



Ministry
of Justice

Lord Timpson
Minister of State for Justice

Andy Slaughter MP
Chair of the Justice Select Committee
House of Commons
London
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14 April 2025

Dear Andy,

I write to you ahead of a programme airing on Channel 4's current affairs series 'Dispatches' about electronic monitoring, scheduled for broadcast on 14 April 2025. The programme will show undercover reporters employed within Serco's electronic monitoring operation who claim to have gathered evidence of service failures.

On 1 April, officials discussed the contents of the programme with you in a closed-door briefing. As explained, this administration has worked tirelessly to hold Serco to account and improve performance. We have made progress, the backlogs referenced in the programme have been reduced to tolerable levels and we strongly refute many of the claims made in the programme, especially in relation to specific details of the handling of offenders featured although identified. There is no doubt, however, that some of the issues highlighted do not meet the high-performance targets we have set. As with all our contracts, there are robust mechanisms in place to hold Serco to account. We have used financial penalties in response to under-performance and unmet targets and I have met with senior leaders in Serco to raise concerns. We continue to work closely with them to address performance issues and we will not hesitate to impose further penalties if performance does not improve.

We believe electronic monitoring is a vital tool for justice and we continue to tag more people than ever before to cut crime and make our streets safer. We are confident in our ability to expand; this Government's landmark review of sentencing will further explore the range of tougher punishments that can be served outside of prison and the tech we can use to limit the liberties of offenders in the community.

There were some key points which we believe will be covered in the documentary which we have provided some additional information on.

Backlogs

The documentary makers state the public were misled over last year's backlog of visits – this is categorically untrue. The number of outstanding visits was reduced to normal levels by the middle of November. There will always be some cases awaiting install due to the volume of new referrals Serco receives and this contract allows the provider to have a strictly limited number of outstanding "business as usual" backlog cases at any one time for that reason.

Stock levels

There was sufficient stock available to Serco and installations have never stopped due to the department's inability to meet demand. The department has consistently purchased and delivered new equipment to meet the operational needs of Serco and previous incumbent Capita from November 2023 to the present day.

In addition to the new stock that is supplied, Serco is responsible for the recovery and reuse of tags and any stock that is damaged can be returned for repair or replacement within 14 days.

Training

The programme raises concerns about training which Serco has rebutted. The changes in the length of some of the initial training is because a technology upgrade means training is now only necessary on one IT system. This training is only one part of the training and induction and the two week safety course remains the same. New starters will then spend appropriate time shadowing an experienced member of staff until they are signed off as competent and confident to undertake the role.

Offender Management

Serco must make a minimum of two attempts to install a tag. If both visits result in a “no show” or if the address given by the offender is incorrect, Serco is required to send a non-compliance notification to the offender’s probation officer, who will then make a decision on what enforcement action is appropriate. If an offender tries to tamper or remove a tag, block the signal or let the battery run down, this will be detected by the technology and anti-tamper devices built into the equipment. The responsible officer monitoring the offender will be notified and action will be taken.

We take all breaches of licence conditions very seriously. Our probation officers will use their professional judgement to evaluate all breaches and whether these breaches indicate an increased risk to the public or if that offender can no longer be safely managed in the community.

The performance of Serco is unacceptable, and we will continue to impress upon them the need for immediate action to improve standards. I would like to reiterate the government’s commitment to ensuring the highest possible standards of electronic monitoring and will continue to work closely with Serco to ensure performance standards improve significantly.

Yours sincerely,



Lord Timpson

Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending