

Date 24th April 2024

Public Audit Committee

Room T3.60

The Scottish Parliament EDINBURGH

EH99 1SP

By Email Only

On Behalf of Community Union.

I write the following statement for the attention of the Public Audit Committee in response to letter sent 3rd April 2024.

Firstly, the difficulties being presented by GEO-Amey, Community (and formerly PSU) have been presenting for the previous 25 years in relation to the Private Estate in Scotland. Refraining from the 'overused' Political arguments that are consistently wheeled out in these matters, quite frankly the Scottish Escort Contract is a commercial contract that if all parties involved apply honesty and integrity, then it is a contract that was designed to fail and apply financial penalties at ease.

Community has always maintained that no matter the Employer, Private and/or Public, the risk to the Operational Solution should never be appeased to that of an ulterior Political and/or Financial agenda, and regrettably this is the case.

For example in Section 22 GEO-Amey without doubt are culpable of contributing to the attrition problem within its organisation, and this was due to a number of internal factors, namely, competitive rates of pay, lack of real experience in local management positions and the 'domino

effect' of never having the appropriate staffing profile, that ultimately led to other staff leaving the organisation however,

I would pose the reasonable question within this period how many of ex GEO-Amey staff were recruited by the Scottish Prison Service, so the very organisation that is responsible for monopolising the monitoring of the private estate in Scotland (SPS), and duly applying financial penalties across varying Service failures as per the Commercial Contractual Agreement, to which one of these is inclusive of applying a financial penalty to GEO-Amey for not reaching its agreed headcount, then surely this fact is perverse.

How can it be fair and just that one Employer within the Justice Sector in Scotland applies financial detriments to a fellow Employer for not having the requisite staff in the operation, yet that Employer has knowingly recruited ex GEO-Amey employees into its organisation?

It has always remained Community's view that there should be a complete review of the entire Private Justice Sector contracts in Scotland in order to ensure that they move with the ever changing world of the Prisoner fraternity, and further there should be a consideration given to appoint an entirely independent monitor of these commercial contracts whereupon there is no vested or biased interest to applying the financial constraints and restrictions on the Employer.

We absolutely accept that any Private Contractor must align to the restraints of the financial model agreed however, at present, and since the introduction of the Private Estate to Justice Sector in Scotland, this has never been the case, there continues to be ulterior motives by the current monitor of these contracts to apply pressure (just because they can and are not accountable) which is a fundamentally flawed provision.

Finally, while all of the above has been ongoing there is a dedicated staff group, some of whom possess 20 years' service (amongst the longest serving in our country) who are continually working to a very high standard however, this fact is being lost against the political/commercial agreements that are not fit for purpose.

Ends

Steve Farrell

Regional Secretary

Scotland & Northern Ireland

Community



General Secretary: **Roy Rickhuss CBE**