



E: dghsc@gov.scot

6th March 2024

Dear Mr Leonard,

RE: The 2022/23 audit of the Scottish Prison Service

Thank you for your letter of 9 February 2024 regarding the health impact of the failures of the Scottish Courts Custody Prisoner Escorting Services (SCCPES) contract, delivered by Geo-Amey.

I'm aware of the long standing issues which GEOAmey are experiencing in meeting their contractual obligations and I'm assured that the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) are doing all they can to work with GEOAmey to improve their performance. In terms of healthcare appointments, there is currently a contractual Improvement Notice applied to GEOAmey requiring them to improve performance in relation to hospital appointments, this was initially implemented in December 2022.

That being said, the number of prisoners missing hospital appointments as a result of GEOAmey cancellations remains a cause for concern, which my officials have been monitoring for a number of months with the assistance of our partners in the National Prison Care Network (NPrCN) and the Scottish Healthcare in Custody (SHiC) Oversight Board. This has allowed data to be routinely gathered in relation to missed healthcare appointments, which is shared with the SPS and has helped in understanding and responding to contractual issues.

On 6 April 2023, Dr Craig Sayers, the Clinical Lead for the NPrCN wrote to all NHS Chief Executives and Medical Directors to request that patients were not removed or reprioritised on waiting lists as a result of patient transport cancellations. This request was reiterated to Boards again on 19 January 2024 in correspondence from Gary Jenkins, Chair of the SHiC Oversight Board, attached at Annex A. In his letter Mr Jenkins outlines examples of the types of appointments that have been missed, including an example of how this can impact health outcomes.

In this correspondence, Gary Jenkins informed NHS Boards of the current actions underway by GEOAmey and SPS to improve the performance around healthcare appointments. GEOAmey have recently intimated that they will be recruiting a new cohort of staff with further officer training courses throughout the first quarter of 2024. This should have a resultant improvement in escorting individuals attending hospital appointments. In the interim, SPS have agreed that when GEOAmey have failed to carry out an escort to a critical hospital appointment, SPS will hire a private ambulance should SPS transport be unavailable.

In September 2023, the NPrCN met with SPS regarding GEOAmeY escort cancellations. Following this meeting, Prison Healthcare Teams were requested to take the following action to mitigate the likelihood of appointments being cancelled:

- Try to avoid Mondays.
- Schedule appointments after 11 am.
- Provide GEOAmeY with as much notice as possible.
- Where possible, prioritise appointments and communicate this with SPS.
- Where appropriate, maximise the use of telephone appointments and Near Me.

You have asked if data is available on the impact of postponed and cancelled appointments on the health of prisoners. Although the costs of missed appointments are not recorded, the NPrCN have been requesting data on a quarterly basis from all prison establishments in Scotland. This data has included numbers and types of appointments patients have missed. A summary of the most recent data can be found at Annex B, which builds on the data outlined in Annex A. It is important to note that this is management data only, it has not been quality assured, and therefore does not provide a complete picture. It does however provide a useful indication of the scale of the issue and has been helpful in measuring and escalating the severity of the issue and in understanding how successful the steps taken to improve the performance have been. The NPrCN will continue to collect and report on this data.

I note the request that the NHS secondary care teams avoid the scheduling of hospital appointments prior to 9:30 am to avoid clashing with court appearances. To support the previous request made by the NPrCN to prison healthcare teams that appointments should be scheduled after 11am, I have, today, written to all NHS Board Chief Executives and Medical Directors requesting that people living in prison are not given appointments before 9:30. I have also re-iterated the request that suitability of secondary care consultations for a Near Me appointment are considered, and that any appointments which are missed as a result of transportation issues are not re-prioritised on waiting lists.

