

IL/AV 121-14

Via email: Ms. Margaret Hodge, Chair,
House of Commons Public Accounts Committee

12 November 2014

Dear Ms. Hodge,

**The Third Ministry of Justice Electronic Monitoring Contract
– Value for Money?**

Towards the end of October you will have received a letter, with an accompanying paper, from Professor Mike Nellis (dated 21st October). You will see that Professor Nellis copied Napo in to this correspondence and I am now writing, on behalf of Napo to endorse the case that he makes for PAC scrutiny of this contract.

Professor Nellis' description of the development of these contracts, and his analysis thereof, is thorough and accurate in our view. It is the case that this whole affair has been less than transparent and the statement in this year's MPA report that the project would "*support the development of a co-operative and constructive partnership approach to delivery through the engagement of key stakeholders across the criminal justice sector both in the project and following implementation of the contract(s).*" has not been sustained in reality.

The previous contracts for EM, which have attracted so much attention from the Serious Fraud Office, amongst others, were valued at somewhere in the region of £100-120million p.a. This has been equivalent to more than 10% of the overall budget for Probation year on year and is money that might have been better targeted towards funding the supervision of under-12 month prisoners on release. As Professor Nellis has pointed out, we do not really know the value of the new contracts or their proposed scope. One would hope that these contracts will be cheaper than their predecessors, not least because those previous contracts were hugely overpriced. According to the Policy Exchange Unit report, the average 'per day' cost of a tag in the US was £1.25 compared to £13.14 in England and Wales at the time the report was prepared. On the other hand, the more sophisticated technology (GPS) is likely to be more expensive to operate and if numbers are greatly increased, then so will the contract prices. Figures for 'whole-life' contract costs as given in the MPA report 2013/14 are anything from £529.2m to £912m. If these contracts are for six years, then the annual cost might be between £88m and £152m.

Napo believes that the unimaginative and indiscriminate use of EM curfews has been nothing short of scandalous. Indeed an expensive scandal at that, and with little or no evidence to suggest that 'stand-alone' curfews (around 70% of those imposed) do anything at all to reduce re-offending rates.

Napo would agree with the Probation Inspectorate when they observed in their report on EM that it should be better integrated with Offender Management. A targeted use of curfews to assist in ensuring compliance with other community order requirements would be preferable – rather than just using them as a low-level disposal to achieve the aim of punishment. Equally the new GPS technology does appear to have a very real place, perhaps for controlling the movements of certain sex-offenders and perhaps also for those released from prison on temporary licences.

In February 2014 we understand that around 14,000 EM curfews were in force. Arguably 70% too many –see above. The numbers requiring GPS tracking should be measured in hundreds not thousands, and with this more targeted approach, funds could have been re-directed to other areas which could reap greater rewards in terms of reduced re-offending – i.e. the under 12 month prisoners, and therefore lower overall social costs.

Had there been greater consultation with stakeholders and better research, of European models of implementation, for example, then far better value for money might have been achieved. Had we been consulted, we would have advocated a more cautious approach with the use of research, pilots, impact assessments and proper evaluation. We see little sign of any of this, but rather a somewhat hasty and chaotic exercise in re-letting contracts that were in crisis.

May I then draw to a close by expressing our serious concern that these contracts may be used as a means of further reducing the resources directed towards Probation. We are concerned that there is a misguided plan to replace supervision by people with supervision by electronic tagging and tracking. There is no substitute for good face to face supervision and there is no evidence that EM reduces re-offending. We believe that supervision by probation staff should co-exist alongside the targeted use of electronic monitoring. There needs to be a shift away from a private security control service towards a more modern rehabilitative use of technology – rather than a shift in the other direction, which seems to be in prospect. Rehabilitation using electronic monitoring is best achieved by probation staff being more involved in the supervisory task with the Electronic Monitoring service provider taking care of the supply/installation of equipment, maintenance and monitoring/reporting aspects.

We commend Professor Nellis' report to you and we would likewise be happy to engage in further communication on this matter should you feel it helpful.

Yours sincerely,



IAN LAWRENCE
General Secretary