



Justice and Home Affairs Committee

Corrected oral evidence: Investigation into electronic monitoring

Tuesday 9 September 2025

11.05 am

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Members present: Lord Foster of Bath (The Chair); Lord Bach; Baroness Bertin; Baroness Buscombe; Lord Dubs; Lord Henley; Baroness Hughes of Stretford; Baroness Prashar.

Evidence Session No. 3

Heard in Public

Questions 16 – 27

Witness

I: Antony King, Managing Director of Citizen Services, Serco UK and Europe.

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

Antony King.

Q16 The Chair: Good morning, everybody and welcome to the very much delayed 10.30 am session of the Justice and Home Affairs Select Committee's investigation into electronic monitoring. We apologise to our guests today for the long-delayed start due to the technological problems we faced. We are very pleased to have Mr Antony King with us as our first witness. To kick off, Mr King, would you be kind enough to introduce yourself and your role?

Antony King: Good morning, Lord Chairman and committee members. I am the managing director for citizen services at Serco UK and Europe. In that role, I am the accountable owner of electronic monitoring that Serco delivers on behalf of the Ministry of Justice in England and Wales.

The Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I understand you are happy to be called Antony throughout, so we will do that.

We are well aware that there was an episode of the "Dispatches" television programme that was very critical of Serco's services in respect of electronic monitoring. We will get into that and give you an opportunity to respond to some of the criticisms that were made a little later on. But just as a way of getting started, I would be grateful if you could explain to the committee exactly how your contract with the Ministry of Justice works. We understand you have a four-year contract with an opportunity to extend it for a further two years. But clearly, in light of the recent announcements, not least reflected in the Sentencing Bill before Parliament, there will be a significant increase in the number of people likely to be tagged, possibly increasing from around 20,000 to as many as 40,000. So, in your answer, I would be grateful if you could explain how it is envisaged that that increase in numbers will be reflected in the contract. Clearly, we will discuss later your ability to deliver that increased number. I am merely interested in understanding the mechanics of the contract. Could you explain it to us?

Antony King: Of course, Lord Chairman. As you said, we have a contract with the Ministry of Justice. It is important to distinguish between what we do and what Allied does. You will be talking to witnesses from Allied later. Allied supplies the equipment to—

The Chair: For the record, to be clear, Allied Universal Electronic Monitoring provides the tags to you. We have witnesses from Allied a little later this morning.

Antony King: Correct. Well, technically it provides them to the MoJ, which then gives them to us on Allied's behalf. Our contract is with the Ministry of Justice.

We do the tagging services in England and Wales, as I mentioned. We are responsible for the bit in the in the middle. If you think of the genesis of an electronic monitoring order, it starts in the courts. It starts with the police putting someone on bail, or it could start with someone coming out of prison for early

release. That causes an order to be raised. That order is then sent to us. Just for clarity, at the moment that order is sent via email. You alluded to some of the issues that were mentioned in the media. A lot of those are now being addressed through some of the improvements we are making, such as the fact that, going forwards, it will not be via email, it will be through an electronic portal, and that will remove some of the areas of error.

The order comes to us. We then process the order. We then query it as needed, if the information is incomplete. Once the order has been completed, we are then responsible for installing the equipment. As a reminder, we have four types of equipment—curfew monitoring; GPS, which is location monitoring; alcohol monitoring; and a small cohort of people who wear biometrics, which are non-fitted devices that they use with their thumbprint, and they are used in bail immigration cases.

We fit the appropriate equipment. Sometimes a person might wear two types of equipment but typically it is only one. Once the equipment is fitted, we then monitor the person for the duration of their order. If they do something that goes against the terms of their order, we are alerted, we will investigate it and then, as necessary, raise a breach with the appropriate authority. At the end of the order, we remove the equipment. At that point, our responsibilities are completed.

The Chair: How does the contract work? The number of people you are tagging can vary over time. How is that reflected in the contract?