I hope that the measures outlined above provide you, and the members of the Public Audit Committee, with the reassurance that the Scottish Government and our partners are committed to mitigating the healthcare impacts of prisoner transport cancellations.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Lamb
Chief Executive of NHS Scotland and Director General for Health & Social Care

LETTER FROM GARY JENKINS TO NHS BOARDS

JANUARY 2024

**CUSTODY HEALTHCARE: GEOAMEY CANCELLATIONS**

To: NHS Board Custody Healthcare Lead
NHS Board Medical Directors
NHS Chief Executive Officers

SITUATION:

The number of planned healthcare appointments for secondary care that prisoners are missing due to GEOAmeY escort cancellations has continued to increase. In April 2023, the Network Programme Team wrote to NHS Board Medical Directors to request that patients were not removed or reprioritised on waiting lists in these circumstances.

GEOAmeY is contracted to escort people from prison to healthcare appointments in the community. The contract is managed by the Scottish Prison Service on behalf of the Scottish Government.

BACKGROUND:

Cancellation rates have continued to increase, 13 out of 15 prisons provided data for cancelled and missed appointments between July-September 2023, the number of missed appointments was 826. This is a significant increase from April - June total of 209. (Appendix A)

A full range of appointments for tests and investigations have been missed. These include:

- Appointments that have required the patient to fast or take bowel prep the day before.
- Planned, day and plastic surgery appointments.
- MRI, CT, radiology, and x-rays investigations.
- Appointments across a range of specialists including physiotherapy, dental, orthopaedic, endoscopy, cardiology, ophthalmology, neurology, gastroenterology, pain clinic, burns unit, audiology, endocrine, dermatology, neuropsychology, musculoskeletal services and ear nose and throat assessment clinics.
- Screening, including AAA and breast.
- Antenatal.

Appointments identified as urgent also continued to be missed, especially if the patient required a transfer between NHS Boards, or if the appointment required three members of escorting staff. The cancellations are resulting in significant delays to treatment and often patients are missing appointments on multiple occasions.

Communications have been received recently where secondary care specialists have specifically stated that, as a direct consequence of multiple missed appointments, patients have come to harm, including an example of an individual with decreased limb function being noted post-orthopaedic surgical intervention.

ASSESSMENT:

The Scottish Prison Service have been working closely with GEOAmeY to resolve the current performance challenges and service delivery issues associated with the prisoner escort contract, including a focus on the impact on Justice partners and the NHS. There has been a revision and recalibration of the contract, which includes clear deliverables for GEOAmeY to meet certain staffing levels and performance targets over the coming months.

Specifically, there is currently a contractual Improvement Notice applied to GEOAmeY requiring them to improve performance in relation to hospital appointments. This was served initially in December 2022 and had an immediate impact with improved service provision. However, as the year went on, with increased staffing issues, they had to maintain and support other important delivery areas such as court operations and delivery. Staffing levels reduced to such an extent, that many contractual areas of service were impacted resulting in SPS and Police Scotland directly carrying out many contractual matters such as hospital detains and ViPER (ID parades), as well as supporting court business.

Subsequently, the Scottish Government have agreed an uplift in the contract funding envelope to support increased and improved levels of staff pay.

Staffing levels have increased by around 40 officers in the last 3 months with another 20 currently in officer training, operationally deployable during January 2024. GEOAmeY have further intimated that they will be recruiting up to 80 new staff during January 2024, with further officer training courses throughout the first quarter of 2024. This should have a resultant improvement in escorting individuals attending hospital appointments. This will continue to be monitored through the Scottish Healthcare in Custody Oversight Board at its quarterly meetings.

In the interim, SPS have agreed that when GEOAmeY have failed to carry out an escort to a hospital appointment, but the requirement to attend a hospital appointment is critical, if the individual is unable to be transported in a SPS vehicle, SPS hire a private ambulance to safely transport the individual to hospital.

