

Justice Committee

Oral evidence: [Rehabilitation and resettlement: ending the cycle of reoffending](#), HC 469

Tuesday 19 May 2026

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[Watch the meeting](#)

Members present: Andy Slaughter (Chair); Pam Cox; Warinder Juss; Tessa Munt; Sarah Russell; Dr Neil Shastri-Hurst; Vikki Slade.

Questions 516-618

Witnesses

[I](#): Antony King, Managing Director of Citizen Services, Serco UK & Europe.

[II](#): Claire Hubberstey, Chief Executive, One Small Thing

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Serco \[RAR0070\]](#)

[One Small Thing \[RAR0087\]](#)

Examination of witness

Witness: Antony King

Chair: Welcome to this afternoon's sitting of the Justice Committee. This is a further evidence session in relation to our rehabilitation and resettlement inquiry. We are looking at alternatives to custody in particular this afternoon, with two witness sessions. The first is with Antony King, the managing director of citizen services at Serco. I will ask Mr King to introduce himself in a moment and to say what Serco does in this respect, but first we have to make our declarations of interest.

Warinder Juss: Good afternoon. I am Warinder Juss, the Member of Parliament for Wolverhampton West. I am a solicitor, but not practising. I am a member of the GMB trade union executive council and a member of various APPGs.

Pam Cox: Good afternoon. I am Pam Cox. My interests are as declared on the register. I will just add that I am the chair of the all-party parliamentary group on penal affairs.

Chair: I am the Chair of the Committee and the MP for Hammersmith and Chiswick. I am a non-practising barrister, a member of the GMB and Unite trade unions, and a patron of two justice-related charities: the Upper Room, for ex-offenders, and the Hammersmith and Fulham law centre.

Tessa Munt: Good afternoon. My name is Tessa Munt. I am the Member for Wells and Mendip Hills, which is in Somerset. Everything is as declared on the register, but I point out that I am a director of WhistleblowersUK, which is a non-profit-making organisation. I am also the vice-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on penal affairs.

Vikki Slade: Hello. I am Vikki Slade, the MP for Mid Dorset and North Poole. My interests are as per the register, none relevant to this Committee.

Dr Shastri-Hurst: Good afternoon. My name is Neil Shastri-Hurst. I am the Member of Parliament for Solihull West and Shirley. My interests are as declared on the register, but I point out that I am a barrister and maintain a practising certificate; I am an associate tenant of No5 Barristers' Chambers.

Q516 **Chair:** Mr King, perhaps you could introduce yourself and tell us what your role is in Serco and how it relates to the electronic monitoring service. The relationship between Serco and the Ministry of Justice goes back for some years and has not always been a happy one, but perhaps you can tell us what your experience is and what services you provide.

Antony King: Of course. Hello, Committee members and Chair. Thank you for inviting me to give evidence. I look forward to talking to you and answering all your questions. My name is Antony King and I am the



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managing director of citizen services at Serco UK and Europe. Within my business unit sits the electronic monitoring service. That service is what we provide on behalf of the Ministry of Justice across England and Wales. We take orders from prisons, probation and courts. We fit the electronic monitoring devices, we monitor the device-wearers during the course of their monitoring order, and, at the end of the service, we take the devices off.

To answer your second question, Chair, our relationship with the Ministry of Justice is a strong one at the moment, I think. We are working closely with them across the wider criminal justice sector to see what additional value we can add to the electronic monitoring service, above and beyond our contract. Our current contract is doing well, as I think James, the director-general, told you when he came to see you last month. We are green on all our key performance indicators, so that has now given us the bandwidth and space to start talking to probation and the MOJ about how we can improve the wider end to end, which I will happily share with you as we go through the session.

Q517 Chair: How many people are tagged and how many do you anticipate will be tagged in the future?

Antony King: It varies, obviously, but at the end of April we had circa 29,000 people being tagged. That is an increase of about 8,000 or so since we took the contract on two years ago, so it has gone up quite significantly during that period. Over the past 12 months we have dealt with three early release schemes—most recently the FTR56 on behalf of the Ministry of Justice—and we are working closely with the Ministry on the independent sentencing review, where we anticipate further people coming out in September.

In terms of the numbers we are anticipating in September, we have spent the past several months working with the Ministry of Justice to model what those numbers will be. The Ministry is still working through the final numbers. I cannot share what those will be, because we do not have them at the moment, but we have done various scenario planning, and the latest we have heard from the Ministry is that it anticipates sending us numbers to model shortly that will be lower than the previous estimates.

We think we are in a good position to deal with the increase in September. We currently have additional capacity in the field, driven by the efficiencies that we have managed to drive out over the past 18 months. We have modelled the higher numbers that the Ministry has sent to us, but it is now telling us that the numbers will be lower, so we think we are in a good place to deal with them.

Q518 Chair: What additional numbers are you expecting?

Antony King: As I say, I cannot actually tell you what the additional numbers are, because we are still waiting for the numbers from the MOJ.

Q519 Chair: You must have some idea, if you are doing 29,000 at the moment. Will it be 35,000? 50,000?

Antony King: Genuinely, we do not know what the numbers are. They have varied; they have gone up and down. They are not on the public record yet, so I think that is a question for the Ministry.

Q520 **Chair:** When does this take effect?

Antony King: September.

Q521 **Chair:** So how do you know that you will have enough staff, and the right qualification of staff, for exactly what they will be doing?

Antony King: As I said, Chair, we have been working on various scenarios with the Ministry. We modelled the most recent scenario it gave us and we had sufficient staff. It now believes that those numbers will be lower, so, given that we had enough staff—

Q522 **Chair:** You cannot give us a number, so lower than what?

Antony King: That is only because the Ministry has not released those numbers, and I do not feel that I am in a position to share them publicly in advance of the Ministry doing so.

Q523 **Chair:** We are talking about different types of tag, and about people at different stages either of sentences that they would have served or of alternatives to custody.

Antony King: Yes, that's right. They are the same sort of tags, but for people coming out of prison earlier and, as you say, as alternatives to custody.

Q524 **Chair:** Do you anticipate, then, that this will be a seamless process? You say that the contract is working now; it certainly was not working a year ago when we last looked at it. What do you mean by that change? Why do you say that it is now working? What are you are getting right now that you were not getting right a year ago?

Antony King: First and foremost, as I think the Committee has been told previously, we are now hitting all the contractual key performance indicators and have been for several months. We are being more efficient in the field, with more jobs per day. We have rolled out various technology improvements, as has the MOJ, with more still to come. Across the board, we are in a better place and, as I say, we have spare capacity in the system at the moment, which we are maintaining to make sure that we are in a good place for September.

Q525 **Chair:** We are talking about whether the justice system works. Have you got enough tags? Are you putting the right tags on the right people? Are you putting them on in good time? Are they working? Are they working effectively to control knowledge of where offenders are and what they are doing? You are saying that all that is working now.

Antony King: No, I am saying that the bits that Serco is in control of are working. Do we have enough tags? The tags come from Allied Universal, as I think the Committee knows. They are supplied to the MOJ and then to us. At the moment, we have sufficient tags, and AUEM is telling the MOJ



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and us that it will have sufficient tags for the ISR. We are measured in things like our success rate for installing, how quickly we install the tags, how quickly we do the breaches and so on. On all those measures, we are now meeting our contractual targets.

On the broader question of whether electronic monitoring is working, yes, by and large it does work, but of course there will always be people who have breached and are no longer on a tag and so on.