Antony King: The contract contemplates an almost unlimited number of people who could be monitored. As more people are monitored, that gets reflected in the billing that we make to the Ministry of Justice. As an example, when we took the contract on and went live in May 2024, we had approximately 20,000 people being monitored. That number, as of this month, is in the order of a little bit more than 26,000. So, already, over the course of 15 or 16 months, we have increased the volume by over 6,000 people, and it can increase further. So, to your question around the Gauke report, it does not require any contract change, it just happens through the natural mechanism set up in the contract.

The Chair: Without going into the details about how you would be capable of managing if there is a significant increase in the number, the current contract that you have would mean that Serco and Serco alone would be responsible for carrying out the activities you described? There would not be the possibility of the MoJ looking for another contractor to deal with the extra numbers that will come as a result of the Sentencing Act, as it will eventually become?

Antony King: As contemplated at the moment in our discussions with the ministry, the assumption is that we will be doing all of it. In terms of the logistics of it, the key bit is—

The Chair: Sorry, just so I am absolutely clear, you said “the assumption is”, but what I need to know is whether the wording of the contract is such that, were

somebody else to start delivering it, that would be a breach of the contract.

Antony King: I will have to get back to you on that, because I am not entirely sure. My assumption is that the MoJ can use other people, but in terms of the exact wording of the contract, I will come back to the committee. I am sorry, I do not have that information to hand.

The Chair: That would be very helpful. I have two further questions. Please give very brief answers, if you can. The first is, as a result of the use of tags, lots of data about individuals is collected and made use of in a variety of different ways. Who owns that data?

Antony King: In brief, the Ministry of Justice owns it. It is the data controller and we are the data processor.

The Chair: From your experience in relation to this particular contract, as opposed to others that Serco has with government departments, local government and other parts of the public sector, what is your view of the ability of the MoJ to carry out its role as a contract monitor?

Antony King: The MoJ does a good job of monitoring our contract. It has people on site. We have our base offices in Warrington, where we do the monitoring. The MoJ has its own dedicated room with a team of people on site. It has full access to all our IT systems, which means that at any point in time it can run data checks or run reports. We have a close working relationship with the MoJ. But it is also fair to say that the wider service is important as well. It is not just our relationship with the MoJ, it is how we interact with probation, the prisons, the police, et cetera. Again, over the last several months, we have been putting in place improvements in how we interact with them to overcome some of the problems in the end-to-end process that were the root cause of some of the media issues that you talked about earlier.

The Chair: One of the concerns that has obviously been expressed is about the relationship with the use of data and it being handed on and so on. You have just described improvements in the contract monitoring arrangements. Rather than going into them now, I would be enormously grateful if you could write a note to us explaining what those changes have been and what further changes might be envisaged for the future.

Q17 Lord Bach: Good morning. My questions are about training. What training is provided to those working on electronic monitoring? Bearing in mind that the Channel 4 “Dispatches” programme already referred to suggested that the training course for new recruits had been cut from what does not sound a very long duration, from three weeks to two weeks, and the allegation was made that there is not a safety training element due to the backlog of tags—they found five people on the training course who started work without any training at all—how would you counter those allegations?

The Chairman has already referred to the second part of the question. There could be as many as 46,000 people being subject to electronic monitoring before very

long. That is a huge increase from the present number, which I am told is about 22,000.

How does the training work? How does the future look?

Antony King: Our staff are our biggest asset by far. They are incredibly professional and dedicated, and the safety of our staff is of absolute paramount importance. To that end, we have quite a detailed and comprehensive training programme, which is distinguished between the people who work in the field and the people who work in the monitoring centre.

The people who work in the monitoring centre can do various roles within the monitoring jobs. They can be raising breaches, or they might be doing the entering of the orders. We put them in classroom-based training to make sure they are capable and able to do it. They are then supervised during their probation period, for want of a better word.

The people in the field also go through two weeks of classroom-based training. On the media reports about the reduction last year, it is very important to remember that we were running three systems last year because we were in the process of rolling out a large new IT system. The point about the training being from three to two weeks was due to the fact that, at that point, the new system had gone live and we were only training people on the new system, not both systems.

