

complaint

Mrs R has complained about British Gas Insurance Limited. She's unhappy with the service provided under her HomeCare insurance policy.

My references to "British Gas" include its engineers.

background

Mrs R had a HomeCare policy with British Gas. In October 2013 Mrs R contacted British Gas to report a leak in the bathroom of one of her rental properties. An engineer visited the property and repairs were carried out.

Mrs R moved back into the property in December 2014. A month later she contacted British Gas to complain about the standard of repairs carried out in 2013. She said the repairs had left her bathroom with a constant draught of cold air. She asked for this to be inspected and rectified. British Gas didn't respond to Mrs R's concerns until March 2015. It apologised for the delay and paid £50 compensation. But it wouldn't agree to carry out an inspection of the repairs.

Mrs R continued to raise concerns about the work carried out by British Gas. She explained that due to her age and medical condition she was struggling to deal with the constant flow of cold air going through her house. She also complained about the cost of her energy bill, which she thought was too high and due to the 2013 repairs.

By July 2015 British Gas agreed to inspect Mrs R's bathroom. Its engineer wasn't able to find anything to support Mrs R's claim of poor workmanship. But agreed that due to how much time had passed it would pay £333 to cover the cost of further repairs to Mrs R's bathroom. Mrs R asked for further compensation and British Gas agreed to pay her an additional £195.

Mrs R later switched to a new energy supplier. British Gas sent her a final energy bill for £389.98. A final demand for payment of the bill was also sent. Mrs R told British Gas she wouldn't pay the bill until her meters had been checked. She thought they might be faulty or that the increased bill was linked to repairs from 2013.

In January 2016 Mrs R's noticed that her unpaid final gas bill had been recorded with credit reference agencies. She contacted British Gas to query this several times. She was promised a number of call-backs but these didn't happen. She wrote to British Gas several times but still the matter couldn't be resolved.

By June 2016 British Gas responded and upheld Mrs R's complaint. It said that:

- for the alleged poor work carried out by its engineers and initial delays it had paid Mrs R £528
- because of the service Mrs R subsequently received it had applied £50 credit to the outstanding balance on her gas bill
- a further cheque for £300 would be sent to Mrs R, to cover the outstanding balance for her gas bill of £227.76 as well as for delays and inconvenience caused

- it had stopped debt recovery now it had confirmation the outstanding gas bill had been paid. Mrs R's credit file had also been amended

Mrs R later referred her complaint to this service. She said she was satisfied her energy account had been rectified and credit file amended. But she felt further compensation was due. Specifically Mrs R said:

- it had taken eighteen months to resolve matters and this had caused her significant distress
- she'd spent a lot of time on the phone and written numerous letters and emails in an attempt to resolve things and felt she should be compensated for her time
- due to information British Gas put on her credit file she'd had to sign over the property she owned to her husband because she wasn't deemed eligible for a buy-to-let mortgage
- she'd had to pay a year's worth of professional insurance for her role as a counsellor because she wasn't deemed eligible for credit to spread the payments because of the state of her credit file
- she'd had to pay a credit reference agency £14.99 per month from January 2016 until July 2016 to get a notice of dispute put on her credit file and so she could monitor her credit rating
- she'd been unable to get a credit card with her bank because of the state of her credit file

Our investigator reviewed the complaint and said he didn't think any further compensation was due. He said the compensation awarded by British Gas was significant despite a lack of evidence to show Mrs R's increased bill was caused by poor repairs in 2013. Mrs R later submitted a copy of her credit file to support her claim that British Gas' actions had left her with a poor credit score. But the investigator didn't think this supported her claim so his opinion remained the same.

Mrs R disagreed and asked for an ombudsman to review the case for a final decision. Before the case was passed to me the investigator clarified what this service could and could not consider. Specifically the investigator said we couldn't look at issues relating to Mrs R's credit file because the business that had added information to Mrs R's credit file wasn't a business covered by the Financial Ombudsman Service. Mrs R and British Gas accepted this.

my findings

For clarity I should first explain that my decision deals only with the issues Mrs R has raised about the level of service she received from British Gas about her insurance policy. As has already been explained, this service is unable to consider issues Mrs R has raised about her credit file. This is because the business responsible for information placed on Mrs R's credit file (relating to her energy bill) was put there by a business (British Gas Residential Energy) which doesn't fall within the jurisdiction of the Financial Ombudsman Service. Mrs R may wish to refer issues relating to her gas bill and the implication of information about this on her credit file to the Energy Ombudsman.

Turning now to Mrs R's complaint about customer service. I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint. It's agreed that the service provided by British Gas wasn't of the standard

expected. The issue for me to decide is whether the compensation paid to Mrs R by British Gas for distress and inconvenience caused is fair and reasonable in the circumstances.

It's clear to me that there were unnecessary delays in the length of time British Gas took to send someone to inspect the repairs Mrs R was complaining about. It took British Gas almost two months to respond to Mrs R's initial request for this to happen. I think this would have caused Mrs R some frustration and inconvenience as nothing seemed to be happening despite her efforts to resolve things. British Gas has paid Mrs R £50 for the delay in responding to this aspect of Mrs R's complaint which I think was fair.

Mrs R had to raise her concerns about the 2013 repairs with British Gas on a number of occasions and wait several months before British Gas eventually agreed to inspect the repairs and ultimately fix them. Mrs R has said that before British Gas agreed to inspect the repairs, it was winter and bitterly cold. She has explained that because of this, the draught coming from her bathroom was unbearable, and made worse given her age and state of health. I have real sympathy for Mrs R and can appreciate that this must have been an uncomfortable and distressing time for her. So I'm pleased to see that following the concerns Mrs R raised, British Gas agreed to cover the cost of repairs to Mrs R's bathroom. This is despite it not being able to confirm whether or not the 2013 repairs were poor.

Specifically, British Gas has covered the cost of installing a hatch, refitting a toilet and having new flooring laid in the bathroom. Mrs R has said she's satisfied with this settlement. I'm mindful that due to the amount of time that had passed British Gas wasn't able to say for sure that the issues in Mrs R's bathroom were caused by faulty repairs carried out in 2013. But given the circumstances and what Mrs R went through, I think British Gas agreeing to pay £333 to Mrs R to cover bathroom repair costs and a further £195 for delays was fair. I don't propose to make any additional award in this respect.

Mrs R has asked for compensation for the amount of time and energy she put into raising and pursuing her complaint. Specifically she has said she'd like remuneration based on her lowest hourly rate of £35. Having carefully reviewed everything Mrs R has submitted to this service it's clear to me she has indeed put a lot of effort into trying to get matters with British Gas resolved. There are numerous occasions where Mrs R and her husband made calls, sent emails and letters to British Gas in an attempt to get their concerns addresses. Several times British Gas failed to get back to Mrs R when it said it would. I can imagine how disheartened and disappointed Mrs R would've been by this.

British Gas has acknowledged that its service fell short and apologised. It paid Mrs R £300 compensation for this, which also covered the outstanding balance of the energy bill Mrs R was disputing. Under the circumstances I feel this is a fair recognition of the inconvenience and poor customer service Mrs R received. I know Mrs R feels that more compensation should be paid for the time she spent trying to resolve things. But this service wouldn't usually award compensation for specific "units" of time. Having thought carefully about the length of time Mrs R has had to pursue her complaint I think that British Gas' settlement reasonable. So I'm not going to ask it to do anything more than this.

British Gas covered the cost of Mrs R's final gas bill in its entirety. This is despite the dispute over whether the increased bill arose from poor workmanship in Mrs R's bathroom in 2013. The impact of this previously unpaid gas bill is still in dispute and not something I can comment on. But I think British Gas' decision to cover the cost of the energy bill so Mrs R didn't have to pay any of it was a fair settlement. Especially as Mrs R will have had some

use of the gas and electricity for the period the final bill covers. So I don't intend to order British Gas to do anything more regarding this.

In total, British Gas has paid Mrs R £878 compensation in recognition of what has happened. This is a significant award and in my view it fairly reflects the issues Mrs R had with British Gas.

I don't underestimate the stress Mrs R has suffered throughout the claims process and her complaint. But because I think British Gas has made a fair settlement, I don't intend to order it to do anything more to resolve this complaint.

my final decision

My decision is that British Gas Insurance Limited has taken fair and reasonable steps to resolve this complaint, so I don't require it do anything more.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs R to accept or reject my decision before 23 February 2017.

Chillel Williams

ombudsman