Q526 Chair: Those are the basics, aren't they? The basics are, as you say, whether the equipment is working, whether it is being fitted and things of that kind. What role do you have—either on your own or in tandem with the Probation Service—in ensuring that offenders who are fitted with tags are being rehabilitated, and that you are controlling what their activities are and ensuring that they are doing the right things, not the wrong things?

Antony King: Serco's role is very much an operational one at the base level. We are not directly involved in rehabilitation. What Serco does is facilitate rehabilitation. If you go back to basics, electronic monitoring has, in various studies, been shown to be effective in terms of rehabilitation. The MOJ published a report last year that talked about a 20% reduction in reoffending for people who had come out of prison on a curfew monitoring requirement, so electronic monitoring does seem to work for rehabilitation.

In terms of how Serco rehabilitates people, we are a facilitator, as I said. We do that in three ways. The first is through providing a good service. Electronic monitoring cannot work unless people are being tagged and monitored. The second way is that we are often the first port of call for people after they have come out of prison and the wider criminal justice sector. The professionalism and dedication of our staff when they make contact with offenders and support them through the process is really important—it sets the right tone for electronic monitoring. Also, all our frontline staff are safeguarding-trained. We are very frequently the ones who raise safeguarding concerns we encounter with the appropriate authorities. The third way is in how we facilitate rehabilitation by stepping above and beyond our contract, as we are doing at the moment, because we care about the system working. We are working with police, probation and others to improve the end-to-end process—by getting orders earlier and more accurately, for example, so that we have a better chance of success.

Q527 Chair: That was going to be my next and last question, for the present purposes. As you say, when your staff go out, it might be somebody's first interaction after they come out of custody or start serving their sentence. Are you saying that your staff are trained to deal with those situations? They might find that people are not doing what they should be doing—taking substances that they should not take, for example—or are suffering from trauma or facing risks. Do your staff know what to do in those situations? What do they do if people are not complying—if they have not been able to tag an offender?



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Antony King: On the first question, we do not deal directly with those situations, but we raise safeguarding concerns, whether with the police or social services, or by calling an ambulance. I get reports every single day of what happened during the night. Last night we had a very distressed device-wearer phoning our monitoring centre. It sounded like suicidal ideation, so we intervened by calling an ambulance to their house. That is just a small example of what we do. We do not directly help them, but we raise concerns with the appropriate authorities. In some instances, we do directly help them depending on the circumstance.

In terms of the breach process, we do not do anything much beyond raising the breach with the appropriate responsible officer to say that that person has violated their monitoring order, and then it is over to the responsible officer—be that probation or the police—to take the appropriate action.

Q528 Tessa Munt: I just want to understand whether you know what you don't know, if you see what I mean. I have an example: the gentleman who had been harassing one of my constituents was released from prison and should have been GPS-tagged but was not. He therefore breached the location bit and was reportedly twice in a place he should not have been. Everyone was a bit, "Oh, that is someone else's responsibility." If somebody is due to be tagged but has not been, and you have not been brought into the system somehow, do you get an exclusion order sent to you from the court, the prison or the Ministry of Justice? How do you know where you are failing through no fault of your own? The public's perception is that somebody released early will be tagged. How is this circled sorted?

Antony King: Provided that we have received the order—

Q529 Tessa Munt: Okay, but where would you get that order from?

Antony King: The order will come from the responsible officer. That could be a prison, or probation if they are being released from prison. It could also come from a court if it is a community order, or from the police if the person is being released on bail. There are various different routes through which the order can come in. When we took the contract on, those orders came through by email, but the MOJ has been rolling out, alongside us—it is an MOJ system—a new electronic portal. That has reduced the number of errors and problems with the orders coming in by about 5%, so it has been a success so far, and it is still in the process of being rolled out.

Once we have the order, they are on the system. We will then have two attempts to try to fit a tag—if it is a youth case, we will make three attempts. In a number of cases, we will then get requests to make further efforts as well. If they are not successful, we will then raise a breach notice for non-compliance, which goes back to responsible officer who raised the order. Then it is over to them to take the appropriate action.

Q530 Tessa Munt: Wouldn't it be a good idea if you were at the prison gate, tagging people as they come out?



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Antony King: It's funny you should mention that, because one of the things we have been doing over the last few months, alongside the MOJ, is what we call "tag at source", which is a euphemism for exactly what you said: going directly to the prison and fitting the tag at source, when they are coming out of prison. The pilot has been successful. Because Serco has prisons of its own in the private sector, we are continuing that pilot with our prisons, and the MOJ would be looking to roll it out more wholesale next year. It is a question of priorities, given that we have got the ISR coming as well, but we are definitely looking at stuff like that.

Q531 **Tessa Munt:** Just one other quick question: what would be the disadvantages to getting somebody tagged as they left prison?

Antony King: There aren't many—I think it is more around prison capacity, who is doing the fitting and so on. There are some logistics to work out, but in principle, no, there aren't many, which is why the pilot is being run and why we are looking now. As you can imagine, it has been much more successful fitting the tags that way.

Q532 **Vikki Slade:** You told us that you had 29,000 people who you currently tag. You also told us earlier that you are not responsible for the asylum system and that side of it, but does the tagging include people in the immigration system, and is there anyone in the criminal justice system who you are not responsible for tagging, but who other people tag?

Antony King: We have about 4,500 immigration cases on tag—a combination of GPS tags and I think about 600, at the latest estimate, where periodically they have to press their thumb reader to prove they are still in the country. But most are on GPS tags. There is some tagging that we are not responsible for. For example, the Mayor's office in London has run a small pilot for knife crime, which we are not involved in—it does that directly—but by and large, in England and Wales we are responsible for all the electronic monitoring.

Vikki Slade: So men, women and young people.

Antony King: Correct.

Q533 **Chair:** I want to bring Neil Shastri-Hurst in, but while you were answering those questions, we looked up a press release from the MOJ last September that said that you were getting an extra £100 million for an extra 22,000 people on tags. Do you recognise those figures?

Antony King: Sorry, Chair, those are numbers I don't recognise—I certainly don't recognise the 122,000.

Chair: "Up to 22,000 more offenders and defendants tagged each year"—

Antony King: Oh, 22,000.

Chair: Yes, 22,000—what did I say?

Antony King: Sorry, I thought I heard 122,000, which is why I raised my eyebrows.



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Q534 **Chair:** But it's still nearly double what you are doing at the moment. Is that figure likely, with that £100 million extra investment?

Antony King: I think additional money has been made available to the MOJ overall—I think the figure of £800 million is the one that fits in my mind.

Chair: That's the Probation Service and everything else.

Antony King: That's correct; the £100 million, I don't recognise. I mean—

Q535 **Chair:** I think maybe you ought to go back and ask them about this, because it was in their press release six months ago or more.

Antony King: The 22,000 number has been bandied around—sorry, I thought you said 122,000. I think that number, as I said earlier, is probably coming down, but we await the latest numbers. In terms of how much of that will flow through to Serco in pounds, shillings and pence, there are fairly clear contract mechanisms for the tariff that we get paid per device-wearer.

Chair: I am not filled with confidence about your linkage with them, but anyway.

Q536 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** What are the target timeframes for fitting, checking and de-installing tags?

Antony King: We have to make two attempts by midnight the day after we receive the order. On uninstalling tags, I think, from memory, it is three days, but I would have to double check that. Obviously, uninstalling is not quite as important as getting the tag on.

Q537 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** Can you write back to us and confirm that?