But our training is comprehensive. We cover the use of the equipment, which is clearly important because they need to go and do their job. We offer safeguarding training. I get regular reports overnight for things that have happened the previous night in the field—we see this all the time—and a lot of those involve safeguarding incidents where we have got involved and notified emergency services or given assistance, et cetera. Safeguarding is really important as well.

Then there is an important element of safety training. The safety training we give to our staff is to not do confrontation. We are not training them to tackle people. It is situational awareness training. That means that if ever they feel uncomfortable in a situation, they are supported and trained and can spot the signs so they can withdraw from that job. When they withdraw from that job, then we will go and investigate it further.

Once they have completed that training, they then go into the field. They will work with an experienced field officer for however long it takes for them to feel comfortable. Then, at the point where we are happy that they are now comfortable and they are happy too to do their job unsupervised, they will be formally qualified, as it were. That is the training; hopefully that covers the things that you were interested in.

The second part of your question was about expansion. The key to that expansion is that it needs to be organic, rather than in massive great chunks. At the end of last year and over the summer, we demonstrated that we can deal with some of the

smaller release schemes. We did SDS40 successfully last October. In June, we did the HDC releases, and that was about another 1,200. In those bite-sized chunks, we can just absorb those into the BAU workload. As I said earlier, we have gone from 20,000 to 26,000 on tag over the last few months, so it is a bit higher than your 22,000.

In terms of the big step changes, that clearly requires planning, and we are in discussions with the ministry at the moment about how we make that step change from the second half of next year following on from the Gauke report, because it might require us to have extra buildings, and clearly, there are fleet implications. We just need to make sure that we have identified those step changes and that we have got sufficient time to recruit and train. But I am very confident that we can cope with those increases.

- Q18** **Baroness Prashar:** Can I just probe a little more on training? You have talked about safeguarding and the other technical aspects of managing this. In your training, do you give an understanding to people about the purpose of electronic monitoring and the context of where it fits into the criminal justice system?

Antony King: Yes. Any of you are very welcome to come and visit our Warrington office. If you go into the Warrington office, you will see posters on the wall that talk about the mission, the fact that we are supporting the rehabilitation of offenders, the fact that we are reducing reoffending, and the fact that we are helping to administer justice on behalf of victims. Our staff have an incredibly strong public service ethos. I think one of your later questions is going to be about public versus private. I cannot stress the public service ethos that our staff have enough; they want to go out and do the right thing by the public, and that can involve the mission and purpose of electronic monitoring and the safeguarding elements.

- Q19** **Baroness Bertin:** You segued quite nicely into my question, Antony. I would like you to give a bit more detail about what the advantages and disadvantages of private contracting in electronic monitoring are. How does it work in England and Wales compared to other jurisdictions? We have heard that it works less well in England and Wales compared to Scotland, for example. I would like you to give more detail on that, please.

Antony King: We do immigration cases on behalf of the Home Office in Scotland and Northern Ireland, but otherwise the Scottish service is run by my colleagues at Allied Universal, who are sitting behind me. They will probably be better placed to talk about the Scottish piece, if that is okay. My understanding is that in Scotland, they do curfew monitoring, and they have not yet rolled out GPS monitoring, so it is a different approach. However, it is still run by the private sector in Scotland.

If you look more broadly across the globe, there are a couple of very distinguished academics—if I can just go off on a slight tangent—called Mike Nellis and Anthea Hucklesby. I got to know Anthea quite well a few years ago. They both have a pragmatic view. In fact, Mike Nellis has said that the mixture of private versus public delivery of electronic monitoring does allow for best practice to be promulgated

between the two types of providers. I think it is fair to say that while in western Europe it is predominantly run by the probation service, in places such as North America it is a very mixed economy, sometimes run by probation and sometimes by private companies.

In terms of advantages and disadvantages, one of the things that you must take on board is the fact that there is a public service ethos that gets raised. Our staff absolutely have that ethos. I do not think that is a factor, whether it is run privately or whether it is run through the public sector. I think there is an advantage from running it in the private sector, because we can bring innovation and a breadth of experience into some of the work. I mentioned that we have rolled out a new IT system. We did that in very short order during the course of last year. From my experience, I think that would have been a more challenging and difficult thing to do in the public sector.

