

The complaint

Mr B has complained about The Prudential Assurance Limited (Prudential). He said he can't obtain a valuation of his whole of life policy online. He said he is being provided with a sub-standard service compared to other customers of Prudential. He would like to be able to gain access online and get an instant valuation.

Mr B has also complained about not receiving a manual valuation from Prudential within a reasonable timeframe. He said Prudential has not done what it said it would do. He would like Prudential to send him valuations as agreed between them.

What happened

Mr B has held a whole of life policy with Prudential since January 2001. He has extended his policy twice, in January 2011 and again in January 2021. His policy is due to mature on 28 January 2031.

Mr B said he has never been able to access details about his policy online and he can't obtain a valuation this way. He said this is unfair and he is being provided with a sub-standard service compared to other policy holders.

Mr B complained to Prudential about this. He first complained to it about the fact he couldn't get a valuation online. He has also complained about several occasions where he has asked for a valuation from Prudential, and it has taken longer to obtain than he said it promised.

Prudential has responded to Mr B's complaints on several occasions. In September 2019 it agreed that he cannot obtain a valuation online. It said that there is an issue with its software in relation to policy holders that have extended their end date. It said Mr B and other policy holders with similar circumstances cannot access a valuation online. It said, it didn't think this system restriction will change either. It has said sorry and paid £150 compensation to Mr B for this.

Prudential has also responded to several complaints where Mr B complained it hadn't done what it said it would do. Prudential wrote to Mr B in January 2022, October 2022 and again in March 2023. It said sorry in these complaints for not meeting Mr B's expectations and has paid compensation overall of £625, this being £300 in January 2022, £100 in October 2022 and £225 in March 2023.

Mr B is not happy with Prudential's response. He said he doesn't understand why Prudential can't fix the issues in relation to its online portal and has said he thinks it should do this. He has also said, it continuously is not getting a valuation to him within 48 hours, something that it said it would do. Mr B said Prudential should send out automatic statements to him. Mr B referred his complaint to our service.

An investigator looked into Mr B's complaint. She said she didn't think Prudential needed to take any action, other than what it has already done to date. She said she wasn't going to uphold Mr B's complaint as she could see Prudential had already paid him £625 compensation for the ongoing inconvenience caused. She said Prudential had explained that

Mr B would be unable to obtain a valuation online and that it would send him one within 48 hours when he phoned them. Prudential said it couldn't send out automatic statements. Our investigator concluded it was not unreasonable of Prudential to say this.

Mr B is not in agreement with the investigator's view. So as this is the case his complaint has been passed to me, an ombudsman, to look into.

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.

I am not upholding Mr B's complaint. I will explain why:

- Mr B has had a long-standing issue in relation to his with profits whole of life policy, that he holds with Prudential. I can see that Mr B has never been able to obtain a valuation for his policy online. Something that most Prudential policy holders now can do.
- Prudential has explained why this is the case with Mr B's policy. It said there is an issue with its software in relation to policy holders that had extended the end date of their policy. It said it was unable to automatically provide a valuation online due to this system restriction, and that this needed to be done manually. It said it was also unable to instantly provide a valuation on the phone as it needs to be manually calculated.
- I acknowledge Mr B's frustrations that he is not receiving the same level of service as other policy holders that now can obtain a valuation online.
- Prudential has explained that its online service was supposed to provide valuations for all its policy holders but for any that had extended the end date of their policy, this function did not work online. Prudential has been clear with Mr B that it is not going to be able to fix this. Prudential has also said sorry, has provided compensation and has provided an alternative way that it can provide a valuation. It has asked Mr B to call it and has told him that it can provide a valuation to him within 48 hours. It said it will do this by working out his valuation manually then calling him and notifying him what it is. It said it would then follow this up with a valuation in the post.
- On balance and considering all that I have read in Mr B's complaint, I don't think Prudential has been unreasonable with the way it has dealt with Mr B's initial complaint. It has explained why Mr B has not been able to access a valuation online and has offered an alternative way of getting a valuation to him as practicably as it can, in this case Prudential has said 48 hours.
- Prudential has agreed with Mr B that it would provide a valuation to him within 48 hours, after he has called it to request one. It said it has put a note on its system for its staff to read, so that there is an understanding as to what has been agreed. It has said it will obtain a valuation within 48 hours and call Mr B by this time to provide it. It would then send the valuation by post. So again, I don't think Prudential has been unreasonable here with the way it has dealt with Mr B's complaint. I also agree that it is up to Prudential whether it wants to send automatic statements to Mr B or not.
- The ongoing issue remaining is that at times Prudential is not meeting its own self-

imposed target, and this has led to frustration and further dissatisfaction from Mr B on top of his disappointment about not being able to gain access to a valuation online. Mr B has been given a total of £625 in compensation by Prudential to date, for occasions when it has not met its own target, in addition to the initial £150 compensation for the original issue. It has agreed that it has not done what it said it would do and so has said sorry for these times and paid further compensation.

- I can see that Prudential has apologised and paid compensation to Mr B totalling £775 for not providing the online service to Mr B and then in addition not providing a valuation manually within 48 hours as it said it would. I think the amount of compensation it has already paid is fair and reasonable and so I won't be asking it to do anything further.
- Going forward, Prudential either needs to provide valuations in the timeframe it has agreed with Mr B or contact him and discuss what a manageable timeframe would be for doing this work. If Prudential are unable to meet the time frame that it has agreed with Mr B going forward, then I can see how this is going to cause further dissatisfaction from Mr B. If this is the case Mr B should contact Prudential first and if need be, complain to our service about it. But in conclusion, I think the amount of compensation Prudential has paid for everything that has happened up to now is fair and reasonable in the circumstances. So, it follows that I don't uphold Mr B's complaint.

I appreciate that my decision will be disappointing for Mr B, and I acknowledge the strength of his feelings in the submissions provided. But based on everything I have read and the findings I have given, I don't uphold his complaint.

My final decision

My final decision is that I do not uphold Mr B's complaint.

Under the rules of the Financial Ombudsman Service, I'm required to ask Mr B to accept or reject my decision before 30 January 2024.

Mark Richardson
Ombudsman