



Ministry
of Justice

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Parliamentary Under-Secretary
of State for Justice

Bob Neill
Chairman Justice Committee
House of Commons
London
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Dear Chairman,

ELECTRONIC MONITORING

Thank you for your letter of 13 June requesting more information on what the Ministry of Justice is planning in terms of a major satellite tracking pilot and new sentencing options for the use of location monitoring.

My Department is committed to making use of different forms of electronic monitoring technologies to support innovative approaches to sentencing and the effective management of suspects and offenders in the community. Radio-frequency technology is already widely used as a reliable way to enforce curfews but we will start piloting location monitoring later this year to improve our understanding of how GPS could be best deployed in future. We are hoping to develop the existing, but limited, evidence base on the use of GPS tagging, which will ultimately help inform our wider national electronic monitoring programme. The pilot will take place in two large geographical areas. It will be led by eight police forces, who are assisting us with the design work in close collaboration with CJS partner agencies. The first area covers the following police forces: Bedfordshire; Northamptonshire; Cambridgeshire; Hertfordshire; the second area includes Nottinghamshire; Staffordshire; West Midlands; and Leicestershire.

The selected police forces have experience of using GPS tagging in the context of voluntary, integrated offender management schemes, and are confident they have the infrastructure and capabilities required to deliver the pilots in the timeframe announced by the Prime Minister. The pilots will test how location monitoring may be used for a range of offenders or suspects. The timing means that the pilots will involve only cohorts who can be tagged under existing primary legislation but the evaluation will be used to inform wider reforms. They will test the impact on both decision makers and offending behaviour and will enable us to consider how existing or new powers can be used to facilitate better management of offenders. They will allow us to test where it is desirable and appropriate to use location monitoring technology and inform how it might best be deployed.

You mention the examples that the Prime Minister highlighted of how location monitoring may be used in the future. We are of the view that we should use prison to punish offenders and protect the public but that once sentenced to custody the focus of our prisons should be on rehabilitating offenders. That is why the Secretary of State has announced a radical programme of prison reforms. To support those reforms we are looking more broadly at how we can utilise technology to ensure prison places are used both proportionately and effectively.

The first use of location monitoring technology we are looking at concerns the use of bail and remand. The courts already have powers to impose a curfew as a condition of bail and we are using radio-frequency monitoring to ensure compliance with those bail conditions. We are considering how we could expand these provisions to allow courts to use location monitoring, either in support of other bail conditions, or as a condition of bail in itself. We believe that location monitoring of defendants on bail will offer reassurance to the courts that some suspects who would otherwise be remanded in custody can now be supervised in the community.

We consider that location monitoring will offer options to the court to either toughen community orders for those who receive them now, or provide additional safeguards which will allow courts to sentence an offender on the cusp of custodial sentence to a community sentence, reassured by the safeguards that monitoring will provide as part of supervision. The statutory powers already exist to use location monitoring in support of other community order requirements such as exclusion requirements. The availability of location monitoring will make requirements like exclusion zones more practical and enforceable. Location monitoring as a stand-alone requirement of a community order is also catered for under a provisions introduced in the Crime and Courts Act 2013. We will now be considering when and how to implement that provision as the location monitoring equipment becomes available and when we have the learning from the pilots. One of the areas we are exploring is where electronic monitoring can provide additional support and safeguards that might enable offenders, some of whom may be women with babies, to be given a community sentence where at present they would be sent to custody.

We also believe that there are opportunities to make use of developments in electronic monitoring to support offenders for example on release from custody, and in particular for greater and more imaginative use of Release on Temporary Licence (ROTL). The Secretary of State in his speech to the Governing Governors Forum in May, highlighted the important role that ROTL plays in helping to rehabilitate offenders, and will continue to play in our reform agenda. ROTL helps prisoners to find and secure employment, to access training and education opportunities and to maintain healthy family ties – all of which, we know, are key elements for successful rehabilitation, provided that this does not undermine public safety or confidence. Such an approach may benefit from the additional safeguards and assurances that electronic monitoring could bring, to know that, while the offender is out of the prison, and their whereabouts will be monitored. Decisions on allowing ROTL and the conditions attached will remain a matter for prison governors – and we also want to allow governors greater discretion over how ROTL is used.

The pilots will commence in the autumn and run for a period of 12 months. We anticipate that across the different statutory cohorts we will work with around 1000 subjects during this period and will undertake an externally commissioned evaluation to ensure we maximise the learning, both in terms of processes and behavioural outcomes. In tandem, we will continue to deliver the programme to deliver a new generation of tags through contracts designed to encourage innovation and provide for future technological developments. The pilots will inform how to target various forms of electronic monitoring ahead of the national roll out of GPS capability by the end of this Parliament.

I hope this provides the Committee with an update on where we are with developing these important pilots and more broadly our work on extending the range of court powers. I would of course be happy to provide further information to the Committee on the detail of these schemes as they develop.

You sincerely, 

DOMINIC RAAB