

The complaint

Mr and Mrs H have complained about the way that Advantage Insurance Company Limited dealt with a flood claim on their home insurance policy. All references to Advantage in this decision include its agents.

What happened

On 10 May 2023 Mr and Mrs H made a claim to Advantage after the ground floor of their home was flooded. Advantage appointed a loss adjuster to inspect the damage and a specialist drying company.

As Mr and Mrs H had no cooking facilities but preferred to stay in their home, Advantage paid them a daily disturbance allowance.

They complained to Advantage about the following points:

- Poor communication from the loss adjuster;
- Conflicting advice regarding the stripping out that was needed to dry the property;
- About a two-month delay in approving their quotes;
- The fact that they'd had to live without a working kitchen for much longer than necessary.

Advantage accepted that there had been a lack of communication from the loss adjuster and significant delays in handling the claim. It offered £200 compensation which Mr and Mrs H didn't accept.

They brought a complaint to this service. Our Investigator recommended Advantage should pay £700 compensation for the way the claim had been handled.

As Advantage didn't agree, the matter has been referred to me.

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.

In essence, Mr and Mrs H say that Advantage handled the claim badly, causing avoidable delays and providing poor customer service.

I'd like to clarify that in this decision I'm looking at how Advantage handled the claim up to 17 November 2023 being the date of its final response to Mr and Mrs H's complaint.

Although drying times can vary, I usually think it should be possible to dry most properties within four weeks unless it's a particularly large or complex loss which wasn't the case here.

It was understandably very upsetting for Mr and Mrs H that the drying process took much longer than that because of the drying company's advice as to how much stripping out was required and delay on the part of Advantage in approving a quote for further stripping out.

Their kitchen was stripped out in July 2023. At the end of October they were still waiting for the drying to finish.

I calculate that Advantage is responsible for a delay of around two months. Mr and Mrs H have explained that at the start of the claim they chose to remain in the property because of their child's special needs. They say if they had known that no meaningful progress would have been made three months' later, they might have made a different decision. During that time they had no sink, no storage and nowhere to prepare food. The radiators had been removed meaning the house was very cold and uncomfortable.

During the course of the claim they tried to contact the loss adjuster by phone and email on several occasions without success. This would undoubtedly have been very frustrating.

Calculating the amount of compensation due in a situation like this is not an exact science but overall, I think a total award of £700 is reasonable to recognise the fact that Advantage's poor claim handling has caused avoidable upset and inconvenience to Mr and Mrs H.

My final decision

For the reasons set out above, I uphold this complaint and require Advantage Insurance Company Limited to pay Mr and Mrs H £700 compensation for the trouble and upset it caused them.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr H and Mrs H to accept or reject my decision before 26 July 2024.

Elizabeth Grant
Ombudsman