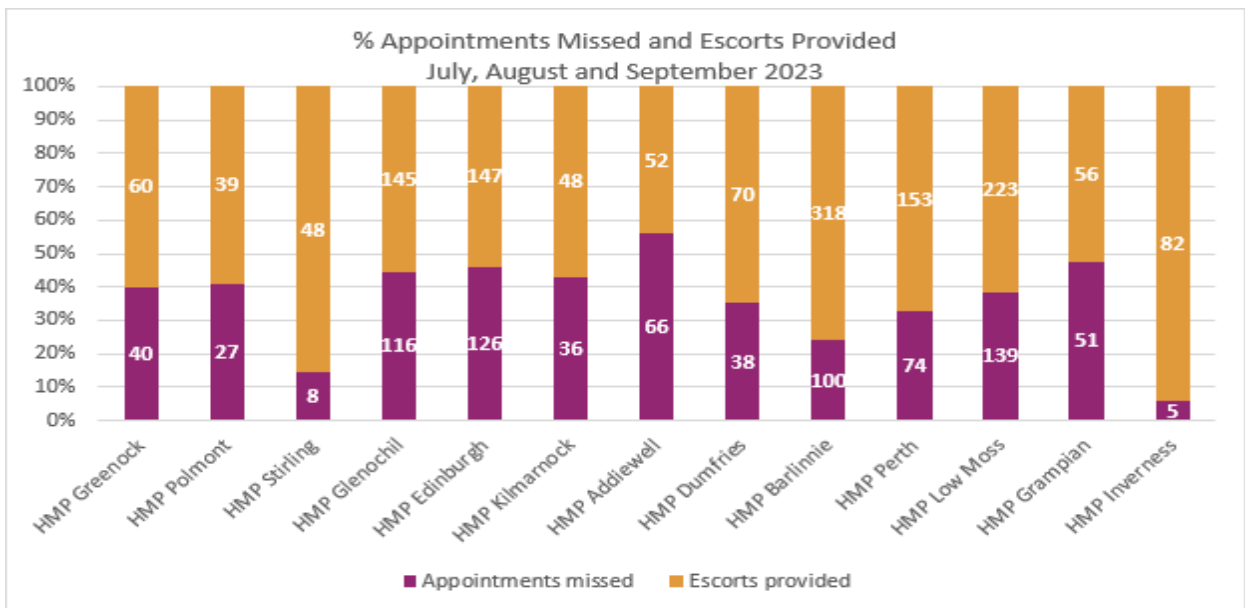
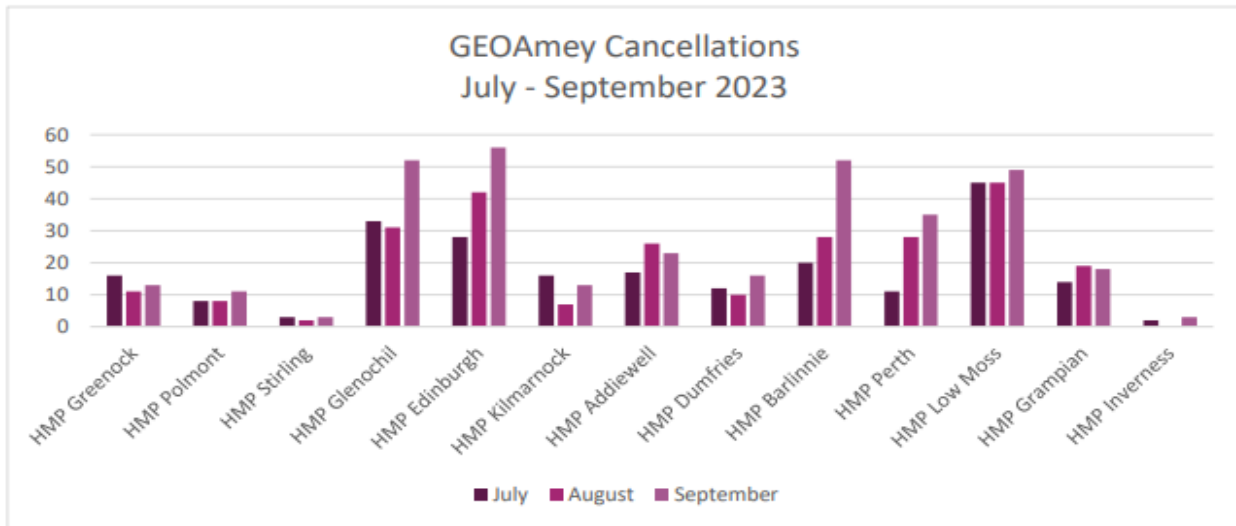
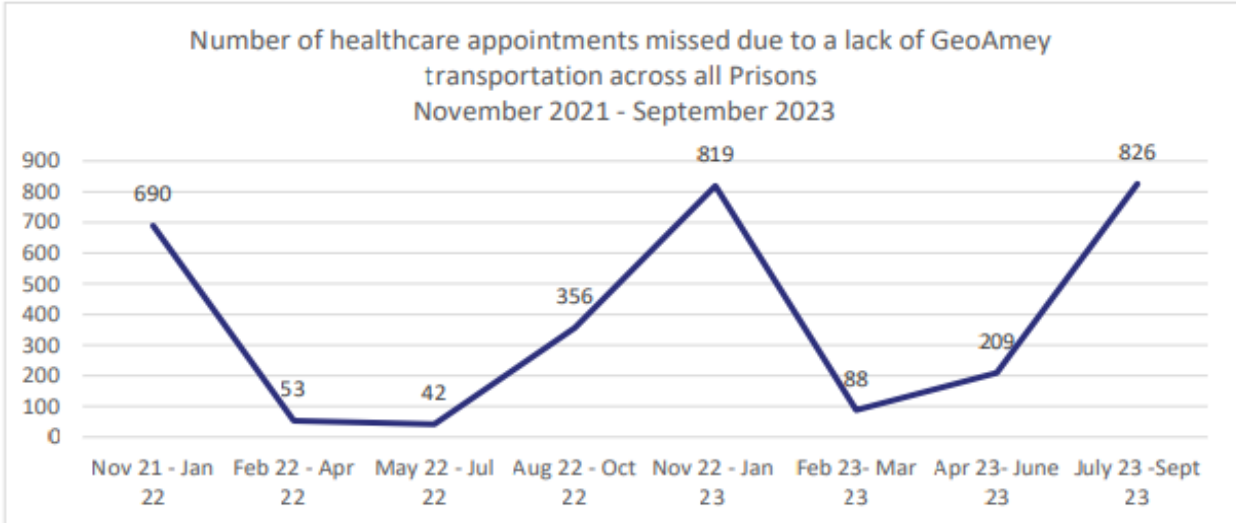
RECOMMENDATION:

