

complaint

Mr and Mrs O are unhappy with the service they received from British Gas Services Limited when their boiler broke down.

background

Mr and Mrs O's liquid petroleum gas (LPG) boiler broke down in February 2019. As they had homecare cover with British Gas, they contacted it and arranged for an engineer to visit on 21 February 2019.

Mr and Mrs O say the engineer arrived an hour late and told them a part was needed to repair the boiler. The part was ordered and a new appointment was made for the next day to fit it. Mr and Mrs O then had a series of engineer appointments and further communication with British Gas until the boiler was repaired on 2 March 2019.

Mr and Mrs O are very unhappy with the service British Gas gave them during this time. The complaint points they've made can be summarised as:

- An engineer didn't attend as agreed on 22 February 2019. British Gas sent another engineer the same day, but they arrived at a time Mr and Mrs O had already told British Gas they wouldn't be in and left the part outside Mr and Mrs O's house.
- An engineer visited as agreed on 23 February, after Mr and Mrs O contacted British Gas because the original booking disappeared from their online account. The part didn't fix the boiler so a new part was ordered.
- An engineer failed to attend as agreed on 25 February 2019. When Mr and Mrs O contacted British Gas about this, it said it had cancelled the appointment because the new part wouldn't be available for a week or so.
- British Gas had arranged a telephone appointment with Mr and Mrs O on 27 Feb 2019 to provide a quote for a new boiler. But this wasted their time, because in that call British Gas said it needed to visit to give a quote because it was an LPG boiler.
- An engineer failed to attend as agreed on 1 March 2019. Mr and Mrs O say they saw the engineer arrive, park and then drive off without approaching their home. When they called British Gas, it said the engineer had reported there was no-one home. It agreed to send another engineer before 12pm since Mr and Mrs O would then be unavailable. But no-one arrived so Mr and Mrs O had to call British Gas and rearrange the appointment for the next day. Mr and Mrs O say British Gas then gave them conflicting information about the original appointment on 1 March 2019 - at first it said an engineer hadn't been. Then it said an engineer had been but didn't have the correct part. And then it said an engineer had been but wasn't qualified to work on their LPG boiler. Mr and Mrs O say British Gas wasted their time by sending an engineer not qualified for the job, and that both it and its engineer lied.
- An engineer visited on 2 March 2019 and repaired the boiler without the part British Gas had said was needed. Mr and Mrs O say the repair was therefore unnecessarily delayed, and they were left without a boiler for eleven days.

Mr and Mrs O complained to British Gas, and it accepted it gave them poor customer service. It explained there was a shortage of LPG trained engineers and that it would internally address the matter of the engineer incorrectly reporting they hadn't been at home on 1 March 2019. At first British Gas offered Mr and Mrs O £100 compensation, but ultimately it increased this to £130 in its final response to Mr and Mrs O.

Mr and Mrs O didn't think this was enough given the inconvenience they'd been put to. So they brought their complaint to our service. They said they hadn't had a working boiler for eleven days. They said the missed and cancelled appointments meant they'd had to rearrange things at short notice and call British Gas many times to find out what happening. And they were unhappy to think British Gas had lied to them and about them.

After Mr and Mrs O contacted our service, British Gas reconsidered and increased its offer of compensation to £200. Mr and Mrs O didn't accept this so our service continued to investigate. And after looking into things, our investigator thought British Gas had given Mr and Mrs O poor customer service and said it should pay them £250 compensation.

But Mr and Mrs O disagreed. They said £250 wasn't enough to reflect the problems they'd had with British Gas over the years (some of which they'd previously complained to our service about) or to make British Gas improve its service. And British Gas also disagreed with our investigator - it thought the £200 compensation it had already offered was fair.

As both Mr and Mrs O and British Gas disagreed, this complaint has come to me for a decision. I issued a provisional decision on 30 January 2020 in which I said as follows.

I've considered all the available evidence and arguments to decide what's fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint. Having done so, I intend to uphold this complaint and ask British Gas to pay Mr and Mrs O £400 compensation to recognise the inconvenience and frustration it caused them. I'll explain why.