Antony King: Absolutely.

Q538 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** How often are those targets met?

Antony King: We have a target of 95% for our key performance indicator, to use the contract jargon. For the last several months, we have met that 95% target. We have to be successful in two attempts by midnight the day after the order is received in 95% of cases, and we are achieving that currently.

Q539 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** You have said that is for the last several months. When was the last time you failed to hit that target?

Antony King: It would have been towards the end of last year. When we took the contract on, the previous regime had a target of 80%. We have been walking up that number to get to 95% through an agreed path with the MOJ. I seem to remember that we hit the 95% for the first time towards the end of last year.

Q540 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** You said you were moving from 80% to 95% on that transition period. Over what period did you upscale from 80% to 95%?



Antony King: The key dependency was completing the roll-out of the new IT systems and then migrating all the device-wearers on to the new technology. That was not actually completed until last October. October last year was the point when we had the one IT system with the one new tag. We have been rolling that number up since about last summer. October was the point where we had a fighting chance of hitting it, and then by the end of the year, we were there or thereabouts.

Q541 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** Prior to October last year, how often were you hitting your targets? Had you ever hit your target?

Antony King: We were hitting the 80% prior to that—the 95%, clearly not, because of the issues I said about the IT system and so on. In terms of the detailed month-by-month breakdown of KPIs, I did not bring that with me, I am afraid.

Q542 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** Could you provide that to the Committee?

Antony King: Yes, of course.

Q543 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** We had the Channel 4 documentary in April last year, which revealed that you were struggling to meet those contractual obligations. Can you set out why those failures arose?

Antony King: As documented, that first period of the contract was challenging. We took on a higher number in the backlog than we anticipated. The levels of sickness that we inherited in the workforce were considerably higher than we anticipated, with a demotivated workforce. Then we had a very complicated IT roll-out. All those things created a perfect storm that meant, as documented in the media, in the back end of 2024, we had difficulties. The key point is that Serco as a company reacted to that, and we poured huge numbers of resources into fixing that as quickly as possible, so that by November 2024, we were back down to acceptable levels with the MOJ in terms of outstanding workload. We have been working through various improvements ever since.

Q544 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** What do you define as “acceptable levels”?

Antony King: There was an informal—so it is not a contractual target—measure agreed with the Ministry of Justice around having fewer than 400 jobs outstanding in the field that were more than three days old. We hit that in the middle of November.

Q545 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** A few moments ago, you set out that, since the back end of last year, you have been meeting those contractual targets. What is the current backlog?

Antony King: This morning, it was 26. It is never going to be zero, because some of those people require appointments with probation to actually fit them in person. Although we did hit zero once last month, typically, you are always going to have a handful sitting in that bucket.

Q546 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** What would you define as a normal range of outstanding cases or backlogs?



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Antony King: That is really difficult to define. You can hit the KPIs but actually have more than 400 cases that are older than three days. We have tried to make sure that we hit both, which is what we have been doing for several months now. The MOJ defined a normal workload as about 400. That is the figure that they gave us, but for the last several months, it has been running in the tens.

Q547 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** Presumably that workload depends on the total that you are fitting?

Antony King: Absolutely. You get fluctuations and so on, so the balance for us as the people who operate it is to have enough capacity to deal with those without having too much capacity so that it is uneconomic.

Q548 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** When was the last time Serco received a penalty for failure to comply with the contractual obligations?

Antony King: Again, it is in the public domain that during the transition period and the back end of 2024, there were contractual penalties applied. We also had a very small contractual penalty for missing one KPI in February.

Q549 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** What KPI was that?

Antony King: I can write to you with the details. I think it was nine, which is around additional requests coming in for us to do additional visits and various things. It is a sort of catch-all KPI where we have to go and do additional things at the request of the responsible officer.

Q550 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** So not specifically to do with installation and de-installation?

Antony King: No.

Q551 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** But it would fall into the checking bracket?

Antony King: Yes, or to just go and do a check, that sort of thing. There is a whole bunch called service requests, and it could be a bucket list.

Q552 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** It is just that you said you met all your contractual obligations for the last several months, but in February you clearly did not meet one because you had a penalty.

Antony King: It was a very minor miss. We are literally talking about missing the KPI by 1% or 2%.

Q553 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** A miss is a miss though, isn't it? If I miss an open goal, I still do not get a goal, do I?

Antony King: Sadly, you do not—you are right. Technically speaking, we had one minor KPI fail in February, but broadly, our KPIs have been green and the MOJ has been very pleased with our performance.

Q554 **Dr Shastri-Hurst:** Could you write to us setting out your adherence to the KPIs month by month for the last six months and when they have been missed and achieved?

Antony King: I think so, yes.

Q555 **Warinder Juss:** To follow on from the Chair's question, if you have a person who has been tagged and they are engaging in some sort of criminal activity, what would be your response? How would you act in that situation?

Antony King: If they are on a tag and have a monitoring requirement, we will only know whether they have broken that requirement. For example, if they are on a curfew tag, that means they must typically be at home from 7 pm until 7 am and we will know if they are not. In the first instance we will try to telephone them to find out why and so on. Ultimately, we will then raise a breach with the responsible officer. If they are on an alcohol monitoring tag, we will know if they are drinking alcohol, and again, we will raise a breach. If they are on a GPS tag, we will know whether they are in or out of an exclusion zone that they should not be in.

We do not actually know whether they are committing crime, but we know whether they have breached their order, and that then goes to the responsible officer. Subsequent or separate to that, if a crime has been committed, we will get requests from, for example, the police saying, "Could you tell us the location of X on a particular date?" so that they can see whether they might have been in a crime area, and we can give them that information. However, we simply do not know whether they have committed a crime or not, just whether they have breached their order.

Q556 **Sarah Russell:** To follow up on that, what is your experience of the transfer process to the responsible officer? Is there any feedback mechanism that makes it clear that someone has received that and is actioning it? What happens next?

Antony King: Before I answer, I just want to say we met at the barriers to equal parenting event in October, as I am the executive sponsor for parents and carers at Serco.

Sarah Russell: Lovely.

Antony King: Anyway, you are right. Going back to my earlier point, we are responsible for this, but we have been working closely with probation and so on to improve the end-to-end process. One of the areas we inherited, which was not perfect before, was the notification of what happened. For example, we could be raising a breach, and someone might get recalled to prison, but we might not get notified and so on. Ditto with the probation, where we might raise a breach, but then we would not know whether no further action has been taken or whether something has been done. We have been working very closely to make sure that that process has been improved. It definitely has now improved so we have much better data. However, ultimately the decision about what happens sits with them and they will then inform us.

Q557 **Sarah Russell:** I understand that. In terms of your end of the process, how does that work? Is it automated? How does it happen?



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Antony King: It is not automated at the moment, no. It is a manual process. We—as in we and the MOJ—are in the process of doing various automations, such as the order entry portal I mentioned. We have now got a service request portal, to deal with the service requests that your colleague was talking about in terms of additional work. But one of the bits that is not automated at the moment is that update process around what happens to an offender. That is still a manual thing, so probably an email.

Q558 **Sarah Russell:** Do you have a KPI for how quickly that email gets sent after the breach?

Antony King: We have a KPI for sending the breach, but then obviously the notification back to us sits with the Probation Service, and on their side, there are no KPIs, if that makes sense.

Q559 **Sarah Russell:** What is your KPI for how quickly the email goes after the breach?

