



HMIPS
HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland
INSPECTING AND MONITORING

News Release

“Planned Failure” – A Thematic Review of Prisoner Transport in Scotland

This report examines the prisoner transport service through the lens of respect and protection for human rights. It focusses on the impact of prisoner transport on people in custody and their families, through a detailed examination of the way it has been experienced by those who have used it and how the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) and partners have responded. Key findings and recommendations are put forward to suggest where improvements should be made or where fresh approaches could lead to better ways of delivering a more reliable and higher-quality prisoner transport service.

This report adds to the information published in December 2023 highlighting concerns about the Escorting Services contract and performance of GEOAmeY in the [report of the 2022/23 audit of the SPS](#) by Audit Scotland.

“Planned failure” refers to circumstances where the prisoner transport provider, GEOAmeY, alerts the SPS that they will be unable to undertake an escort that has been previously booked. Regrettably they have frequently, at times daily, had to alert the SPS to their inability to deliver booked escorts on time or at all. This has impacted on the health, wellbeing and family relationships of prisoners as well as the justice system.

Behind every prisoner transport journey is a human story and it is these stories that prompted us to shine a light on these issues. This report describes how failures in delivering prisoner transport have had a deep impact on people and services that is unacceptable. Hundreds of people in custody have missed important hospital appointments or been denied the opportunity to attend family funerals or arrived for them late. Others have missed visits home to see terminally ill loved ones, or seen plans delayed for activities that would help their rehabilitation journey and progression from closed prisons through to the Open Estate at HMP Castle Huntly.

We have found that transport failures have also contributed to wasted resources in the NHS from cancelled hospital appointments and resulted in the urgent redeployment of officers onto escort duties. This can affect prison regimes and stifles delivery of critical casework in circumstances where many prisons are already coping with overcrowding.

The report also highlights the limited use of virtual court technology to reduce the demand for prisoner transport, which often takes the form of long return journeys to appear in court for only a few minutes or in some cases not be seen in court at all. Optimising digital capacity was a recommendation made by HMIPS as far back as 2012. This report goes further suggesting that all partners in the justice system embrace a joint obligation to ensure that every journey is necessary, and as short and efficient as possible. This would minimise the risk of cancellations and ensure precious resources are deployed effectively.

HMIPS acknowledges the staffing and other challenges facing GEOAmev and the considerable efforts made by the Scottish Government, the SPS and GEOAmev to improve compliance with the current contract. We acknowledge too that the operating context changed substantially following the COVID-19 pandemic with prison numbers rising and court business increasing, and that performance has markedly improved throughout 2024. This report also highlights examples of where local prison management have done their best to compensate for the failure of the prisoner transport service and get prisoners to hospital and other important appointments.

We must nevertheless learn from what has gone wrong and ensure that we do much better in future in delivering a human rights-respecting, trauma-informed, reliable and resilient service for transporting those in custody.

The report makes 25 recommendations for improvements in five key areas:

- Improved contract specification, giving greater priority to some critical events that are not court-related, and better resources and more professional contract management, including better management information.
- Improved resilience through offering pay and conditions capable of maintaining an adequate workforce.
- Better collaborative working and contingency planning and delivery.
- Improved governance and external scrutiny to improve performance.
- Reducing demand on the prisoner transport service through digitalisation and modernisation of the wider criminal justice system.

The SPS and partners must ensure, through the next service tendering exercise and contingency planning, that failure on the scale that has occurred with this contract, with its detrimental impact on the health, wellbeing and dignity of those in its care, is never repeated.

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Interim HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland, Stephen Sandham was appointed in August 2024.
2. On publication the report can be found at www.prisoninspectoratescotland.gov.uk
3. For further information please contact Kerry Love, at Kerry.Love@gov.scot or on 07939 980452.

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