

The complaint

Mr G's complaint is about several claims he made on his Great Lakes Insurance SE ('Great Lakes') pet insurance policy.

Mr G is unhappy with the way in which Great Lakes handled his claims and feels the compensation they've offered him for this isn't enough.

In this complaint Mr G is represented by his Partner, but for ease of reference I shall refer to all submissions as being his own.

What happened

Mr G held a pet insurance policy with Great Lakes. When his pet became ill, he started making claims on the policy for vet's fees. Mr G says his vet wouldn't accept payment being made directly by Great Lakes to them because they have historically taken too long to process this, so Mr G had to cover those fees himself and claim them back.

His complaints relate to the handling of the claims he made, the time it took Great Lakes to pay these claims, the customer service with which he was provided when he called Great Lakes to sort out payment and the impact late payment have had on him. Mr G is also unhappy with the way in which Great Lakes handled calls with him/his Partner following the death of his pet and the fact that Great Lakes didn't go through security questions with his Partner on one of the calls made.

Great Lakes considered Mr G's complaint and agreed that it should be upheld. They accepted that they didn't handle things as they should have in respect of the issues Mr G identified and offered him an apology together with £30 in compensation. Mr G said this wasn't enough and referred his complaint to the Financial Ombudsman Service.

Our investigator considered Mr G's complaint and said that it should be upheld. He said that Great Lakes should consider the interest Mr G had to pay on his credit card as a result of the late payments, subject to Mr G providing evidence of this, and that they should increase their offer of compensation. Great Lakes accepted the investigator's view and increased their offer of compensation to £300. Mr G doesn't think this goes far enough. He feels the offer of compensation should be between £300-£750 in accordance with our award limits. Because of this, his complaint has been passed to me to determine.

What I've decided – and why

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 agree that Mr G's complaint should be upheld for broadly the same reasons set out by the investigator.

In this case Great Lakes have accepted they did something wrong, so the issue for me to determine is whether the amount they've now offered to put things right, is enough. As things

stand Great Lakes have offered to pay the interest Mr G had to pay on his credit card as a result of the claims being paid late to him, subject to Mr G providing evidence of this. Great Lakes have also offered to pay £300 in compensation for the trouble and upset caused to Mr G generally.

Mr G's position is that the offer of compensation doesn't go far enough. I've thought about this, but I don't agree. It's true that our award limits have a sliding scale, but each case is determined on its own merits and in this case, I haven't seen an ongoing financial impact to Mr G that Great Lakes haven't offered to put right. I appreciate that Mr G says there's been an impact on his credit rating, but I haven't seen any conclusive evidence to support that Great Lakes are responsible for this. The evidence he's given is that his credit rating wasn't 'great' to start with because he doesn't often use credit cards. So, I don't think his starting point had anything to do with Great Lakes. He's also gone on to talk about the fact that he's managed to repair his credit rating since it was damaged. So, I think he's mitigated whatever loss he feels he incurred as a result of his claims being paid late. Taken together, I can't say there's any lasting damage to his credit rating as a result of Great Lakes' actions, such that they should offer him anything else in respect of this.

The figure of £300 does in my view go far enough to compensate Mr G for the delays in his claims being paid, the poor customer service he received, the lack of empathy from claims handlers following the death of his pet as well as the fact that he was left out of pocket for his claims until they were paid. As does Great Lakes' offer to pay the interest on any credit card repayments Mr G made as a result of the late payment of his claims once Mr G supplies them with evidence to support this. I appreciate Mr G has sent this Service copies of his credit card statements, but these aren't for us to assess. He will need to direct these to Great Lakes to consider on the question of interest and explain if possible, how much he's claiming for when doing so in order for Great Lakes to consider this.

I appreciate the stress Mr G says Great Lakes' actions caused and the impact this had on him, and his Partner given her state of health and the fact that it exacerbated the upset he felt following the death of his pet. He also talks about having to cancel Christmas because he couldn't afford it after not having his claims paid in a timely manner. I agree that Great Lakes actions would undoubtedly have caused Mr G difficulty. But I am also mindful that they aren't responsible for the issues that underlie the stress that Mr G was feeling entirely. Mr G's Partner's state of health and the death of his pet would have been things that would already have caused him upset. The award I would be directing in this case would be for any additional worry Great Lakes' actions caused in addition to this rather than taken as a whole. And because of that I think the amount Great Lakes have now offered is adequate.

I know Mr G was also unhappy that Great Lakes didn't ask any security questions during one particular phone call. As the investigator said, Great Lakes did accept they did something wrong here and have provided feedback to their call handlers accordingly. If, however Mr G remains unhappy with this, he can direct his complaint about it to the Information Commissioner's Office.

Putting things right

Great Lakes should:

- Consider and pay any interest Mr G incurred on his credit card as a result of his pet insurance claims being paid late subject to Mr G providing Great Lakes with evidence of this.
- Pay Mr G £300 for the trouble and upset they caused which I've set out in more detail above.

My final decision

I uphold Mr G's complaint and direct Great Lakes Insurance SE to put things right as I've set out above.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B to accept or reject my decision before 11 April 2024.

Lale Hussein-Venn
Ombudsman