

[Sneaking out announcement asking departments to model cuts of 3 per cent and 6 per cent is no way to manage public spending – John McDonnell](#)

John

McDonnell MP, Labour's Shadow Chancellor, commenting on reports that the Treasury has asked government departments to prepare for cuts of 3 per cent and 6 per cent, for 2019/20, said:

"For all Hammond's talk of 'resetting' the Tory Government's economic policy last summer it is now beyond doubt that Hammond represents more of the same Tory austerity.

"Sneaking out an announcement asking departments to model cuts of 3 per cent and 6 per cent for 2019/20 is no way to manage public spending.

"Hammond urgently needs to explain why this announcement was made in the way it was and why after seven years of failed austerity he thinks more of the same will now work."

[Jonathan Ashworth calls for guarantees over NHS lost letters scandal](#)

Jonathan Ashworth MP, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary, following the statement in the House of Commons about the 700,000 patient letters lost by NHS Shared Business Services, has today written to Jeremy Hunt to demand further assurances for the public and said:

"The statement contained no reassurance that you had got to the bottom of what happened in the first place.

"You repeatedly blamed the problem on contractors but failed to acknowledge that this error was committed by a company part owned by your Department, over a period of several years during your time as Secretary of

State.

“How on earth did it happen that NHS Shared Business Services, failed to send so many letters and instead just left them lying in a warehouse?

How much money and staff time has been wasted by this incident?

“Patients and their families will need much more reassurance that the Government actually has a plan to make sure this never happens again.”

Ends

Notes to editors

· In
Section 12 of the NHS SBS Standard Purchase Terms and Conditions it clearly states that there should be regular updates including of data breaches –
“12.3.1
have a named person able to communicate with NHS SBS, who will take the lead for information governance and from whom NHS SBS and the Client shall receive regular reports on information governance matters, including but not limited to details of all incidents of data loss and breach of confidence”

Full Sopra Steria Terms and Conditions here:

<http://www.soprasteria.co.uk/docs/librariesprovider41/Policy/nhs-sbs-standard-terms-and-conditions-v2-jan2015>

· Full
text of Jonathan Ashworth letter to Jeremy Hunt below.

Dear Jeremy

Follow up letter on NHS Shared Business Services

Thank you for your response to the Urgent Question in this House this afternoon about the 700,000 letter undelivered by NHS Shared Business Services between 2011 and 2016. The public will be relieved to hear that, through sheer luck, no incidents of patient care have yet been identified. However it is enormously frustrating that you had to be forced to the House to give this update. Will you commit to publishing the advice you received on which basis you chose not to make the details of this incident clear at an earlier date?

The statement contained no reassurance that you had got to the bottom of what happened in the first place. You repeatedly blamed the problem on contractors but failed to acknowledge that this error was committed by a company part owned by your Department, over a period of several years during your time as Secretary of State. How on earth did it happen that NHS SBS failed to send so many letters and instead just

left

them lying in a warehouse? How much money and staff time has been wasted by this incident? Patients and their families will need much more reassurance that the Government actually has a plan to make sure this never happens again.

Who

in your Department was responsible for keeping a watch on this company? Sopra Steria's contract for delivering the NHS SBS service states: "NHS SBS and the Client shall receive regular reports on information governance matters, including all incidents of data loss." How often did you receive updates about

the work of this company part owned by his Department, as required under the contract signed by Sopra Steria? Will you publish these updates? Will you publish any reports relating to data loss which were received by NHS SBS or your Department since 2011?

Your initial statement last July said the problem was limited to three areas of the country – South West England, East Midlands, and North East London – will you commit to publishing a full breakdown of the whereabouts of the patients who were affected, as promised to

Members today? What guarantees can you offer about the delivery of letters to patients in other parts of the country?

Where was this warehouse where all these

letters were lying undelivered, and had anyone from your Department been there

during the years 2011 to 2016? What guarantees can you give that no further warehouses of undelivered patient letters are yet to be discovered? Were these

all the letters that NHS SBS were commissioned to deliver during this time or only a part of them? Were NHS SBS paid for the delivery of these letters, and if so will this money be recovered? What action are you taking to address this

astonishing waste of public funds on your watch? Has an apology been offered to

the NHS staff, both in hospitals and GP surgeries, whose time and effort has been wasted by this case?

Finally will you commit to returning to

the House once your enquiry is finally completed to update the house on the final cost and impact for patients, and to explain what measures you are putting in place to make sure an incident like this never happens again?

Yours sincerely

Jonathan

Jonathan Ashworth

Shadow Secretary of State for Health

Labour hold emergency business roundtable to discuss business rates “ticking time bomb” – Rebecca Long-Bailey

Labour

hold emergency business roundtable to discuss business rates “ticking time bomb”

Senior

Labour politicians met today with representatives from ten major business organisations to discuss the mounting business rates crisis.

