

10th April 2024

Mr R Leonard MSP
Convenor
Public Audit Committee

By email: publicaudit.committee@parliament.scot

Dear Convenor,

Public Audit Committee - 2023/23 Audit of the Scottish Prison Service (SPS)

Thank you for the opportunity for my colleagues and I to attend and provide evidence to the Public Audit Committee on 28th March. I am writing to provide additional information and context to supplement a number of the points addressed during the GEOAmeY evidence session and to confirm the precise details of figures we referred to, in the hope of providing additional clarity.

Pay Rate - Comparator to the Scottish Prison Service

In our written evidence, we stated that “despite the material increase in officer pay across the last 12 months, the pay gap between PCO salaries and that of an SPS officer as at April 2024 is expected to be in excess of 40%”.

We explained in our oral evidence the methodology applied to determine that pay gap. To confirm, we believe that the role of our PCOs is comparable to a blend of the responsibilities of an SPS Band C and SPS Band D officer, a position which was discussed in detail with SPS representatives, but was never formally agreed and they may well have a different view. However, based on our view, we have calculated that the rate for a blended Band C and D SPS officer with 3 years’ service is 43.2% above our PCO salary.

Below is a table which summarises the different salary levels (based on 37-hour contracts) with the percentage gap to our pay also detailed. All salaries/pay rates are based on April/May 2024 levels (with GEOAmeY pay subject to successful ballot):

Employer/Comparator	Starting Salary	After 3 years
GEOAmeY	£25,493	-
National Living Wage	£22,011 (15.8%)	-
Scottish Real Living Wage	£23,088 (10.4%)	-
SPS Band C	£28,425 (-11.5%)	£32,200 (-26.3%)
SPS Band D	£34,789 (-36.5%)	£40,850 (-60.2%)
SPS Blended Band C & D	£31,607 (-24.0%)	£36,510 (-43.2%)

Pay Rates - SCCPES Contract vs PECS Contract (England & Wales)

We undertook, in our oral evidence, to furnish the committee with more detail on the relative pay rates of our PCOs as between Scotland and England/Wales. We indicated that there was now broadly, pay parity, subject to successful ballots and with the caveat that there are different pay structures under each contract.

For completeness, a comparison of the pay rates for both major GEOAmeY contracts, subject to successful ballots, are as follows:

	Scotland	England and Wales
Effective Date of Pay Review	1 st May 2024	1 st September 2024
PCO Starter Rate (Up to 18 months Service)	n/a	£12.50
PCO Rate	£13.25	£13.50

Operational Communication

During our evidence to the committee, Mr Redmond discussed the levels of communication at a local operational level. GEOAmeY would like to reiterate our commitment to addressing this within our teams and taking the required steps to ensure communications are improved across all Scottish sites.

Points of Clarification

1. In answering questions from Mr Simpson (10:55), Mr Huntley advised that on another contract, we have experienced challenges on headcount numbers (albeit not to the extent on SCCPES) and that, notwithstanding, we have continued to deliver a high level of service despite higher level of volumes. Mr Huntley referred to an increase of 120% in volume. A more precise description would have been “120% of pre-Covid volumes” or “20% above pre-Covid volumes”.
2. We referred, in our evidence, to the challenges of the “120-minute operating window” for court arrivals. The exact impact of the operating window on any day may vary due to the mix of which prisons (with different operating times) are moving custodies to which courts (with different contractual arrival times e.g. most Sheriff Courts 09:30, High Courts 09:15, Dundee Sheriff Court 09:00). The committee should also be aware that the operating window has reduced by c. 30 minutes since the start of the contract, due to a change in prison operating times triggered by post-COVID19 activities. This reduction in operating window has impacted our service to courts and is an example of a change in the operating environment experienced by GEOAmeY.

We appreciate your consideration of our written evidence, oral evidence and the supplementary information contained within this correspondence, as part of your analysis of the Auditor General’s report. Finally, we wish to restate our commitment to playing our role in the multi-agency solution required to deliver these services effectively, to all partners and users of the Scottish Judicial system.

Yours sincerely,

David Jones
Managing Director