



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Public Audit Committee

Audrey Nicoll MSP
Convener
Criminal Justice Committee
Scottish Parliament

7 October 2025

Dear Audrey

The 2022/23 audit of the Scottish Prison Service

I [wrote to you previously on 23 September 2024](#) to make you aware of the Public Audit Committee's scrutiny of the Auditor General for Scotland's section 22 report, [The 2022/23 audit of the Scottish Prison Service](#). The letter also included links to our [report on the key issues and concerns](#) arising from our scrutiny along with the [Scottish Government's response to our report](#).

In my letter I also highlighted that we had requested a progress report from the Scottish Government on the implementation on some of the key recommendations in our report. We considered the [progress report from the Scottish Government](#) at our meeting on 7 May 2025 and agreed to write to HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland and relevant Trade Unions to seek their views on the progress that has been made to date. We also wrote to the Scottish Government to ask what consideration had been given to delivering future prisoner transport services under a public sector model and on the value for money assessment undertaken to determine that a new commercial model of delivery was the best approach. All of the correspondence can be found on the [Committee's webpage](#).

The Committee considered the responses at its meeting on 3 September 2025 and agreed to close its scrutiny of the section 22 report, and in doing so write to the Criminal Justice Committee to highlight its outstanding concerns. These are set out below.

Operation of the Scottish Courts Custody Prisoner Escorting Services (SCCPES)

The Scottish Government's progress update showed an improvement in the delivery of the SCCPES contract, including court appointments, medical appointments and Video Identification Parade Electronic Recording (VIPER parades). The progress

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Email publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot. We welcome calls through Relay UK and in BSL through Contact Scotland BSL.

update also reported a slight reduction in GeoAmey's staffing compliment towards the end of 2024.

The response from the Prison Officers Association Scotland (POAS) noted an improvement in the delivery of the SCCPES contract, however concerns remain around the operational impacts still faced by Scottish Prison Service (SPS) establishments, staff and prisoners. This includes prison officers continuing to experience last-minute operational changes around hospital escorts and late-night bed watches, impacting on staff already under pressure and the care that is provided to prisoners. We share POAS's concerns on the impact on the prison workforce and on prisoners.

We also note the Public and Commercial Services Union's (PCS) response that while the number of late running courts has reduced, concerns remain around GEOAmey's approach to logistics in bringing those in custody to court.

You may wish to consider monitoring the delivery of the SCCEPS contract as part of your future work programme.

Human rights, access to healthcare and overcrowding

In our report, we highlighted that human rights issues presented a risk to the Scottish Government and the SPS due to the failures in the delivery of the SCCEPS contract, the increasing prison population and the condition of parts of the prison estate. In its response, POAS continues to highlight the impact of missed or delayed appointments and treatments on the welfare of prisoners because of unreliable transport. POAS also commented that the additional pressure to manage prisoners experiencing "extreme mental distress" not only impacts prisoner welfare but also increases the emotional and professional pressure on its members.

The progress update also provided information on steps taken to reduce the impact of overcrowding and double cell occupancy, including addressing mental health concerns, the independent review of sentencing and penal policy, early release of prisoners and the steps taken to achieve additional capacity on the existing prison estate. The update also confirmed that the Scottish Government is committing an additional £45 million of resource funding to further strengthen alternatives to custody.

In her response, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland referred to her inspection report for HMP Barlinnie, published in February 2025 which stated—

"Overcrowding makes it harder to access basic entitlements, and the prison was not able to offer daily showers. It also makes it harder for staff to build and retain positive relationships with new arrivals, and the additional daily transactional work in dealing with more prisoners than a prison is designed to accommodate can put a strain on services and relationships.

The need to hold mixed categories of prisoner in A and B hall due to overcrowding limited the ability of staff to get people out of their cells safely. This meant that prisoners who were not at education or work could be locked up for 22 hours a day, which is unacceptable."

It is clear that the risk presented by human rights issues relating to SCCPES and overcrowding continues, and you may wish to monitor this as part of your future work programme.

Planning for future contracts

The Committee was disappointed to learn from the Scottish Government's progress report that a decision had been made to retender for the next SCCEPS contract and we sought further information on the consideration that was given to delivering this service via a public sector model. We draw your attention to the [Scottish Government's response](#) to our request for further information.

In its response, Community Trade Union raises a concern that GeoAmey has made it clear that it does not intend to bid for the new contract and that the loss of experience could lead to a "race to the bottom" of other potential bidders which could adversely affect its members.

In her response, HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland "welcomes the fact that action has already been taken to begin the re-tendering exercise and the commitment that has been made by both the Scottish Government and the Scottish Prison Service that the new contract specification will take account of the findings and recommendations in our thematic review".

We highlight the assurances given by the Auditor General for Scotland that he will continue to monitor the progress of the work for the next SCCEPS contract going forward.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Richard Leonard". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Richard Leonard MSP, Convener