New

rates are due to kick in on 1st April but thousands of businesses are unsure whether they will be able to pay.

Labour

joined forces with businesses to put pressure on the Government to provide emergency transitional relief for struggling businesses in the budget next week. They also agreed to begin an ongoing dialogue about how to fundamentally reform business rates in the longer run.

The

meeting followed Labour’s earlier announcement of a five point plan for business rates, which is intended to help businesses through this difficult period, and develop a system of business taxation that is fairer on businesses and local communities alike.

Labour’s

Five Point Plan for Business Rates:

1.
Set up an emergency transitional relief fund for businesses facing “cliff edge” increases in their rates, and revise the appeals process to ensure businesses get a swift and fair hearing
2.
Bring forward CPI indexation so that businesses aren’t paying more because of how inflation is measured
- 3.

Exclude new investment in plant and machinery from future business rates valuation

4. Introduce more regular valuations in law to stop businesses facing periodic, unmanageable hikes

5. Fundamental reform of the business rates system to ease the burden on traditional high streets and town centres in the age of online shopping; support the traditional fabric of our communities, including community pubs and incentivising free cash machines; and create a fairer system of business taxation.

Rebecca Long-Bailey, Shadow Business Secretary, said:

“We’ve called this emergency meeting with business organisations today because time is running out to save our local businesses and we need to keep the pressure on.

It’s clear that there is a way out of this crisis, the question is whether the Government are going to take it.”

Jim McMahon, Shadow Minister for Local Government, said:

“Our town centres and high streets are already struggling – and this latest hike in rates threatens to send many businesses under. Small businesses in particular need far more support than the Government is currently offering.”

“This business rate revaluation has exposed the inherent flaws in this antiquated and unfair system. That’s why we are calling for a full review of business rates. The Government must move towards a system which works for businesses, and their local communities.”

Mike Cherry, National Chairman at the Federation of Small Businesses, said:

“Business rates are an outdated tax. FSB is keen for all political parties to help those small firms hardest hit by the current revaluation, and to start to focus on fundamental longer-term reform of business rates to make sure it’s fair for small firms. It is incredibly important to support small businesses and the self-employed so

they don't face shock tax rises, so we are delighted to take part in the roundtable."

Andrew

Silvester, Head of Campaigns & Deputy Director of Policy at the Institute of Directors said:

"It's hugely important that politicians on all sides look for constructive ways to reform business rates. This is a 20th century system and in a 21st century economy it looks painfully out of date."

Christopher

Richards, Senior Business Environment Policy Adviser at the Engineering Employers Federation, said:

"Establishing the principle that plant and machinery has no place in the business rates system is an important first step for all political actors to take, this is the top priority action for industry. The inclusion of plant and machinery in business rates bills represents a tax on productive investment and undermines the international competitiveness of UK manufacturing. Excluding future investments from being taxed is therefore a significant step in the right direction, is consistent with the government's industrial strategy aims and if enacted would give some confidence to manufacturers about the likely post-Brexit investment environment in the UK."

[Wing-Loong II UAS conducts maiden flight](#)

A Wing-Loong II, the new reconnaissance and strike multi-role endurance Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS), is on static display at the 2016 China Int'l Airshow in Zhuhai on Nov. 2, 2016. [File photo by Chen Boyuan / China.org.cn]

China's home-developed Wing-Loong II, the new reconnaissance and strike multi-role endurance Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS), successfully completed its maiden flight Monday.

With a more than 20 meter wingspan, the yellow Wing-Loong II No.01 made its appearance on the runway of a highland airfield in western China at noon Monday, before conducting a 31-minute flight.

"Its flight marks China's new generation reconnaissance and strike UAS. Following the United States, China becomes another country capable of

developing such new generation large reconnaissance and strike UAS,” said Li Yidong, chief designer of the Wing-Loong UAS series.

The Wing-Loong UAS series were developed by Chengdu Aircraft Design and Research Institute (CADI) of the state-owned Aviation Industry Corporation of China.

Li said it showed that China had the capability to deliver new generation reconnaissance and strike UAS products to foreign military customers.

In fact, the Wing-Loong II has already won the biggest overseas purchase order in the history of Chinese UAS foreign military sales, even before its maiden flight.

The Wing-Loong II is a medium-altitude, long-endurance, multi-role UAS integrated with both reconnaissance and strike capabilities.

It is composed of the Wing-Loong II unmanned aircraft, GCS, mission payload and a ground support system.

Its unmanned aircraft is 11 meters in length, 4.1 meters in height, and 20.5 meters in wingspan. The maximum flying altitude of the aircraft is 9km, with a flying speed reaching up to 340km per hour.

