

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

[News story: Government launches major new drive on internet safety.](#)

Ministers have begun work on a new Internet Safety Strategy aimed at making Britain the safest country in the world for children and young people to be online.

Culture Secretary Karen Bradley is leading the new cross-Government drive on behalf of the Prime Minister – with a green paper expected in the summer.

A report by leading academic Professor Sonia Livingstone has been commissioned to provide up to date evidence of how young people are using the internet, the dangers they face, and the gaps that exist in keeping them safe.

Ministers will also hold a series of round tables in the coming weeks with social media companies, technology firms, young people, charities and mental health experts to examine online risks and how to tackle them.

The work is expected to centre on four main priorities: how to help young people help themselves; helping parents face up the dangers and discuss them with children; industry's responsibilities to society; and how technology can help provide solutions.

The focus will be on preventing children and young people from harm online and making the internet a safer place.

The round tables are also expected to examine concerns around issues like

trolling and other aggressive behaviour including rape threats against women.

They will involve ministers and officials from departments across Government including the Home Office, Department for Education, Department of Health and Ministry of Justice as part of a co-ordinated effort to make the internet safer.

It comes amid growing fears that the threat from online dangers has grown far more quickly than society's response to them, and worries that tech-savvy young people are being exposed to risks that their parents never were and might not know how to confront – like sexting, cyber bullying, and content which promotes self-harm, suicide and eating disorders.

[A recent poll](#) found more parents were concerned about sexting than about their children drinking or smoking. The YouGov survey for the PSHE association showed 78% were either fairly or very concerned about sexting, compared to 69% who concerned about alcohol misuse and 67% who were concerned about smoking.

[A study last year](#) for the NSPCC and Children's Commissioner found 13% of 11 to 16 year-olds reported that they had taken topless pictures of themselves and 3% had taken fully naked pictures of themselves. □ More than one in 10 young people say they have been the victim of cyber bullying, and self-harm among children is on the rise amid evidence of a link between internet use and an increased risk of self harm.

Karen Bradley, Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, said:

The internet has provided young people with amazing opportunities but has also introduced a host of new dangers which children and parents have never faced before.□

It is increasingly clear that some behaviours which are unacceptable offline are being tolerated or even encouraged online – sometimes with devastating consequences.□□“We are determined to make Britain the safest place in the world to be online, and to help people protect themselves from the risks they might face.□□

To do that we want to understand the full scale of the problem and explore how everyone – including Government, social media companies, technology firms, parents and others – can play their part in tackling it.

This new work builds on a range of Government initiatives around internet safety, including the Home Office's world-leading efforts to combat to combat child sexual exploitation and abuse.

In December, Home Office minister Baroness Shields was appointed the PM's Special Representative on Internet Crime and Harms, with an international focus on internet safety and security working with global technology companies and other governments to protect UK citizens. As part of the move,

Department for Culture Media and Sport Minister Tracey Crouch took on responsibility for domestic online safety.□□

It also comes as the Department of Health is developing a green paper on children and young persons' mental health, expected in the Autumn and measures in the Digital Economy Bill currently going through Parliament will introduce age checks for pornographic websites so under-18s cannot view harmful content – with powers to block sites which refuse to comply.

Sonia Livingstone is a professor of Social Psychology at the London School of Economics. Her empirical work examines the risks and opportunities from digital technologies, including for children and young people. She serves on the Executive Board of the UK's Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) and has advised various Government departments and public bodies

[Press release: Planned roadworks in Devon and Cornwall: weekly summary for Monday 20 February to Sunday 26 February](#)

Planned new and ongoing road improvements over the coming week.

The following summary of planned new and ongoing road improvements over the coming week is correct as of 17 February but could be subject to change due to weather conditions or unforeseen circumstances. All our improvement work is carried out with the aim of causing as little disruption as possible.

Devon

A38 Belvedere Cross, Haldon to Splatford junction, Kennford, south of Exeter: bridge inspection

Eastbound carriageway will be closed overnight from 8pm on 27 February until 6am on 28 February. Diversion will be in place via old Haldon Hill.

A38 Smithleigh, east of Plymouth: drainage work

Westbound carriageway will be closed overnight between the exit and entry slip roads from 8pm on 3 March to 6am on 4 March. Diversion via the exit and entry slip roads.

Cornwall

A38 between Dobwalls and Turfdown, east of Bodmin: stabilisation work

24-hour one-way system will be in operation between the Halfway House and Trago Mills until 14 April. A 30mph speed limit will be in place between Two Waters Foot and St Neot junction with a 24-hour westbound diversion via the A390 and North Lane to rejoin the A38 west of Two Waters Foot. Trago Mills can be accessed via the A38 as per normal.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

[£1.8m to help Fire and Rescue Services deal with water rescue and flooding](#)

The Cabinet Secretary made the announcement on a visit to the Cardiff International White Water Centre, where South Wales Fire and Rescue Service personnel were undertaking water rescue training and gave a demonstration of rescues from vehicles in water, inflatable sled rescues and swift water boat rescues.

Whilst Fire and Rescue Authorities already respond to flooding and inland water rescue incidents using their existing general powers and resources, they are not required to do so. The Cabinet Secretary has therefore signed an Order which will create a statutory duty on the three Fire and Rescue Authorities in Wales to respond to such incidents.

To support the introduction of the new duty, funding has been made available to replace ageing flooding and water rescue equipment, and to purchase a second high volume pump in North Wales.

The Cabinet Secretary said,

“The demonstration of water rescue skills here today clearly shows the dedication and professionalism of our firefighters. As a result

of their excellent work, we have been hugely successful in reducing the risk of fire in Wales.

“Flooding can be just as hazardous as fire, and more wide-ranging. It can devastate whole communities, threaten widespread casualties, and destroy property and the environment. We need to be sure that our fire services will be ready to respond – and our firefighters need to know what is expected of them. This is why I have created a new duty on our fire and rescue services to respond to flooding or water rescue incidents which pose a direct threat of death or injury.

“They also need the equipment to do this safely and effectively. I am therefore also pleased to announce an extra £1.8 million over this financial year and the next, to enhance and update the boats, pumps and protective gear that our fire services need.”

South Wales Fire and Rescue Service’s Chief Fire Officer, Huw Jakeway said:

“It was a pleasure to welcome the Cabinet Secretary to Cardiff International White Water and for him to see our dedicated crews in action, as part of their ongoing training programme when it comes to water rescues. For us as Fire and Rescue Services in Wales, keeping our communities and firefighters safe in and around the water has always been a priority and the new funding for equipment, over the next two financial years, will enable us to continue to serve our communities to the highest standard.”

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."