Notwithstanding the planned improvement approach noted above, I should like to reiterate the request that individuals from custody settings are not removed or reprioritised on waiting lists as a result of the aforementioned circumstances.



Scottish Healthcare in Custody Oversight Board
Chief Executive: The State Hospitals Board for Scotland
January 2024

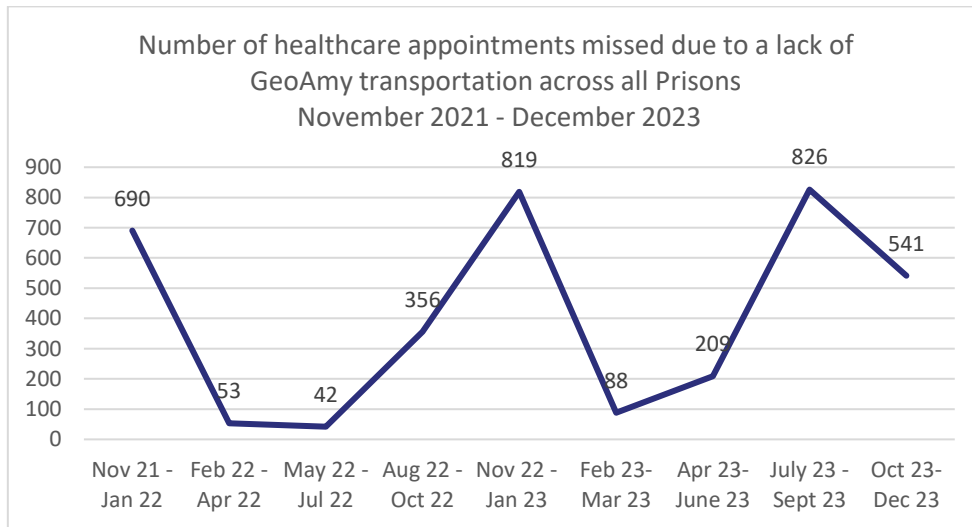
Appendix A: GEOAmeY Cancellations: Volume and Location