But before I explain my reasons, I'd like to be clear that in this decision I'm only considering this particular complaint. I'm not considering any previous complaints Mr and Mrs O have brought to us about British Gas. That's because our service looks at complaints on a case by case basis, and we don't look again at complaints we've already investigated.

I'd also like to be clear that our role is not to regulate financial businesses. Instead, our service looks at individual complaints from consumers. Therefore we're not here to punish businesses when things go wrong, but rather to put consumers back into the position they should have been in.

Mr and Mrs O have detailed the poor service they say British Gas gave them in February and early March 2019 during the course of repairing their boiler. And British Gas itself seems to accept the points they've made - it's agreed it gave them poor service.

Since it's not in dispute that Mr and Mrs O received poor service from British Gas, I therefore need to decide what would be a fair and reasonable was of putting things right in this particular complaint. To do that, I've thought about the impact the poor customer service would've had on Mr and Mrs O, and what they've told us about this. And I'm satisfied British Gas caused them inconvenience and frustration. I'll explain why.

British Gas repeatedly missed and cancelled appointments at short notice, and I'm satisfied this would've caused Mr and Mrs O frustration. And when this happened, Mr and Mrs O said they needed to take action to find out what was happening - either by checking their appointment online or by calling British Gas for an update.

Those missed and cancelled appointments needed to be rearranged. Mr and Mrs O said this caused them inconvenience because they had to change things at short notice to make sure they could be at home for the rearranged appointments. Mr and Mrs O have also said that

when engineers did attend, they sometimes arrived late or at times Mr and Mrs O had told British Gas wasn't convenient for them. I think this would have added to their frustration.

Mr and Mrs O are also very unhappy about what happened on 1 March 2019. They said the British Gas engineer lied about them by saying they hadn't been at home. And that British Gas lied to them when they contacted it later that day, as it gave them three different explanations for what had happened. Whether British Gas lied or whether these were honest mistakes, I think Mr and Mrs O would have been frustrated to find that incorrect information had been recorded about why the original appointment didn't go ahead. And British Gas then giving several different accounts about that would have added to their frustration.

Mr and Mrs O have said they were left without a boiler for eleven days. Their boiler had broken down, so it's fair to say they were likely to be without it for at least some period of time. But British Gas said a part was needed to repair it, and that turned out not to be the case. So I'm satisfied the repair was probably delayed by a few days, as there were times when engineers were waiting for a part that wasn't ultimately needed. I'm satisfied this would have caused Mr and Mrs O further inconvenience and frustration.

One of the complaint points Mr and Mrs O have made is that British Gas wasted their time by incorrectly arranging a telephone appointment for a new boiler quote. But this isn't a complaint point I can consider. That's because our service doesn't have a free hand to look into every complaint brought to us. Instead we must follow the rules that set out which complaints we can look into - these are known as the DISP rules. Providing a quote for a new boiler isn't a regulated activity under the DISP rules, so I don't have the power to consider this particular complaint point.

But after taking everything else into account, I think £400 is fairer and more reasonable compensation for the ongoing inconvenience and increasing frustration British Gas caused Mr and Mrs O, given the mistakes outlined above.'

Mr and Mrs O didn't provide any comments in response to my provisional decision. But British Gas said £400 was more compensation than it would consider in the circumstances and the £200 it had already offered was fair. I've now gone on to make my final decision.

my findings

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

I set out in my provisional decision why I thought £400 was a fair amount of compensation given the ongoing inconvenience and increasing frustration British Gas caused Mr and Mrs O. And while I acknowledge that British Gas still thinks the £200 compensation it's already offered is fair in the circumstances, it's offered no further evidence for me to consider about why that might be the case. Therefore, I see no reason to depart from my provisional decision.

my final decision

For the reasons set out in my provisional decision and also above, I uphold this complaint. British Gas Services Limited should pay Mr and Mrs O a total of £400 compensation.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr and Mrs O to accept or reject my decision before 24 March 2020.

Ailsa Wiltshire
ombudsman