Professor Mike Nellis also talked about one of the challenges of outsourcing it privately. He thinks that is the interface between the private company and the Probation Service. That is true, in that we are not directly part of probation, and therefore there is an interface where perhaps it would be more seamless if it were run within probation.

To that end, we have been working incredibly closely this year and put in place lots of forums and meetings and so on. We have been working with probation, for example, on things, such as the breach packs. The breach packs that are stipulated under the contract were not being welcomed by the Probation Service and the police, so we took it upon ourselves outwith the contract to go and work with them to say, "How can we do that better?" We have now created a breach pack that they are much more comfortable with, and we are in the process of automating it. Where the pinch points are that the academics identify, they are the things that we are trying to work on within Serco to try and make sure that we can make them better.

Baroness Bertin: One just very quick follow-up: do you think it is fair that you do not have many competitors in this world, and do you think that does have an effect on service and what the product is?

Antony King: The MoJ went through a very comprehensive procurement process. In terms of the tag providers, I keep deferring to David at Allied at the back, but he is much more of an expert on the equipment than I am. There are many companies around the globe that manufacture the tags.

In terms of the actual service provision in England and Wales, there were several companies that bid for it, including Capita, Allied, Serco and others. There are a number of companies who can bid to make it competitive. Clearly, the size of the operation, because it is run as a national service, means it is not lending itself naturally to SMEs. But I think competition is not an issue. In terms of the quality of service, we have very strict quality measures and service levels in our contract that the MoJ hold us to account on.

The Chair: Just before we move on from that, one of the issues that you have referred to now on three separate occasions is the very strong public ethos of your staff. Yet some people would argue that your staff are extremely low-paid. It is slightly surprising, therefore, that issues of public service are high on your agenda. Can you just explain the apparent contradiction?

Antony King: We have a very close relationship with Community union. It represents our staff on our contract. We go through pay negotiations every year. It has just been very happy to sign off and recommend to our staff the latest pay negotiation.

Q20 Baroness Buscombe: Antony, some have criticised the decision to award Serco an electronic monitoring contract after it was fined £19.2 million as part of a deferred prosecution agreement from the Serious Fraud Office back in 2019. According to a letter from the Prisons Minister to the chair of the House of Commons Justice Committee, financial penalties have been imposed on Serco every month since taking over the contract because of poor performance. How do you respond to those who say you should not have been eligible for that tender process? How do you feel you are performing? Before you start, I ask you to please not use the term “lessons learned”, because I am allergic to it.

Antony King: Press the buzzer if I use it. I will try not to. I do not think I was going to, but I probably will end up doing it inadvertently now.

To address the first point, the MoJ went through a rigorous procurement process in which Serco was eligible to bid. I cannot comment on whether we should or should not have been allowed to bid for it. What I can say, though, is that while I was not in Serco when the events that you are referring to happened—I have now been in Serco for nearly 18 months—the ethics and integrity of the people that work in Serco are deep. It went through a corporate renewal under Rupert Soames after the events that you refer to. We have very strong controls around anything to do with charging, ethics, whistleblowing policies and so on, so we are not the same company that we were when those events happened. The allegation is that we should not be allowed because we might be—and I am going to use the word—the same company we were before. That is not the case; I can assure you on that.

In terms of the service levels, service credits and so on, the picture we inherited last year was complicated on a number of fronts. When we took the contract on, we inherited a workload that was considerably higher than we anticipated. We then had a significant increase in the workload through the early release schemes. We had a very demotivated workforce, with high levels of long-term sickness and attrition. On top of that, we were rolling out a new IT system and new hardware supplied by Allied. All those things combined led to a very challenging environment, which you referred to. We realised that. The problem is that these things snowball quite quickly. The moment we realised it, we put all the resources of Serco into fixing the problem and, over a very short period of about two months or so, we got back on top of that workload and have stayed on top of it ever since.

