

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