Antony King: I will give you the exact detail probably in a written answer, but it is several hours. We have quite a tight timescale for raising the breach once we get a notification, so a handful of hours. Again, that process on our side is now broadly automated. The breach gets acknowledged on the system, the breach pack gets generated automatically—and, again, gets checked—and then we will send it over to the responsible officer.

Q560 **Sarah Russell:** What is your KPI for how many hours it is between the generation of the pack and the email going out? People often say, “On average, we do this in three days”, but we find out the longest ones are 60 days. What is your average, what is your KPI, and what is your longest outstanding one?

Antony King: I will not make those up. What I can say is that because we are hitting the KPI, the average is going to be below the KPI level, which is a handful of hours. I am trying to think whether we report on the longest one. It is probably better if I get back to you on that one, but broadly the average and the longest are now very low, and probably lower than they have historically ever been, but I will get the data to you.

Sarah Russell: Yes, please. I would like those figures.

Q561 **Pam Cox:** The Government have ordered the biggest expansion of electronic monitoring since 1999. We have discussed the numbers involved in that expansion and your plans to deal with it. In terms of staffing, to ensure you are covered to deal with that expansion, how many staff do you currently employ, how many new staff will you need to employ, and how long does it take to train someone from start to finish to be working in this area?

Antony King: In total headcount, we have got just over 1,000. That is about 600 field staff; about 350 in the operations centre, who are doing the breaches and monitoring and so on; and then we have probably just under 100 support staff, including management. As I mentioned earlier, at the moment we are now more efficient than we were when we took the



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contract on, so we are actually overstaffed. We can cope with the volumes that we have been notified of by the MOJ thus far—which we think are going to come down, as I mentioned earlier. We can cope with the existing staff load. In the event that the number suddenly shot back up again beyond what we could cope with, we would need to recruit. Once you have got the recruitment process, you then take two weeks or so to train, and they need to go into the field if they are a field officer and work with an experienced officer for as long as possible. So there is at least a two to three-month lag, but at the moment we have sufficient staff.

Q562 Pam Cox: It takes two weeks to train somebody?

Antony King: Two weeks for the classroom-based training, and they will then go into the field and work with an experienced officer until they feel comfortable that they are now graduated.

Q563 Pam Cox: What is your retention rate?

Antony King: To flip that the other way around, our attrition rate is about 11% per annum, so about 1% per month.

Q564 Pam Cox: I know you have got a number of pilots going on at the moment. You talked about the tag at source pilot. I understand there is also the domestic abuse perpetrators on licence pilot, and the acquisitive crime pilot, in which people convicted of theft, burglary or robbery are given additional spatial restrictions. Could you give us an update on how those three pilots are going?

Antony King: We are in the process of, and continuing, the tag at source pilot. On the other two, we are not beyond conversations phase with the MOJ.

Q565 Pam Cox: Okay. It would be good to have an update on when those conversations progress.

Antony King: I can update you on the conversations. Unfortunately, I cannot give you any timescale, because obviously that sits with the Ministry.

Q566 Pam Cox: How many alcohol monitoring tags do you roughly have at the moment?

Antony King: About 5,500 alcohol monitoring tags are fitted at the moment.

Q567 Pam Cox: Is there some evidence on their impact?

Antony King: The MOJ has commissioned studies on their impact. I am not necessarily the academic subject matter expert on this, but I am not aware of any UK studies on their effectiveness at the moment. I think there are ones in train.

Q568 Pam Cox: This is all part of the push towards more community-focused justice and effective measures in the community to address the prison crisis.



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You are likely to be taking on additional numbers of tagging cases. How can you do that securely and safely without impacting the services that you already run?

Antony King: Via the fact that we have spare capacity in the system. We have modelled the way that this would work and have coped so far with three early release schemes. FTR56 has just completed, and that was on a particular day of the week—a Tuesday. We had several hundred extra cases coming out and we dealt with those without hitting the service level KPIs at all. Based on the numbers that we are being told by the Ministry, the staff that we have at the moment will deal with that through the usual mechanisms. We will pay staff overtime as needed, but we have the spare capacity.

Q569 **Sarah Russell:** To take a slightly different angle, if you had a family member who had been stalked by someone violent and there was an exclusion order with a tag associated with it, would you be comfortable about what was going to happen to that offender? I am not asking this as a question about Serco's performance within this system but about the system as a whole.

Antony King: I suppose you could answer that from a Serco perspective, an MOJ perspective and a personal perspective. It has to depend on the individual to some extent. You have to trust that the probation—the prison that is releasing them on licence—has done the appropriate risk assessment, and that this person is therefore a low risk to the person that the exclusion zone is against.

The service is not a blue light service. If they do breach that zone, we will raise a breach, but that does not necessarily trigger the emergency services to kick in. That is not the way the service was intended. I believe, for it to be effective and safe, it has to be very much based on the risk assessments of the people letting the person out on licence.

Q570 **Sarah Russell:** What is your answer to the question?

Antony King: I trust the system—that the system makes the right judgments, so it would be safe.

Q571 **Pam Cox:** To go back to the safeguarding question, you said your operatives often raise safeguarding concerns. To whom do they raise them and do you keep a record?

Antony King: We absolutely keep a record. I meant to say this earlier, but Josh Babarinde used to sit on this Committee, and he came out with one of our field agents last year. He took an interest and we invited him out, and I extend that offer to everyone here. If you want to come and visit our monitoring centre, or if you want to go out with a field operative in the evening, we can do it in your constituency or wherever you live. It is really informative.

We do keep a log, and where we raise it to depends on the circumstance. Last night, we raised it and called 999, and an ambulance arrived at the

address. On other occasions, it might just be a safeguarding call back to probation. On occasions we have even contacted GPs and so on.

Q572 Chair: Can I ask you a couple more questions before we conclude? I am not speaking for myself or for other members of the Committee, but my observations of Serco in this role over the years began with the unfortunate—to put it mildly—fraud allegations and the substantial criminality that was revealed then. I think quite a lot of MPs were surprised when Serco got the contract back. At the time of the Channel 4 documentary, they were shocked again that there appeared to be these major holes in the system. What I understand you are telling us today is that, in terms of providing that basic mechanical system, you are now meeting your performance indicator targets. You are telling us that, within the cohort of people you have to deal with, and the types and number of tags, you are able to provide a service that the MOJ finds adequate at the moment. Is that fair?

Antony King: I hope I am saying a little bit more than that, Chair. What I am trying to convey is that not only are we doing the basics of the contractual obligations, but we and our staff genuinely care passionately about this service and are trying to do much more than that. Last year, at our own expense, we commissioned Newton, a third-party consultancy firm, to review the end-to-end system. That review made a number of findings that we are now working on with the Ministry of Justice in what is called the STEM programme, which stands for “stabilise and transform electronic monitoring”—an original name.

We are working with probation to see how we can improve our interface with them. We spoke at the Met police national conference to raise awareness of EM, and we have embedded some people in with the Met police in their offices down in London to deal more quickly with some of the inquiries they are making. I would like to think that we are not only meeting our obligations but working passionately and genuinely to try to make the end-to-end better.

Q573 Chair: Let me test that in three areas. First, the basics: of all the different types of tags you use—I am thinking particularly about alcohol tags here—do you have enough tags? Are they being fitted properly and are they working?

Antony King: Yes, yes and yes.

Q574 Chair: In relation to your staff, you referred to staff morale and performance being low when you took over the contract. It was very clear to those of us who watched the documentary that staff seemed to be struggling, and it was sometimes difficult to tell who was in charge of a tagging process—the offender or the person fitting the tag. Do you think you got through that?

