

# Today's report from the NAO should serve as a wake-up call to ministers – Wayne David

**Wayne**

**David MP, Labour's Shadow Minister for the Armed Forces and Defence**

**Procurement**, responding

to the National Audit Office's report on the MoD Equipment Plan, said:

"Today's

report from the National Audit Office should serve as a wake-up call to ministers. The warning signs have been there for a long time but it is becoming

increasingly clear that the Government is in danger of losing control of the defence budget.

"Ministers

ought to have clearly defined priorities and should ensure that, in these uncertain times, Britain's defence expenditure should not be the subject of ill

thought-out public expenditure cuts. The defence budget has been slashed since

2010 and the Government is only meeting the 2 per cent of GDP commitment through creative accounting.

"The

Government should meet this commitment properly. Ministers also need to respond

urgently to the concerns raised by the NAO. And they should confirm when the long-overdue National Shipbuilding Strategy will be published.

"Only

Labour can deliver a serious, joined-up Defence Industrial Strategy, as we did

in Government. Our approach would safeguard Britain's industrial base, secure high quality jobs throughout the supply chain, and protect our national sovereignty, while achieving value for money."

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# This is a welcome though long overdue announcement from the Government –

## **Richard Burgon**

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**Burgon MP, Labour's Shadow Justice Secretary**, commenting on reports that lawyers representing the families of the victims of the Birmingham pub bombings can apply for legal aid, said:

"This is a welcome though long overdue announcement from the Government. Following the Home Secretary's unexpected refusal to fund the legal costs of the inquests, the families should not have been made to wait a further four months for this announcement. Labour has been pressing the Government to do the right thing and this development is welcome.

However, Conservative cuts to legal aid still mean that families who do receive public funding are far from on a par with the resources of public bodies. This is another reason the Government must get on with its review of legal aid cuts."

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## **You simply cannot empower local government if you impoverish it – Pearce**

Commenting on the LGA's warning that local authorities face a £5.8 billion funding black hole by 2020, Teresa Pearce, Shadow Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, said:

"The £5.8 billion funding gap facing local councils is a damning indictment of this Government's indifference to the fate of communities across the country. Year after year, councils have warned that the sheer scale of cuts they have been dealt will lead to a tipping point. Now, we are at that tipping point, and the Government is simply not listening.

"The scale of funding cuts that local government has endured – predicted by the IFS to be a 79% cut in direct funding by 2020 – will leave them able to only offer a threadbare service, such as the minimum statutory services in adult social care and child protection, and little else. The libraries and museums have already been closed, youth services have been cut back and all viable efficiency savings have been made.

“There is an unprecedented crisis in social care, with care providers handing contracts back to councils, 1.2 million elderly people living without the care they need and bed-blocking in the NHS at an all-time high. Yet the Government failed to provide a penny extra for social care in the Local Government Finance Settlement. The Prime Minister’s claims of “new funding for social care” amount to nothing more than pushing the numbers around in existing budgets.

“Councils, such as Surrey County Council, have been forced into the unwelcome position of holding a referendum on steep council tax rises in an attempt to plug the funding gap. But council tax rises are a short-term sticking plaster for a problem that needs long-term solutions.

“Local councils play an invaluable role in society – caring for our elderly, looking after the disabled and supporting our young people. It is local services that support, shape and enrich the communities we live in. You simply cannot empower local government if you impoverish it.”

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## **“Urgent action required” as Theresa May’s NHS Crisis continues – Jonathan Ashworth**

New figures published today show that there were 315 cancelled urgent operations in the NHS in December, including 12 cancelled for the second or more time.

In total there were 4,093 cancelled urgent operations in 2016, up from 3779 in 2015 and 3216 in 2014.

The NHS situation report for the week ending 22 January has been published today, showing further evidence of the strain on the health service:

- 51 different trusts reported serious operational pressures at some point.
- 11 trusts registered an OPEL 4 incident – indicating that they were unable to deliver comprehensive care, with increased potential for patient care and safety to be compromised.
- 43 temporary diverts from one A&E to another to provide temporary respite.
- 18  
Trusts had bed occupancy over 99 per cent.

**Jonathan Ashworth MP, Labour’s Shadow Health Secretary**, responding to the latest winter

pressure data, said:

“Theresa May’s NHS crisis continues, and the problems are worse and more widespread than in previous years. By underfunding and overstretched the NHS, the Tories have pushed health services to the brink.

“Even urgent operations are now being cancelled in record numbers – 4,093 in 2016, up 27 per cent in just two years. The Prime Minister needs to explain what she’s going to do to fix this mess – not just pass the buck to local health providers. Cuts to social care have left patients stuck in hospitals across the country even when they are ready to leave, with knock on effects for those waiting for treatment.

“Urgent action is required and Labour is calling for a sustainable health and social care package to be brought forward in the March Budget, so that the NHS and its patients never have to go through a winter like this again.”

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## **It is deeply depressing that the Tories have chosen to take money away from schools like this – Angela Rayner**

**Angela Rayner MP, Labour’s Shadow Education Secretary**, commenting on reports that the Treasury has taken back £384 million originally promised for schools in England, said:

“It is astonishing that the Treasury is now clawing money back from the Education budget at the same time as schools spending is being drastically cut.

“There is no better investment a government can make than in education and it is deeply depressing that the Tories have chosen to take money away from schools like this.

“Theresa May needs to answer some serious questions on what this money is now going to be used for if not to help ease the pressure on struggling schools.”