We are also operating under what are called interim service levels, because of the fact we have been running these legacy systems, et cetera. Against those legacy interim service levels, we are performing very well and continue to perform well. We will have a slow transition to full service levels, which are the ones that get reported to the public. They are not contractually applicable yet, but we will be transitioning to them over the next several months. We have not paid service credits in recent months of the contract. Our performance is considerably better than it was. Last year's circumstances were quite challenging and unique, but we are now back on top of things and are in a much stronger place.

Baroness Buscombe: That is very helpful. Are you confident that the measures that you have put in place are sufficient to ensure that the issues which led to these fines and repayments are not happening again, and will not happen again, with the increased numbers that you are going to cope with?

Antony King: Yes, absolutely. One of the key mechanisms for charging is through the number of people being monitored. We have spent several months this year working very closely with the MoJ to make sure that we are all in complete alignment around what that piece of data means, where the data is sourced from and how it is produced. As I say, the MoJ have full and open access to our systems, so can check the data at any time. There is a practical point, in that, practically, it cannot happen—that is very clear—but, to go back to my earlier point, there is an ethical point, in that the controls and ethos within Serco just would not let it happen anyway.

Baroness Buscombe: Does the contract now allow for this expansion from a financial standpoint? You talked about the possibility of increasing the number of buildings, for example. Is that all within the contract?

Antony King: Yes, the contract contains a tariff table of pricing up to a certain number. Once it goes beyond that number, there is a broader conversation to have with the MoJ, recognising that some of these might be step changes in buildings, et cetera, but it is still contemplated by the contract and has mechanisms to cope with it.

Q21 **Baroness Hughes of Stretford:** May I just follow up, briefly? I am trying to marry up the strong comments you have made about the public service ethos and ethics of the company now with what the Serious Fraud Office found—that Serco then was guilty of fraud, false accounting and deliberately misrepresenting information that led to inflated bills to the MoJ. Are you saying that the Serco that existed then was a disreputable company that did not have a public service ethos, or what? It is very hard to take. This happens all the time; people come along and say, “That was then and this is now”, but, actually, it was individual people at that time doing wrong and misclaiming huge amounts of public money.

Antony King: I am not trying to avoid the question, but it is genuinely difficult for me to talk about Serco in 2011 and 2012. I have been in Serco only since last year. All I can comment on is what I see now, and what I see now is a company that has

the highest standards that I have seen. It has high probity and a very stringent and rigorous process for maintaining ethics, whistleblowing, et cetera. That is where we are.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: I know you are in a difficult position. I suspect that Serco then would have said the same about itself at that time, yet still it was behaving criminally.

Q22 The Chair: If we take it a stage further and move to the more recent period, the “Dispatches” programme from April this year showed a number of real concerns. I know that Serco responded and said in relation to some of the claims in that programme that you were shocked by its level of inaccuracy. What is your current response to the “Dispatches” programme?

Antony King: It is not that the things highlighted recently in the media are not issues; the attribution of the cause is just incorrect. For example, it is absolutely true that one of our field officers will go out of an evening and find they cannot do the job. In fact, I was out only a couple of weeks ago, and on the first four jobs that we went on we could not do the job. Often, that is because we do not have the right address information, for example, as you saw on the “Dispatches” programme; there were repeat visits because the address information was not accurate.

That is the point I was making earlier about how we try to improve that interface in the end-to-end process. We have commissioned a third-party company, sponsored by the MoJ—at our own cost, I should say—to look at how we can operate better across the wider Probation Service. Also, our new IT system is giving data insights that just were not there before, around the likelihood of success depending on when we receive the order, et cetera. I have talked about the fact that with the MoJ we are rolling out an automated order entry system, which will mean that stuff is not coming through via email. Lots of things need to be addressed in the end-to-end process to alleviate some of the issues highlighted in the media.

The Chair: In relation to the difficulty of inaccurate addresses, presumably the plans to now introduce a system whereby many people are tagged pre their release from prison will be a significant improvement for that particular problem.

