

This has all the signs of a cover up – Ashworth

Jonathan Ashworth MP, Labour's Shadow Health Secretary, responding to revelations that NHS Shared Business Services failed to deliver more than 500,000 letters from hospitals to GPs in the five years to 2016, said:

"This is an absolute scandal. For a company partly owned by the Department of Health and a private company to fail to deliver half a million NHS letters, many of which contain information critical to patient care is astonishing. Patient safety will have been put seriously at risk as a result of this staggering incompetence.

"Jeremy Hunt now needs to tell the whole truth of why patient safety has been put at risk in this way. This has all the signs of a cover up by the Health Secretary and he immediately needs to make clear what he knew and when.

"The news is heart breaking for the families involved and it will be scarcely believable for these hospitals and GPs who are doing their best to deliver services despite the neglect of the Government. We urgently need to know how this was allowed to happen, how many patients were involved and how many have been harmed, and whether patients remain at risk.

"This happened on the Secretary of State's watch and now raises serious questions about Mr Hunt's handling of this shambles.

"It appears this matter was discovered at least by January 2016, and six months later in July 2016 Jeremy Hunt chose to issue a 138 word statement to Parliament. This statement was perfunctory, complacent and evasive, failing to reveal any of the catastrophic detail of how 500,000 pieces of correspondence, including test and screening results and pathways following hospital treatment, had failed to be delivered and were in fact languishing unopened in a warehouse.

"Instead Mr Hunt glibly told Parliament that "some correspondence in the mail redirection service has not reached the intended recipients." For a Secretary of State who supposedly has transparency as his watchword this looks like he has tried to hide the scandal from patients and the public. It's totally unacceptable.

"Quite simply the public will be naturally angry that the Secretary of State who oversees NHS Shared Business Services has failed in his first duty to protect patients."