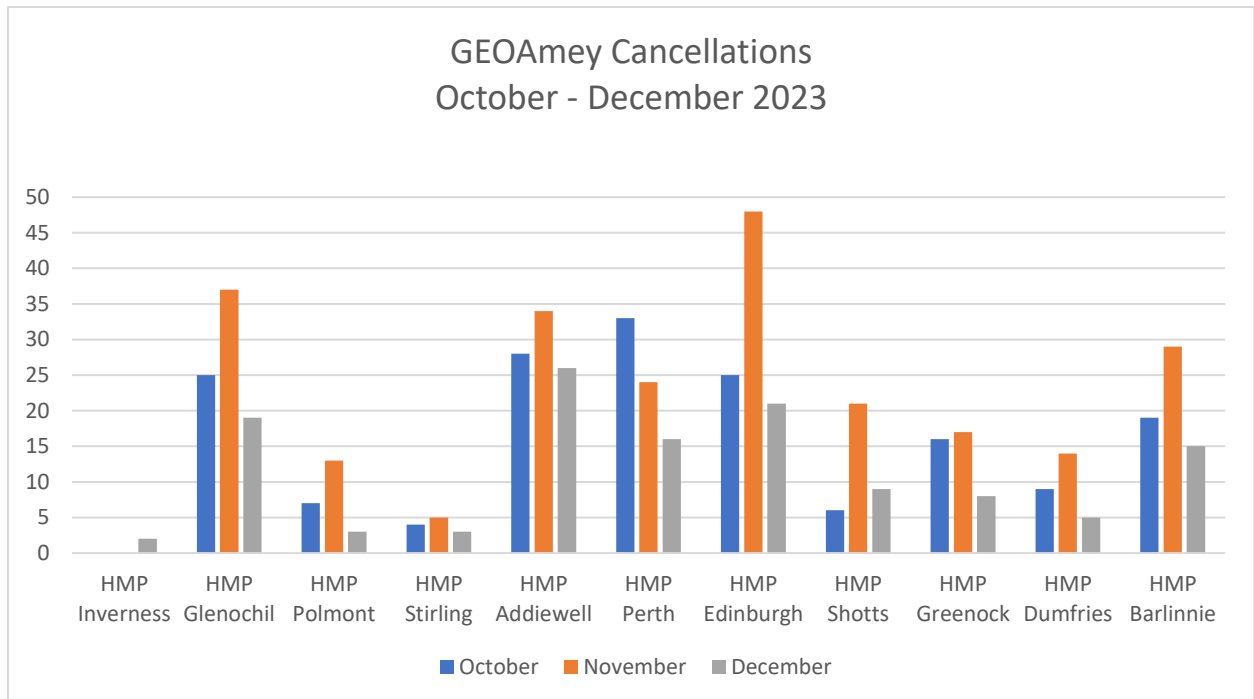
GEOAmeY hospital cancellation data to December 2023

Assessment

Data collected shows that cancellation rates have decreased, however, 11/15 prisons provided data in Q3, compared to 13/15 in Q2. The number of missed appointments for the 11/15 prisons who provided data between October - December 2023 was 541 which is a decrease from July - September total of 826, as shown below:



A summary of missed appointments between October-December for each prison that provided data is shown below:



The number of appointments missed compared to the number of appointments that escorts were provided for is displayed below. Overall, approximately **29%** were missed.

Appointments Missed and Escorts Provided October - December 2023

