as the parts aren't available. Mrs W says the fridge is still working, but she'd like the whole fridge replaced because of the damage caused. She says this would cost over £2,000.

I understand Mrs W is proud about the appearance of her home, but I don't think it would be fair to tell British Gas to pay for a whole new fridge. As it's still working properly, I think it would be fair for Mrs W to get some compensation for the loss in value of the fridge. The damage is to the appearance of the fridge, and I think £100 is a fair amount to reflect this.

British Gas has done something wrong, so it needs to pay something to Mrs W to put things right. But overall I think what it has offered is fair.

my final decision

For the reasons set out above, I uphold Mrs W's complaint against British Gas Services Limited. I require British Gas Services Limited to:

1. pay Mrs W £6,631 within 28 days of the date on which we tell them Mrs W accepts my final decision (if she does).
2. pay Mrs W any VAT charged in relation to the repair of her floor, ceiling and piano up to the value of £622.40. This should be paid within 28 days of her providing the evidence of the VAT being charged.

If British Gas Services Limited pays either of these amounts later than this, it must also pay interest on the amounts from the date payment was due until the date of payment at 8% per year simple.

If British Gas Services Limited considers that it's required by HM Revenue & Customs to take off income tax from that interest, it should tell Mrs W how much it's taken off. It should also give Mrs W a certificate showing this if she asks for one, so she can reclaim the tax from HM Revenue & Customs if appropriate.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs W to accept or reject my decision before 31 October 2016.

Mark Hutchings
ombudsman