Antony King: There is always more you can do in terms of staff, but it is reflected in the attrition rates: we have significantly reduced the long-term sick. We engage with our staff on a regular basis and that is improving, and we have a very close relationship with the Community union—Gavin



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will not mind me telling you that he recently said that this is the best the service has ever been; that is coming from Community. There is always more that we can do with our staff, but they are passionate and care, and they feel like they are providing—and they are—a very good public service, which we support them to do.

Q575 Chair: Finally, I am not sure you answered my earlier question about rehabilitation sufficiently. I am looking at the qualitative rather than quantitative approach that you take. Is it your staff's job to alert probation, or whatever they think appropriate, to either non-compliance with terms of tagging or possible risks to the offender? Do they perform that job? What part does Serco play in the recall process?

Antony King: Do we notify them of non-compliance? Yes; that is done through the breach process that you asked me about. We now have a very good track record of doing that in a timely, automated way. Do we notify people of concerns around the welfare of device-wearers? Yes; we do that through our safeguarding procedures. As I say, every single evening, I get reports of how our staff have gone above and beyond on that. Sorry; what was the final part of your question?

Chair: The final part was about recall.

Antony King: The recall process is not a Serco responsibility. We notify of the non-compliance. It is up to the responsible officer in probation or the police to instigate any recall.

Q576 Chair: So if you have an issue—perhaps a dispute between somebody who is fitting a tag and an offender—your staff do not say to them, "You understand that you can be recalled."?

Antony King: Absolutely we do. We are in the process of launching something now: when a person gets a monitoring order, we now send them videos, which they can watch on their phone and which are personalised to them, to tell them all about their monitoring order and what to expect—again, if you are interested in seeing that, we can share it with you. That tells them. Then when our staff go to visit, they are very clear about what the consequences are. We give them a booklet. Often, they will have a home monitoring unit fitted with a telephone that can directly dial into our monitoring centre, where we can give them advice about their order.

Q577 Chair: So the answer is that you could be instrumental; you could be providing either the warning that prevents someone breaching, or the evidence that shows that someone is breaching, but you would not take the actual decision.

Antony King: Correct.

Q578 Sarah Russell: You said that your staff have safeguarding training, and in your last answer you specifically referred to safeguarding of the person being tagged. Am I right in thinking that your officers are going into people's houses, and so might see things that give them safeguarding concerns in relation to other vulnerable people in that household,



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particularly children? Do you have a process in place for that, and how well established is it? It is obviously quite different from calling 999 if someone is suicidal.

Antony King: I cannot tell you what the consequences are, because I did not get that detail, but last week, when I checked my morning email, there was exactly that: a safeguarding concern was logged with a monitoring centre in Warrington around children in the property, which we then logged. I cannot tell you the actual details, because I do not know them, but we would have then raised that concern with the appropriate people. So it is not just the device-wearer; it is the environment and the people living in that household.

Q579 **Sarah Russell:** Are you confident that your staff have the training to identify safeguarding concerns regarding children specifically?

Antony King: Yes.

Q580 **Chair:** Are you ever concerned that the responsibilities on your staff are too onerous? If somebody is in custody—you are, particularly now, often dealing with people who would otherwise be in custody—they have not only the whole apparatus of the prison, but prison officers who are trained to quite a high level and have year-round and day-round relationships with prisoners. You have staff with two weeks' training—

Antony King: Two weeks' classroom training, and then they go out into the field with an experienced officer and work alongside them for the period needed for them to feel confident to do it on their own.

Q581 **Chair:** And do you think that that system is working and will continue to work when there are a considerable, additional number of people subject to it?

Antony King: If I could answer that question in two or three ways, First, I would encourage you, if you are interested, to go out with our field officers, because there seems to be the perception that these situations are always inherently risky, whereas the vast majority of people are supportive and pleased when we go into their homes, because the alternative might be going into custody. For 99% of the time, the environment is not what it gets painted as. We train our staff to be situationally aware so that if they do not feel confident at any point, they walk away. Sorry, Chair, what was the final part of your question?

Chair: I think that you have answered it. Thank you very much, Mr King, for attending.

Examination of witness

Witness: Claire Hubberstey.

Q582 **Chair:** Our second panel in this afternoon's evidence session in our rehabilitation and reoffending inquiry also consists of a single witness. We are very pleased to have Claire Hubberstey with us. Ms Hubberstey, would you like to introduce yourself?



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Claire Hubberstey: Good afternoon, everyone. I am Claire Hubberstey, chief executive of the charity One Small Thing. Our vision is for a justice system that recognises and responds to trauma, and our mission is to redesign the justice system for women and their children. I am sure we will talk about some of the work that we do shortly.

Chair: Thank you. What we are looking at particularly today is alternatives to custody, and residential alternatives to custody. We will begin with some questions from Warinder Juss.

Q583 **Warinder Juss:** Could you explain, please, why you think gender-specific support is required, as far as the criminal justice system is concerned?

Claire Hubberstey: Gender-specific support is important for everybody. Ultimately, it comes down to understanding need and then designing services that address specific needs. That principle is really important for all of us in service design, if we want to get successful outcomes. I think there are some really important aspects that speak to women's experiences of justice. The reasons they enter the justice system are usually very different from those of men.

We know that women will very often have been in care themselves, and will have experienced domestic abuse, sexual abuse and violence. They will often have caring responsibilities in addition, and their experiences of trauma will, again, be very different. Those experiences of trauma can lead to mental health and substance use issues. We know that women in particular find prison environments more traumatising than men, which is why we find significantly higher levels of self-harm and suicide in the women's prison estate. It is really important that we understand those aspects, which means that we cannot simply rely on a system that is designed around the needs of men to address the needs of women, when they come from quite a different starting point and position.

One of the things that we really need to hold in mind is the principle of avoidable custody. That is particularly the case when we are talking about women, because it is unique, really, that women are held in custody as a place of safety. That does not really happen in the same way for men. Again, that goes back to the lack of gendered provision and gendered understanding.

The issue of risk is badly understood for women. Women are generally a risk to themselves and at risk from other people, so we have a situation where many women enter the prison system because of a lack of community provision that would address either issues around mental health/substance use or unsafe, unsuitable accommodation and even domestic violence. Those issues mean that they are sent to prison as a place of safety, not because the custodial threshold has been met. That is a particularly gendered aspect of the system.

We should not be holding anybody in prison where the threshold for custody has not been met. The cost of doing so and the cost of rehabilitation and reintegration in the community are massive. It makes



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no economic sense whatsoever. We need to provide alternatives within the community so that, in particular, women are not held in custody as a place of safety.

Let me give a couple of very small examples. One of the young women we took very early in opening Hope Street was a 19-year-old care leaver. She had been remanded and faced custody because she was sofa surfing, not because of the nature of her offence. In that case, we were successfully able to encourage remand to Hope Street, and from there, when her case went back, it was with the agreement of probation and a recommendation around a community order with a residency requirement, which she very successfully completed. That is just one example. Other examples include women who experience domestic violence, whose home is not considered safe. They would be ineligible for a community order. That means that magistrates and courts have a whole suite of options that they are unable to use, and therefore prison is used as a place of safety, as an alternative.

Q584 Warinder Juss: Thank you for that very comprehensive answer. I have had experience of seeing a women's centre in operation: one in the west midlands, which is run by the JABBS Foundation for Women and Girls. I was really impressed with the holistic services that it provided. I know from the answer that you have given that a residential women's centre will provide a permanent place of safety, but can you give a bit more information about women's centres in general and what additional services may be provided by a residential women's centre?

