

Matt McLaughlin



Neil Gray MSP  
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care,  
The Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh  
EH99 1SP

UNISON House  
14 West Campbell Street,  
Glasgow  
G2 6RX

Tel: 0141 342 2899

**Your reference: 202400444126**

1 April 2025

Dear Neil,

In a recent meeting with UNISON activists in Scottish Ambulance they raised concerns that their service has been expected to deliver increased levels of service year on year at the same time as NHS Boards across Scotland were wasting money by using upon private sector ambulance contractors to facilitate patient transfers.

Using freedom of information rules, UNISON wrote to the territorial health boards and asked them to tell us how much they were spending on private ambulance services.

Setting to one side the low level of response (only 8 of the 14 health boards responded) it is clear that your governments lack of funding for SAS is forcing local health boards to waste precious resources on private ambulances.

In short NHS Boards have spent at least £10m on private ambulances (maybe twice that much) in the last 5 years. Whilst in the year 2024/25 health boards spent no less than £2.6m.

With NHS Glasgow, Tayside and Forth Valley refusing to provide data it would be easy to suggest that this is the tip of the ice berg and the true level of waste in the 12 months past could be as much as £5m.

Whilst it is of important to note that these costs are associated with patient transfers (not blue light or urgent services), patient transfers and delays in patient transfers are a key part of the current patient flow challenge.

Within SAS, UNISON has been campaigning for improved workforce planning and career pathways to help tackle the historic problems of cover for staff leave, rest breaks and service over runs (all of which are currently a significant pressure and are adversely impacting on patient care and staff welfare).

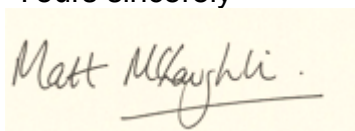
It should of course also be noted that the money NHS Boards are wasting on private ambulances would be better invested in tackling any number of key and persistent pressures that exists across on NHS board structures.

This is a clear waste of public money, and it should serve as a wakeup call to you.

On the back of these figures UNISON us therefore calling on you to take URGENT action to:

- Urgently clarify the total amount of money spent contracting private ambulances, per boards over the last 5 financial years,
- Commit now to a rapid investment in SAS patient transport services which form an essential part of the organisation’s response to existing workforce pressures and planned delivery of services,
- Order an immediate end to private sector care in our ambulance service and invest in our own NHS services.

Yours sincerely



Matt McLaughlin  
**Regional Organiser**  
**Head of Health -UNISON Scotland**

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
Health Board	SPEND	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25*			
NHS Ayrshire and Arran			180822	514564	617733	465467			
NHS Borders		8044	4298	3530	1897	902			
NHS Dumfries and Galloway		32308	36852	54210	51577	55028			
NHS Fife			9980	273653	554964	787944			
NHS Forth Valley	NR								
NHS Grampian		180009	391000	417000	350000	308000			
NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde	NR								
NHS Highland		28960	35167	55250	48015				
NHS Lanarkshire		267112	967921	1242524	312633	975909			
NHS Lothian				165981	79276	62179			
NHS Orkney	NR								
NHS Shetland	NR								
NHS Tayside	NR								
NHS Western Isles	NR								
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>516433</b>	<b>1626040</b>	<b>2726712</b>	<b>2016095</b>	<b>2655429</b>	<b>9540709</b>		
*full year not provided by some boards									