Antony King: Yes. In the summer, about 1,200 people came out of prison on the HDC early release scheme. Our success rate of tagging people directly as they came out was about 94%, versus about 84% for the comparable month for those not being tagged at source. We are in the process of running a pilot, or we will be starting a pilot soon, with the Ministry of Justice to look at how we can do that more comprehensively.

Baroness Buscombe: I fear that one of the issues is the time lag. When those people were on early release, there was obviously a clear list and it was all organised in advance. But day to day, when you are receiving information from others, such as the Probation Service or the police and so on, is there sometimes a time lag that you can do nothing about between the need to get on and tag and their getting

round to emailing you?

Antony King: The timeliness of the orders is obviously something outwith our control. Once we receive the order, we have a target of putting a tag on by midnight the following day—or at least to attempt it, anyway, because, clearly, we cannot always do it if they are not on the premises. That 84% is the figure that we achieved.

Lord Bach: There are examples in our papers that suggest that in Texas and New South Wales, for example, there is little barrier to providing real-time updates. We wondered if there was more that you could do as a company to have real-time updates so that you could get operating not the next day—unless, of course, it was extremely late on the first day—but on the same day. I think that is the question that Baroness Buscombe is asking. Is there more you could do?

Antony King: Our data has shown that our chance of success is significantly increased the earlier in the day we receive the order. It also shows that a lot of our orders come in after 4 pm. Due to the nature of the processing period, that means that we are visiting at nine or 10 at night, when we have a much lower chance of success. There is stuff that we can do to improve the front end—the timeliness of our getting orders—and we are working on achieving that with probation, prisons and other colleagues.

On real-time updates, in things such as breaches, alerts and so on, we do that very quickly anyway. Again, we have stringent service levels for how quickly that is done. There are small cohorts of people who we call “the specials”, the people under TPIMs et cetera, where there literally is a real-time update process. But for the broader cohort, at the moment I do not think the police, probation et cetera set up, or indeed want, those sorts of real-time updates, because we would just be flooding them with information. What we really need to do is a lot more of what we are doing—the investigation phase. So, if we get an alert to say that somebody has tampered with their equipment, there is no point us just immediately telling the police or probation; it is worth us going out and investigating, which is what we do, and then we can take an informed decision about whether to raise a breach notice.

Real-time updates are a little bit of a red herring. It is more around timeliness of receiving orders and then making sure that, where things are being breached, we are doing that within the service level.

The Chair: This all ties in with the overall breach procedures. Lord Henley?

Q23 **Lord Henley:** Can you expand on the few comments you made at the beginning about the breach procedure and what exactly happens in the event of people breaching their conditions?

Antony King: We have the system set up and we get notified of what we call alerts. There are 20-plus different alert types. To give you a few examples to bring it to life, it could be that someone is on a curfew and they have not got home on time. It could be someone on a GPS tag and they have gone in or out of an exclusion zone.

Or it could be that the people are not charging the batteries in their devices and they go dead.

The alert type will dictate the action that we take. For example, if someone is not inside before their curfew, they have a monitoring box in their home with a telephone line attached to it, and we will phone that telephone line and try to ascertain the reason why they have not made it back in time or speak to somebody. We can then make an informed decision about whether a breach notice is needed.

Ditto things such as battery checks. If somebody is not charging their battery, in the first instance we will try and contact the person to say, "Put your battery on charge, you've only got 20% battery left". If there is a tamper then we will in most cases go out and investigate the tamper just to make sure that it has been a tamper and not an issue with the equipment.

Once we have gone through those processes, then we can make that decision about whether we raise a breach notice. This year, we have been automating the breach process. So, instead of it being a manual process, we are now automating it. Again, that is being piloted with the probation and police services so that it is a much quicker process and pulls all the information together in one place.

Lord Henley: Does that go to the police or probation, depending on which is appropriate?

Antony King: That will go to the responsible officer, which typically is someone in probation or the police.

Lord Henley: It goes by what means?

Antony King: It goes electronically. At the moment, again, it still goes through to mailboxes. We send it to the appropriate mailbox.

