

Address:  
110 George Street  
Edinburgh  
EH2 4LH

Telephone:  
0131 477 1234  
Fax:  
0131 477 4567

Website:  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)



## Press release

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### Setting up of prisoner escort contract followed rules

A report by Audit Scotland finds that the Scottish Prison Service (SPS) followed the rules when handling the tender process for prisoner escort and court custody services in Scotland. The report also found that the SPS is actively monitoring the performance of Reliance, the successful bidder.

In the period April to July 2004, 23 prisoners were released in error from the Glasgow courts system. The SPS said Reliance has been held responsible for 12 of these and will incur fixed price penalties as a result.

Following public concern about these incidents, Mr Black agreed to a request from the Justice Minister to look at the procurement of the contract. The contract is worth £126 million over seven years.

“Our study shows that tendering was carried out in accordance with EC and SPS procurement regulations,” said Mr Black. “In addition, the contract includes a comprehensive set of clearly defined performance measures.”

Five companies initially applied for the contract, one was rejected and one withdrew. Of the three remaining, Reliance was the cheapest on cost, coming in at £20 million less than the “public sector comparator” – ie the amount that the current service was estimated to cost.

While Reliance was placed third in the technical evaluation, the SPS assessed that Reliance represented the best value for money overall.

“As the contract has not yet been fully rolled out across Scotland, it is too early to assess Reliance’s overall performance,” said the Auditor General, Robert Black. “However there are signs that, after an uncertain start, measures taken by Reliance and the prison service itself are helping to improve performance.”

When Reliance began providing prisoner escort services in April, 78% of prisoners were delivered to court on time. This improved to 91% and 93% in May and June, and figures for July have reached 98%.”

**For further information contact: Anne Ryan, tel: 0131 624 9970**

**or James Gillies, tel: 0131 624 9971**

#### Notes to editors

1. The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Executive and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament.
2. Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. It provides services to the Auditor General for Scotland and the Accounts Commission.