

The complaint

Mr J and Mrs J complain The National Farmers' Union Mutual Insurance Society Limited trading as NFU Mutual (NFU) made a data security breach and it failed to deal with his complaint competently.

References to Mr J or Mrs J, will include the other.

What happened

Mr J made two separate complaints to NFU. One was regarding his own insurance policy that he held with Mrs J and the other complaint related to a separate insurance policy held by his mother in which he had acted as her representative.

NFU sent Mr and Mrs J's home insurance policy renewal documents in 2023 to an old address. NFU acknowledged its error in sending them to the wrong address and awarded him £150 for the inconvenience.

Mr J said NFU's email responses to himself included his mother's address. He was concerned that copies of these emails had been sent in the post to his mother's address and was also concerned about the personal data that was included in the emails. NFU also sent the £150 compensation awarded to him by cheque to his mothers' address.

NFU increased its offer of compensation to £500. This was to also take into account the error it made when it recorded his mother's address in emails relating to his own complaint and because payment of the original £150 compensation award had been incorrectly sent by way of cheque in his name but to his mother's address.

Because Mr J was not happy with NFU, he brought the complaint to our service.

Our investigator did not uphold the complaint. They looked into the case and said they were satisfied that NFU had taken Mr J's complaint seriously and it should have provided better customer service to him. They said the total award of £500 for the distress and inconvenience caused is what they would expect in the circumstances of this case.

As Mr J is unhappy with our investigator's view the complaint has been brought to me for a final decision to be made.

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 my assessment, I haven't considered the way Mr J's mother has been treated as she isn't involved in this complaint. I can only consider the way Mr J has been impacted by the issues raised. In addition my role isn't to tell NFU how to operate its business. We are not the industry regulator.

In March 2024 NFU said it identified that a system error occurred which changed Mr and Mrs J's address to the previous one it had on file. It confirmed this was not manually changed and this matter occurred due to an IT failure, which was being investigated by its IT department. It said as a result of the system error, his policy documents were posted to his previous address. It confirmed it had raised the matter to its data protection team.

NFU said it takes all data breaches seriously and had logged this issue with its data protection team. It said this team were investigating how this happened to prevent anything like it happening again in the future. It said it had not reported the breach to the Information Commissioners Office (ICO) because it's only necessary to do this if there is a high impact to the individual, in this case Mr J. It said in this instance its error was assessed as low risk. However it said it would be happy to provide ICO with any information that they may require relating to this breach as part of an investigation.

NFU awarded Mr J £150 in compensation for the inconvenience in March 2024. This is when further mistakes happened and the address included in the complaint responses that were sent by email was that of Mr J's mother, and the compensation cheque payable to him was sent to his mother's address.

After a full review NFU explained that when he had registered a complaint on behalf of his mother it was logged against her policy but in his name. When Mr J then raised a complaint about his data later that day, it incorrectly didn't set up a separate complaint and because of this, it incorrectly dealt with both his complaint and his mother's complaint as one. This then resulted in it sending the £150 it had awarded to him for his complaint to his mother's address.

I saw NFU apologised and agreed it had let Mr J down. It reviewed his concerns about email security as he was concerned about his personal information being sent by email. It explained its systems have an encrypted connection between itself and an email recipient as a form of protection. It confirmed the email sent to him was through a secure system. It said it doesn't take any responsibility for the security of his own email. NFU confirmed the letters were issued only by email to Mr J and were not sent in the post.

NFU amended its records to separate the complaints and wrote to him separately about his mother's complaint to avoid any further confusion. It apologised for the distress and inconvenience caused to him and increased its offer of compensation to £500 to take into account both the data breach when it sent the renewal documents to his old address and the error made in sending the compensation awarded also to an incorrect address.

Mr J has said he would like our service to look into NFU's general complaint handling procedures. However this is not within our jurisdiction. Mr J's complaint about the data breach was within our jurisdiction and I have considered the way its complaints procedure failed in relation to this. However I am unable to review NFU's general complaint procedures as this is not a complaint about a "*financial service*" so it's not within our jurisdiction to look into this.

I recognise Mr J will be disappointed with my decision, however although I accept NFU got things wrong in this case and their complaint handling was poor, I think the action taken by NFU was appropriate, and its offer of £500 was fair and reasonable in the circumstances of this complaint. And it's in line with what our service would recommend.

Therefore, I don't uphold Mr J's complaint and don't require NFU to do anything further in this case.

My final decision

For the reasons I have given I don't uphold this complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mrs J and Mr J to accept or reject my decision before 19 December 2024.

Sally-Ann Harding
Ombudsman