

Ofcom's proposal to cut landline prices by at least £5 is a step in the right direction – Watson

Tom Watson, Labour's Shadow Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, commenting on Ofcom's review of standalone landline costs, said

"It's a scandal that service providers have increased landline prices year on year despite benefiting from significant decreases in wholesale costs so Ofcom's proposal to cut landline prices by at least £5 is a step in the right direction.

"Landlines are important to households across the country, and the elderly and vulnerable in particular. We need to see a fairer deal for consumers and the Government must act to put safeguards in place to prevent future increases above inflation.

"This landline rip-off can't go on any longer."

Chancellor must commit to 'triple lock' at Budget

In a speech today on intergenerational fairness Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary will demand that the Chancellor 'commit' in the Budget to 'guarantee the triple lock on state pensions beyond 2020'.

The Government hinted that they may cut the triple lock in order to "tackle the challenge of rising longevity." This led to accusations that the Tories were 'abandoning older people'.

Labour has made a commitment to maintaining the triple lock under the next Labour government, alongside other pensioner benefits.

Debbie

Abrahams MP, Labour's Shadow Work and Pensions Secretary commenting on concerns that the Government has refused to commit to the triple lock said:

"It was shocking to hear the Chancellor suggest that he would expose older people to the flawed austerity agenda – further proof that the Tories are abandoning older people.

"The last Labour government were responsible for a historic reduction in pensioner poverty levels. A record that we remain hugely proud of.

"The Chancellor must use this Budget to provide clarity on the issue of the triple lock, and follow Labour's lead by committing to the policy beyond 2020."

[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.”