Claire Hubberstey: Women's centres make up a really important part of our justice landscape. They provide specialist holistic support, addressing the issues that I just talked about. Their provision will include family support, parenting and therapeutic interventions. It will look at education, employment and training, housing advice and support—a one-to-one personalised programme, usually, of activity and interventions, all through a community hub. They represent really significant and important provision for women at risk in the justice system, and they do a really important job.

One of the challenges is that the funding is really precarious and they are not in every single area, which is a challenge for us. It would be great to see really well-funded women's centres, able to provide long-term, consistent support across the country in every area. The difference with the residential women's centre is that it offers emergency immediate accommodation alongside holistic wraparound support. There are specific groups of women, particularly those facing homelessness, those at particular risk of abuse and exploitation or those with other requirements, for whom the residential element is necessary and really important.

One of the unique aspects of what we do at Hope Street is to enable women to be accommodated with their children. That is unique and really fundamental. We know that about 17,500 children a year are impacted by maternal imprisonment, and that 95% of children leave the family home when mum is in prison, reflecting their role as primary care givers. There is a real disproportional impact on the family unit if mum is held in



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custody. Particularly if you think about prison being used as a place of safety, women being remanded into custody because of a lack of any alternative for them to go to, not because they pose a risk, represents a significant challenge. The residential element enables us to provide accommodation with that wraparound support.

It is important to say that women's centres and residential women's centres are both really important. One does not replace the other; they are both fundamental and important aspects of our justice landscape, and they both need to be part of the justice solution.

Q585 Warinder Juss: You will be aware that there was a plan to open a residential women's centre in Swansea, which never transpired. What do you think may have been the difficulties that stopped the centre from opening? Is it a question of funding, or are there other challenges that the Government might be facing that have made it difficult for that residential centre to open?

Claire Hubberstey: We have moved a long way in understanding and recognising women's needs in the justice space. It is not that long ago that we could not even tell you how many pregnant women were in prison or how many children were born in prison. The need to do things differently and look at things through a gender-specific lens is now a well understood concept. Redesigning an alternative justice system for women and their children is a big undertaking. It is a challenge. It is difficult. You are asking people to work in ways they have not worked before. You are asking for systems to change. You are asking for even really basic things such as appearing on the drop-down box for magistrates as a service that they can utilise. It took us 18 months to be a drop-down option. These are not small things. You would have to ask the Government why they have not been able to progress with Swansea.

It is doable, and we have shown that creating alternatives is doable. There are projects that are doing really fantastic work out there to provide alternative to custody. We really need to look at what they have done and then replicate that. It's swings and roundabouts, but we were fortunate that we did not have some of the constraints of funding cycles and that we had pre-determined criteria, which meant that we were able to design our services specifically around the needs of women and children. They were co-designed with the involvement of justice-involved women, and we were able to engage local stakeholders, who very much came with us on that journey. That was really important. When you are having conversations about whether we can do this or that differently, if you do not have local partners on board from the very beginning, those are very difficult conversations to have. We were fortunate that we were able to do those things in delivering the Hope Street model. There are lots of places in the country where it would be very much an open door, and you could have those conversations and look to replicate that kind of model.

Q586 Pam Cox: Could you explain how Hope Street is funded?



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Claire Hubberstey: As is the case for lots of voluntary sector organisations, it is a diverse mix of philanthropy, which funded an awful lot of the capital infrastructure that was needed up front; trusts and foundations, so constant fundraising through different grant applications; commissioned income, both local and central Government; and enhanced housing benefit, which is a significant proportion of the funding.

Q587 Pam Cox: Is the facility classed as supported housing, or supported living, in terms of local authority provision? How do they own it?

Claire Hubberstey: The model has a residential hub, which has all the activity, the therapy rooms, the café, the crèche and stuff that is open to the local community. It is where probation run their reporting centre from. Alongside that, it has a facility to do co-located working and training for multi-agency partners. On that site is also a residential element. Women initially come there for between three and four months.

We then have a move-on housing pathway, which is supported accommodation. We own our own properties, funded through social finance, which women are able to move on to after that initial stay in the hub. The reason we did that is, as you know, the housing crisis is really a crisis. If we were reliant on others for move-on, once that initial intensive stay at the hub was done, we would not be successful in moving women on as and when they needed it. We own our own housing pathway and are in complete control of it. That also means that we are able to support women for the length of time that they actually need, which can be anything from six to 12 or 18 months-plus, depending on what their permanent settled accommodation option needs to look like for them.

Q588 Pam Cox: What geographical radius are you covering in terms of your user base? How far are people travelling?

Claire Hubberstey: We are restricted geographically—that is part of one of our more significant challenges, I would say—to the south-central probation region. That is largely because of the issue of housing benefit.

Q589 Pam Cox: Walk us through a typical day for, say, two women who might be on different pathways, or who came in through different ways. How would they spend their day with you?

Claire Hubberstey: Part of what we have to do is to build a sense of confidence and really show accountability. We have a very structured programme of activity, which is agreed with probation as part of that placement, so that they can have confidence in what it is that we are doing, but is also individualised and tailored around someone's need.

It starts off with morning gatherings, which everyone is expected to come to. That is at 9.30 in the morning. There we go through what the programme of activities is for the day, who has appointments or might have meetings with social workers or probation, and so on, and then it is off into whatever the first activity of the day is. That could include medical appointments or community-type activities—things not delivered within the main hub—or it could be attending activities that are there. Some of



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those may be court-mandated activities—attendance at a drug treatment requirement or a mental health treatment requirement—and some could be an unpaid work requirement.

We have a café, so we can actually facilitate an unpaid work requirement on site, which means that any children can be looked after in our crèche. It could involve activities with other providers; 35 partner organisations deliver out of our building, so it is absolutely a community hub, not just us delivering interventions. That could be participation in a domestic violence programme, for example, or any number of recovery programmes, all of which we have in the building.

Q590 Pam Cox: In resettlement and rehabilitation, which is what we are focusing on in this inquiry, what is your success rate?

Claire Hubberstey: We are far more successful than women who go to custody as an alternative. Of the women who successfully stay with us for the first two weeks, we have really successful outcomes in education, employment, training and housing. Our average length of stay in the hub is about 93 days. When you compare that to the length of prison stays and the constant going back in and out of prison, it represents much better value. For women with children, eight children who have come to us have avoided going into care as a direct result, so that is a really important outcome for those families.

We have quite a lot of reports that detail the efficacy of the programme, which we can absolutely provide. We are also funding a five-year longitudinal study of our provision, with a control group of women who do not experience it, in the hope of really adding to the evidence base for alternative-to-custody models. This year, we have enough data to do a cost-benefit analysis as well, which will be published in the autumn.

Q591 Pam Cox: In terms of barriers and challenges, is there sufficient information sharing between stakeholders? Could that be better?

Claire Hubberstey: It could always be better, and the sheer number of agencies that we need to share information with is really significant.

One of the real challenges for us, particularly with women who have been in custody, is not being given a full picture straightaway. Very often, we find out about quite significant health needs or health issues that present a risk, such as heart conditions, way after the fact, when those things were actually known about. Even basic information, particularly on health, we find very difficult to get hold of, and that often takes quite a bit of time. We get it eventually, but that time lag represents risk in and of itself. It sometimes means that there is a barrier to accessing appropriate services for women, because we are not able to advocate as strongly as we could if we had access to everything straightaway.