The Chair: One of our witnesses has suggested that if, for instance, the police had a national centre dedicated to receiving this information itself and then forwarding it to the relevant officer in whichever force it was, that would help. What is your view about that as a way forward?

Antony King: That is an option, but there are steps we can take before we go down that route. Those are the things that, again, we are actively working on with the police and probation. For example, at the moment we might send four breach packs for four different events for the same individual, whereas we are now in discussions—because, again, that is what our contract obliges us to do—about how we can improve that and aggregate them with all the events that have happened over a short period. So, rather than bombard them with four different things, here is one aggregated piece of data covering a 24-hour period, which allows them to act in a much more considered way about it. So what the Chairman talked about is certainly something that should be considered, but there are smaller steps that we can implement in the meantime.

Lord Henley: You also mentioned that you can monitor people in a range of different ways according to what the alert is—where they are, whether they are consuming alcohol, or whatever—and, on some occasions, people might be wearing more than one monitor. What additional procedures are there for subjects who require that intensive monitoring?

Antony King: Are you talking about the TPIM cases?

Lord Henley: Yes.

Antony King: We probably should not go into the detail of how we monitor those in a public forum because it is quite sensitive, but I can give you a broad picture. The people responsible for that monitoring are people who are very experienced in our monitoring centre. They have higher security levels. They sit in a locked room, which has restricted access, on their own. They have very close working relationships with the authorities, particularly with the police. We have very tight, stringent controls about how quickly we report—

Lord Henley: Those are your people?

Antony King: Those are our people working very closely with the police. On the actual operational detail, as I have suggested, it probably would not be appropriate to discuss that in a public forum.

The Chair: I am afraid time is getting on. Baroness Prashar?

Q24 **Baroness Prashar:** You already mentioned western Europe and the differences, but can you elaborate on how the work on electronic monitoring differs in the UK compared to other regions?

Antony King: Mike Nellis and Anthea Hucklesby are the genuine experts on this and would be able to give you much better detail than what I can but, in places like Sweden, Belgium and a lot of European places, it is definitely part of the probation service. If you go to the States, it is, as I said, a very mixed economy. Sometimes it is done by probation and sometimes by private companies. They also have different models where, in some states in America, you have the option to leave prison and go on a device, but then you have to pay the company for the rental of the device, which is a very different model to the one that we operate.

There are different ways of doing it and, as I said earlier, they have different advantages and disadvantages. The key thing for Serco is just making sure we are working very closely with our partners in the public sector to make the end-to-end service as best as it can be.

Baroness Prashar: Can you give me some observations of the advantages and disadvantages of the different systems that operate in other countries? Is there anything that we can look at?

Antony King: Do you want specific examples or in broad terms?

Baroness Prashar: In broad terms.

Antony King: The innovation piece is worth investigating. As I say, we implemented last year, over a very compressed period, a comprehensive IT upgrade that was integrated into Allied Universal's new monitoring technology. I genuinely do not think the public sector would have had the skills and capacity to do that in the time period in which we did it. That system has, as I said, given us all sorts of new insights, through looking at the data, as to how we can make the end-to-end service better.

I talked about success rates depending on time of the order. We can understand missing information a lot better. That is a definite advantage in my view, running it from the private sector. It is just that breadth of experience.

Baroness Prashar: From your experience of other countries, does that in any way transfer into the training that you provide for people here?

Antony King: Not directly, no. I do not think it does. We have very specific training around the equipment, the use of our systems, and safety and safeguarding. I do not think we are taking lessons, particularly on the training, from other jurisdictions. That is something I will have a think about; it is definitely worth thinking about.

Q25 Baroness Hughes of Stretford: We are thinking about artificial intelligence as well and accepting that that has implications, say, for probation, that go way beyond just electronic monitoring. But what are your thoughts, as a company, on the potential of artificial intelligence for the development of EM as a service? Can you share any of that with us?