It has a maximum take-off weight of 4.2 tonnes, with an external carriage weight of 480kg, and can fly for 20 hours in a persistent mission cruise.

Li said that the Wing-Loong II could perform reconnaissance, surveillance and ground strike missions.

“It can rapidly identify then strike against time-critical and fleeting targets. The capability is not possessed by previous unmanned aircraft, even manned aircraft,” Li said. “Taking a look at the UAS in same class around the world, the Wing-Loong II is equivalent to the U.S. MQ-9 Reaper, and ranks in the first level on the UAS list.”

With a system extension, it can also perform intelligence collection, electronic warfare, search and rescue missions, and has several uses, including military, anti-terrorism, peace keeping, border patrol operations and civilian use.

News story: Submarines to support economic and community growth

The MOD is investing hundreds of millions of pounds in developing HM Naval Base Clyde as the Royal Navy Submarine Centre of Specialisation.

This will see all UK attack submarines based in Argyll and Bute by 2020, and the eventual arrival of the Dreadnought class of ballistic submarines.

The development is expected to increase the number of personnel at HMNB Clyde to an eventual population of 8,200, with many choosing to live in the area.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed today will see the signatories work together in delivering infrastructure and opportunities for Royal Navy families and local people to live, work and prosper together.

Witnessing the signing was Secretary of State for Scotland David Mundell, who said:

The UK's entire submarine fleet will be based at Faslane by 2020. This will reinforce Scotland's vital role in protecting our country, and guarantee skilled, secure jobs on the Clyde for years to come.

We must ensure this investment in the base is also a catalyst for growth and regeneration in the wider community. Today's agreement will deliver new housing and improved infrastructure, ensuring people in Argyll and Bute benefit directly from hosting the base.

Minister for Defence Veterans, Reserves and Personnel Mark Lancaster, said:

This agreement ensures the investment we are making to upgrade HMNB Clyde, as part of the £1.7bn we are spending to improve military bases in Scotland, will not only help provide our people and their families with more stability and a better environment to work in, but will also help transform the local area, providing skilled jobs and better infrastructure.

Councillor Dick Walsh, Leader of Argyll and Bute Council and Chair of the Argyll and Bute Community Planning Partnership, said:

This agreement is about making the development of HMNB Clyde work for Navy personnel, their families and the communities in Argyll they will be joining. It's about delivering opportunities for new residents and local people to build happy, prosperous lives together. Helensburgh and its surrounding areas offer great benefits as a place to live, work and visit, and we very much look forward to welcoming new Navy friends and neighbours.

Work will focus on key themes which are set out in a Strategic Delivery and Development Framework (SDDF) and include education, economy, community facilities, communication, transportation and housing.

Naval Base Commander, Commodore Mark Gayfer, said:

The Royal Navy is keen to ensure that the local community better understands what it brings to Argyll and Bute.

There are tremendous opportunities for mutual benefit, such as our redevelopment of the Drumfork Club in Helensburgh, building new sports facilities and the UK Government £5m of support for the Council's waterfront redevelopment.

Through its redevelopment HMNB Clyde will grow its staff numbers from 6,800 today to an eventual population of 8,200. The construction phases are expected to support a further 1,000 contractor jobs.

Work on delivering benefits for new Navy families and Argyll communities is already in progress, for example:

- **Economy and regeneration:** On 18 January 17, Argyll and Bute Council and HMNB Clyde held the first joint economic forum in Helensburgh. Local businesses were invited to hear about the tremendous opportunities available from the expansion of the Naval Base. Following the event the Council is collating findings and developing a plan of action to take forward.
- **Housing and Accommodation:** The MOD and Council are working with private and social housing sectors to develop options for choice in the housing market.
- **Education and training.** Argyll and Bute Council has created the role of Service Pupil Adviser to provide advice and support for the large numbers of Armed Forces children in the Helensburgh and Lomond area. This temporary post is funded by the MOD Education Support Fund.

Community Facilities:

- The MOD owned Drumfork Club, situated in Churchill Estate in Helensburgh, is currently being renovated and due to be re-opened mid-2018. The refreshed facility will be open to the entire community and feature an area for registered childcare provision and five multi-purpose function rooms which can be used for organised and semi-organised activities by local community groups and organisations.
- Although many of the Royal Navy facilities in the area have been put in place for use by service personnel, base workers, and their families, the facilities are also made available on a regular basis to local community groups and organisations.

- Communications and engagement. The MOD and Argyll and Bute Council have produced an Armed Forces and Veterans' brochure which will provide information on Argyll and Bute and the various organisations and services available to support the Armed Forces community and their families.