Children's services tend to be much better; they are very engaged in supporting placements at Hope Street. That is much easier, and we have an information sharing agreement with probation. But particularly for women coming to us from prison, there are real gaps there.

Q592 Pam Cox: When you set up Hope Street, how did you reassure the surrounding neighbours that the women there, and particularly those who might visit them, would not pose a risk to their community? I have heard that that can be an issue in other settings.

Claire Hubberstey: It was something that we thought really carefully about, and site selection was critical and important to us. From the moment we bought the site, we immediately put hoardings up with our website, FAQs and contact details, so that the local community could contact us about our plans and what we were planning on doing. We really thought about the fact that the women we were going to be supporting are a part of that local community, and it is really important that we treat those relationships carefully.

There were a couple of things that really reassured the local community, one of which was having a coffee shop that they could come to. There were no really good local options at the time, so that was one thing. If they could come safely in and out of the building, that spoke a lot to what we were going to be doing there. The fact that we were going to have children on site also really reassured people. If you are going to have children, and people are okay with that, that really challenges some of the stereotypes that people probably held.

There was the café and the crèche, and there was also the fact that the whole front of the building is open to the local community. We have run HopeFest, which has a petting zoo that comes as part of our annual festival. We also do wreath-making and easter activities, and we run coffee mornings, so there is a whole host of activities that welcome people into the building. That active participation, as part of the local community, really helped to allay fears, reduce the stigma and break down those barriers.

Q593 Pam Cox: Is it staffed 24/7?

Claire Hubberstey: It is 24/7. Again, people knew that somebody was on site and how to get hold of them, and all those things really play a part. Communicating those things well, being really clear and being open to being asked those questions is how you really help address concern. It is understandable, and it is important that you are open about those things from the outset.

Q594 Vikki Slade: I would love to come and visit. Dorset is in the south-west, even though we are much closer to Southampton than anywhere else. I would love to come and have a look to see what you do, because I am not far away. I can see the benefits to the women of being in a residential women's centre versus custody, in terms of the trauma experience. Do you see this as a viable alternative to women's prisons? If so, why?

Claire Hubberstey: I think it is important to say that we are not abolitionists; there will always be some women who need to go into custody. What we are talking about here is avoidable custody, where there is no risk to the public.

Q595 **Vikki Slade:** Focusing on a place of safety for women?

Claire Hubberstey: Not necessarily place of safety. If somebody does not pose a risk to the public, we should be questioning why they are being held in custody.

For me, it all comes down to risk. If somebody is not a risk to the public, they should be dealt with in the community, because we know that that is going to deliver a far more effective outcome for us all in terms of reoffending and public safety. We should only be putting people in custody where the risk posed is at such a level that they can't be safely supported in the community. There is a whole argument there, but we can park that for now and focus on avoidable custody. For women, that is the vast majority.

Q596 **Vikki Slade:** If you take that particular cohort of women, you would say that this is a viable alternative. Do you think there is enough capacity in terms of access to the appropriate professionals and partners to have at least one in every probation region of the country?

Claire Hubberstey: Yes, absolutely. The expertise is out there already; what we need is the investment in the infrastructure to enable the accommodation piece to bolt on to create that residential element, probably on a regional footprint. That is, probably, volume-wise, exactly the right sort of geography to be thinking about it.

Q597 **Tessa Munt:** I do not want to sound negative, but I want to understand how many people you have lost back into the prison system.

Claire Hubberstey: Those who have been recalled?

Tessa Munt *indicated assent.*

Claire Hubberstey: I'm afraid I don't know the actual statistic off the top of my head. It is not significant in terms of our outcomes. I will provide to the Committee our outcomes data, which includes our recall rate.

Tessa Munt: That would be really interesting. I don't mean that in a negative way.

Claire Hubberstey: No, no—I think it is really important. Of course there are women who this does not suit, and there are women who are not ready to do what we are asking, which is an awful lot of hard work and soul-searching, and to come off substances that may be masking all sorts of things that they are just not ready to address. That is also okay. That will happen. It is about making sure for the women who are ready for this and do want it that there is an option there that avoids custody.

Q598 **Tessa Munt:** Do children's services make a financial contribution to your centre at all?

Claire Hubberstey: No. We get nothing at all from children's services.

Q599 **Vikki Slade:** I have an additional question. Some of us visited a women's prison a few months ago. We visited the mother and baby unit there.



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Some of the women we met may be in custody for longer than they are allowed to keep their babies. Is there a possibility, for women with those longer sentences, who need to be in the system in excess of that year to 18 months when their babies are going to be taken, to be taken out into almost an open prison space? Is that something that you think could be facilitated within your model?

Claire Hubberstey: It is not something that we currently do at the moment. We take referrals from mother and baby units, but for women who are ready to leave. The one exception to the geographical restriction is that we can take referrals nationally from mother and baby units, but at the moment it is for women who are ready to leave—their sentence is up. Actually, there are some women who are stuck there; their sentences are finished, but because of the challenge around getting housing, they are still there way after their sentence has finished. Those women are the ones who we are currently trying to accommodate and support.

Q600 **Vikki Slade:** What other operational barriers are there to having residential centres as an alternative option to custody, apart from money?

Claire Hubberstey: Probation and court confidence is a really important one. Not having a national network of provision can be a challenge, because it is a patchwork and it is inconsistent. Where you are trying to influence a whole system, you need very consistent messaging, and you need a national footprint in terms of visibility. That makes it much easier and really straightforward for everybody. That does not exist at the moment in the way that, say, CAS accommodation is done nationwide and everybody gets what it is.

There are still challenges, particularly around the local restrictions. There will be some women for whom it is really important that they stay local. That is a really good principle where there are safe support networks and so on, but there will also be women who need to move because they are at risk, because of the risk of trafficking or abuse or because they need to be away from things that are not protective of them. We do not have a way to move women easily between areas, because the funding is linked to the local authority that is designated as your home local authority. At the moment, that represents a real barrier to the provision of services, particularly where part of the funding model relies on the housing benefit and has very specific local restrictions to it.

On court confidence and the funding and commissioning issues, the geography of the women's estate is a problem. We only have 12 women's prisons; there is not a women's prison in every police and crime commissioner area, in every mayor's patch or even in every local authority. "Out of sight, out of mind, out of remit" is the phrase that we would apply: if you do not have a women's prison on your patch, will you be allocating funding for services around that? Some do; a lot do not. If you have a prison on your patch, it is very visible, it is there and you have to do something about it. That is the case for men's prisons—there is always a local prison—but not for women's. It is a really fragmented picture. Those are the main barriers.



Q601 Vikki Slade: A final question from me. There are men who are vulnerable and who have experienced trauma, domestic abuse and a horrible lived experience, who may find themselves with similar vulnerabilities. Do you think this model could be used for men as well? Is there any reason why it could not be used for vulnerable men?

Claire Hubberstey: Absolutely none whatsoever. I completely agree with that. It comes back to risk: if you have men who do not pose a risk to the public, they too would be far more effectively dealt with in some form of community justice than in prison, which we know exacerbates rather than reduces reoffending. The whole purpose of prison is supposed to be reducing reoffending, but it is not doing that for anybody.

The challenges for women are because the system is built and designed around the needs of men at the moment, so they are further disadvantaged. It is absolutely not that this would not work for men—I think it really would. On the basis of risk, as I say, we should look at taking anybody out of custody who does not pose a risk. It would be cheaper and we would all be much safer as a result.

Q602 Warinder Juss: I think you have more or less answered the questions that I was going to ask. There is a strong argument to suggest that people are in prison when they should not be there. I know that we have had discussions about rehabilitation in prisons, which is not actually there. How many women and children do you have at Hope Street? I understand that you are not at full capacity because of funding issues, but it would make sense for funding to be provided, because in the long run you would end up saving money by having rehabilitation in Hope Street that could not be provided in prisons.

Claire Hubberstey: You are absolutely right. We are not completely full at the moment, because we are restricted on geography to the local connection, apart from where we can make an exception for particularly high-risk safeguarding or for women coming from mother-and-baby units. That is a frustration, because you have women in neighbouring areas being recalled and going into custody as a place of safety on remand, when they could be coming to us as an alternative. That seems ludicrous, but it is because of the local restriction. I get why those things exist, but in respect of women's justice we need to look at things differently. That is really important.

We opened in 2023. We have supported 300 women and children since then, with 90 as residents. Within those figures, we have had eight children with us as residents, and another 25 who we have supported in the community, who have stayed for weekend visits and those sorts of things. That is where we are, in terms of volume. We could be doing a lot more.

Q603 Chair: Before we finish, can I try to put what you are doing in context? It sounds like an excellent service, but is it exceptional or can it be replicated? Do you know what the cost per annum is of a residential placement in Hope Street?



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Claire Hubberstey: It is difficult to work out a per-head cost. We do the community-based provision alongside the residential placements, so it is not like for like. With the beds that we have across the hub and our housing portfolio across the county, the running costs for the service are about £2.8 million a year. In the scheme of residential projects, that is not astronomical. It was designed to be replicable and scalable: that was one of the principles behind it. Our entire mission is to redesign the system for women and their children.

Q604 **Chair:** But if it is a genuine alternative to custody—we have worked out that the cost of custody is about £52,000 a year—is it the same as that? Is it more than that? Half of that?

Claire Hubberstey: About a quarter of that.

Q605 **Chair:** Right. And you think you are providing an alternative in that way, not a lesser service.

Claire Hubberstey: Absolutely.

Q606 **Chair:** We are dealing with a minority of a minority. Women are obviously a small minority of prisoners, and you have 24 places at any one time—is that right?

Claire Hubberstey: Yes, plus what we have in the houses, so about 47 places.

Q607 **Chair:** What is your occupancy level?

Claire Hubberstey: Between 60% and 70%.

Q608 **Chair:** And that is because you do not have the funding, not because you could not fill those places.

Claire Hubberstey: It is because we are restricted by geography as to who we can take. There has to be a local connection, apart from where we can make an exception.

Q609 **Chair:** You have several times used the phrase “not being a danger to the public” or “not putting public safety at risk”. Could that be anyone who has had a custodial sentence for a non-violent crime?

Claire Hubberstey: Indeed. We take referrals directly from court through any form of community order: tag, curfew, residency requirement or drug treatment order. We can do suspended sentence or out of court disposal—the whole gambit of things at magistrates’ disposal that they currently cannot use because there is usually an issue with the accommodation element that prevents those options.

Q610 **Chair:** Where does punishment fit into this? This is a rehabilitation inquiry, so we are very interested in what you are saying and how the system could work. But if you are talking not about people who are looking for a place of safety but about people who have committed perhaps quite serious offences—albeit not violent offences, so they are not a danger to the public in that way—is that a consideration, or is it left to the sentencer



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to determine?

Claire Hubberstey: We are talking predominantly about women who are looking at 12 months or less. That usually means minor offences, and the punishment there should be a community order. That is not our decision; that is the law of the land. The custodial threshold has not been met—it is less than 12 months.

The issue is that magistrates are currently unable to use the options available to them to issue a community order, because of issues around accommodation and safety. That is why we end up with a whole group of women who do not meet the threshold for custody going there. It is not an issue of punishment. The punishment is mandated by the courts, not us. The challenge is that magistrates are unable to use those options because of those issues that affect women more so, and more frequently than they do men.

Q611 **Chair:** So it is not really an alternative to custody; it is a sentence based on somebody who would not otherwise have seen the custodial sentence.

Claire Hubberstey: Well, it can be used as an alternative to custody, with those requirements around it. The reason it is classed as an alternative to custody is that at the moment that is what is happening. If they were not with us, they would be going to custody, because there is no other option.

Q612 **Chair:** Well, under the Sentencing Act they will not be able to if it is a sentence of less than 12 months, surely.

Claire Hubberstey: We will see.

Q613 **Chair:** What we have heard is that the Government said they were going to set up other centres, but have not. I think that there is one other in the country that operates in the same way as Hope Street, and yet you are saying it is a quarter of the cost.

Claire Hubberstey: Yes.

Q614 **Chair:** But it is not a quarter of the cost if people are not going to go into custody. I understand that that is at the moment—maybe it will be different in future—but are you not going to find it difficult to make it a sustainable model unless you are offering something to the MOJ?

Claire Hubberstey: The cost of reoffending is really high, so if we can evidence that we are effective in reducing reoffending, we will still look very cheap in comparison. That will be part of what the cost-benefit draws out this year: it will be the cost of prison, but also the cost of reoffending. The outcomes are also around long-term involvement in the justice system and repeat short-term prison sentences. That cycle is what we are aiming to break. Again, the efficacy of that is—

Q615 **Chair:** I know you have limited experience—only two or three years—but have you any evidence of that?



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Claire Hubberstey: That is what we are hoping the cost-benefit will evidence really strongly. This year, for the first time, we should be able to have our comparison data for reoffending rates. It is only published every two years, so this will be the first year we can get hold of the Justice Data Lab reoffending data and compare our cohort to the national cohort. That is something that we are doing in partnership with the Ministry of Justice.

Q616 **Warinder Juss:** A very quick question: is the punishment element the fact that they cannot leave Hope Street while they are there?

Claire Hubberstey: The punishment element is whatever the court mandates. We have a curfew, but there are women who come to us on tag, with specific curfews, or with specific court-mandated requirements. That is not for us to set; the court decides what it needs to look like. It could be community service, or a whole host of things. We do not determine that. We just provide the facility to support those things. They are managed by probation, so we do not enforce them. We provide the support; probation oversees that element of punishment, if you can call it that, and evidencing that they are meeting the requirements of the court, whatever that looks like.

Q617 **Pam Cox:** On the cost-benefit analysis, I think I am right in saying that every set of avoided care proceedings would save between £50,000 and £100,000 on the proceedings alone.

Claire Hubberstey: For the proceedings alone, yes, plus the £100,000 a year that it costs on average for children in the care system. We are currently spending £1 billion a year on private care providers. The cost of that, in and of itself, is really significant, without even going into the reoffending rates.

Q618 **Pam Cox:** That is part of the challenge of cross-departmental working, isn't it? The MOJ will not necessarily see those savings, but other Departments will.

Claire Hubberstey: Yes. We know that all these things have a real cost—substance use, homelessness, mental health provision. You are absolutely right that they are cross-departmental, and that is particularly the case for women. Usually, we see women ending up in the justice system and the Ministry of Justice box when everything else has fallen away or where they have been missed. That is an issue, in the justice piece, but that should not stop us looking at how we can prevent women from going into custody needlessly in the first place.

Chair: Thank you for coming—that has been extremely helpful. We have kept to time and kept our promise, so we will close this afternoon's session there.