Antony King: Yes. AI is definitely a buzz word at the moment and it covers, it seems to me, a multitude of things. I am not sure it falls strictly under the banner of AI but we are definitely focusing at present on automation—removing errors, et cetera. I have talked about automating the breach packs and rolling out the automated order entry portal. So there are very specific things we are looking at there. Next year, we are looking at rolling out dynamic scheduling, and that is definitely in the realms of artificial intelligence in the broadest terms.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: Can you just unpack that a bit for me?

Antony King: Yes, of course. At the moment, the systems and processes we inherited mean that when we receive an order, it goes into a team of about 30 people, called our schedulers. They look at the jobs and the region and manually assign tasks to our field agents. In the 21st century, we can clearly do better than that, so, for implementation next year, we are now looking at and have already built the kernel of what is called dynamic scheduling, which is all machine-led.

The AI engine will take the order, look in the region and balance what equipment people have and what the order type is—some orders have higher priority, such as domestic abuse cases. It will also look at things such as distances between jobs and come up with the optimum schedule for each field officer for that night's work. We

think that will bring a significant increase in the efficiency of the service we are operating, and it will certainly help as we expand the service over the next 18 months or so.

There is also data insight. We talk about AI, but the data insight we can get from all this data coming together—around compliancy rates and which order types are more likely to offend—can then feed back into probation to start informing where to focus its efforts. We can do a lot under the technology banner; I am not sure it is all strictly AI, but certainly under the AI banner we are looking at dynamic scheduling.

Baroness Hughes of Stretford: We have been briefed with suggestions from tech companies about the way in which people are monitored, including the use of cameras in homes and other developments. Are you having any discussions with tech companies about those ideas?

Antony King: If we go back to the beginning, when I talked about Serco's role, the MoJ's intent with this contract was for the bit that Serco does and the IT that we have implemented to be as technology agnostic as possible, so that, if there are other technologies in the future, our IT platform would be able to interface and integrate into them. Serco itself is not having those conversations because we use the equipment supplied by the MoJ.

Q26 The Chair: We will certainly pick that up with our next witnesses in a few minutes. I have two quick questions to bring us to an end. Earlier, we talked about the ability of the MoJ itself in terms of its contract-monitoring role. If there is a significant increase in the number of people subject to electronic monitoring, obviously your staff numbers will increase and a number of other things will follow. What are the implications for the MoJ? Would we expect the MoJ, in turn, to have an increased number of people in the team responsible for contract monitoring?

Antony King: That is a good question. I will give you my opinion as opposed to anything that is factually based. My opinion is that it should not lead to a significant increase because, fundamentally, they are monitoring our contract and to monitor our contract we are giving them information, management reports, service-level information, et cetera. The information in those reports will show bigger numbers, but the reports themselves will be the same, so my instinct—my MoJ colleagues might not thank me for this—is that they should not need to grow their teams, but that is just my view.

Q27 The Chair: That is very helpful. Finally, this is your golden opportunity. A Select Committee makes recommendations to the Government about things they can do better in the future. What would you like our report to include as a recommendation to the Government?

Antony King: I have heard that probation spends 70% of its time doing administrative tasks, as a consequence of having very old and outdated IT systems, et cetera. We really want electronic monitoring to be successful for the people being monitored. That is the whole point—the whole reason that we are here. For

electronic monitoring to be most effective, it needs to be very closely supervised by the Probation Service, which therefore needs to have its time freed up to do what it is expert at: rehabilitating offenders and looking after them. That means not spending its time on these administrative tasks. There needs to be much more focus and investment on probation, upgrading its IT systems and, potentially, increasing its numbers.

The Chair: That is very helpful. Thank you, on behalf of the entire committee for the evidence that you have provided us today. Thank you for promising that you will write to us in more detail about the various aspects of the contract itself, particularly in relation to how it works with the increased numbers that are likely. If there are further issues that you feel you would like to have told the committee, please do not hesitate to write to us as quickly as possible, and I hope you will not mind that we may ourselves get in touch with some further questions. I conclude by saying that this has been a very helpful and useful session for the committee. Huge apologies for the significant delay in starting, due to technological problems at this end. We are enormously grateful. The committee is now suspended.