



## Justice Committee

### **Lord Timpson Minister for Prisons, Probation and Reducing Reoffending**

By email only

23 April 2025

Dear Lord Timpson,

#### **Channel 4 Dispatches 'Undercover: The Great Tagging Scandal' – Serco**

Thank you for your letter dated 14 April ahead of the airing of Channel 4's Dispatches programme on electronic monitoring and for the briefing from MoJ officials which preceded it.

I am sure you will agree that the contents of the programme and the specific failures identified are very concerning and that the public, and especially victims, will be extremely alarmed by what they have seen.

As you might expect, the Justice Committee is compelled to inquire into this matter further. While it may be possible to counter some of the specific failures identified by Dispatches, there appear to be systemic issues, both in relation to the management of the contract by the Ministry of Justice and its operation by Serco, that require investigation.

To aid the Committee in its work, I would be grateful if you could provide some additional information on the following matters raised in the programme:

1. The reasons for field monitors being sent to the wrong address and who is responsible for the provision and accuracy of that information;
2. What training field monitors receive, in particular on security, and whether there are instances of field monitors fitting tags without having undertaken any training, and what training agency staff fitting tags receive;

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3. The average and median time taken to fit alcohol and GPS tags and the proportion of fittings that are delayed;
4. The apparent low productivity in relation to the number of tags fitted each week. The reporter only fitted 16 tags during their time undercover.
5. Lack of action from Serco and the Probation Service when there are persistent no-shows;
6. Whether tags are being refused without good reason or removed without further sanctions being applied;
7. The reasons for data needing to be transferred manually from Serco's old to new IT systems and what mechanisms are in place to ensure the accuracy of the data once transferred;
8. Why many staff were reporting that they lacked kit when your letter of 14 April states that there was sufficient stock available to Serco; and
9. Low staff morale and the lack of screening undertaken ahead of field monitor visits to assess risk.

In addition, it would be helpful if you could explain why people are not able to report to the Probation Service to be tagged and why it is not possible to tag people ahead of their release from prison.

### **Previous failures of Serco**

I would like to raise the Committee's concerns about Serco's history of poor performance regarding its previous electronic monitoring contract. As you will be aware, in 2013 Serco paid a £68.5m fine to the Ministry of Justice for overcharging its electronic monitoring tagging services. The subsequent Deferred Prosecution Agreement between the Serious Fraud Office and Serco meant that Serco avoided prosecution. This raised serious questions about the accountability of large corporations who commit fraud against public bodies. It also raises serious questions about the Ministry of Justice's justification to award Serco the contract in 2024.

The Committee acknowledges that since 24 February 2025, changes have been made to public procurement regulations as a result of the Procurement Act 2023. We also acknowledge that the procurement rules were different at the time of Serco's offence.

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However, public protection and safety is a major concern to us. The Committee would like further information on how these changes will prevent contractors bidding for contracts when they breach or fail to meet key performance indicators or have a history of misconduct.

In light of the growing prison population and the impending Sentencing Review, the usage of electronic monitoring services may likely increase to reduce pressure on prisons. It is critical that the Ministry of Justice ensures that any contracts awarded to Serco or any other contractors include stringent performance targets and effective monitoring frameworks.

### **The MoJ's contractual relationships**

Finally, as you will be aware, the Committee is interested in the MoJ's contractual relationships and, to this end, it would be helpful if you could identify the MoJ's strategic suppliers in addition to Serco and the most significant contracts held with them.

I look forward to receiving further information on the issues raised above.

Yours sincerely,

**Andy Slaughter MP**  
**Chair, Justice Committee**