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Committee of Public Accounts

House of Commons 7 Millbank London SW1P 3JA

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Ian Lawrence
General Secretary
National Association of Probation Officers
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23 February 2015

Dear Mr Lawrence

You wrote to me in November on the future arrangements for electronic monitoring of offenders.

I asked the National Audit Office to consider the matters you raised and the accompanying memorandum by Professor Nellis. The NAO made enquiries with the Ministry of Justice and I am now writing with their findings.

Your main concern related to the expected scale and cost of the electronic monitoring contracts. Having completed the contract award, the Ministry's latest central estimate for the lifetime cost of the contracts is now £384 million, below the range cited by the Major Projects Authority in 2013/14 of from £529.2 million to £912 million. Of course the cost would change if the uptake of tags by the courts is greater than expected, or if additional technical capabilities are developed and made available which the courts decide to use. But on the face of it the figures, based on a 15,000 average caseload, do not in themselves indicate a wholesale shift from probation to unsupervised monitoring on the scale that concerned you.


The Ministry has told the NAO that it sees electronic monitoring as a tool which can assist integrated offender management, and not as an alternative to it. The investment in the EM programme is evidently funded separately to probation. The NAO also heard that officials responsible for electronic management liaise regularly with officials managing the Transforming Rehabilitation programme to try and ensure that the tags meet the needs of probation.

You were also concerned about the lack of evidence on the effectiveness of tagging. The Ministry's strategy for rolling out the tags allows for a period of piloting, with volumes being built up during 2015 to ensure that the monitoring service is robust and working well. However the NAO found that the piloting is primarily about technical performance rather than the effects on offender behaviour. The Ministry demonstrated to the NAO some knowledge of GPS tagging experiments, such as in Hertfordshire, but acknowledge that there is little robust information, either nationally or internationally on effectiveness to reduce re-offending. The NAO has challenged the Department on this point and I would hope that the Ministry will put arrangements in place to ensure that it, and the judiciary, are well-informed about the effectiveness of the tags in supporting rehabilitation and securing public safety, as well as their technical performance. .../2.

The National Audit Office has told me that it will keep the new electronic monitoring service in view as the programme is implemented. Depending on the outcome, and recognising the background of contract management failures in the electronic monitoring area, the Committee may well return to the subject in future.

Thank you again for writing to me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Margaret Hodge', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MP
Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts