



Nacro>
Justice ExChange

The Better Futures Project
Briefing 4: Enhancing the rehabilitative
impact of electronic monitoring

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About the Nacro Justice ExChange

The Nacro Justice ExChange is a network of people who have been in contact with the criminal justice system and received support from Nacro with their resettlement journey, including people who are currently in prison or have previously served a prison sentence.

We share the same goal: Using our experiences to inform those in power of what the issues are, and to influence the development of criminal justice policy to ensure that it works better for society, communities, families, and the individuals caught up in the system.

We propose practical solutions based on lived experience of the system.

The views and experiences shared in this briefing are those of the members of Nacro's Justice ExChange and the wider people we support. It is also informed by a survey we conducted with people who have been electronically monitored after serving custodial sentences or as part of a community order, and interviews with staff members.

About the Better Futures Project Briefing: Enhancing the rehabilitative impact of electronic monitoring

This is the fourth in a series of briefings that examine the steps that can be taken to support people in contact with the criminal justice system to create better futures. This briefing explores the experiences of people who have been subject to electronic monitoring, commonly referred to as ‘tagging’. With the use of electronic monitoring set to rise significantly, it seeks to offer practical recommendations to improve its use to ensure that it supports people to turn their back on crime and, in so doing, create safer communities.

In order to better understand experiences of electronic monitoring, we carried out a survey of people who have received support from Nacro who were released from prison or received a community order and been subject to electronic monitoring over the last 3 years. 57 people completed the survey between April and October 2025. Insights were also gathered through forums and one-to-one interviews with members of Nacro’s Justice ExChange and people currently being supported in our services. While the sample size is relatively small and not necessarily representative of the population subject to electronic monitoring, we believe the findings still offer an important contribution to the discussion on electronic monitoring.

Summary

Electronic monitoring plays an important role in the criminal justice system, acting as an alternative to prison. Current Government proposals mean that its use is set to increase significantly. In this context, it is important to understand what works and where improvements can be made to ensure that its use supports people’s rehabilitation, and ultimately safer communities.

Through our survey and interviews, we heard from people who were positive about the impact of electronic monitoring, including how it had provided accountability and structure. We also heard from people for whom electronic monitoring had put in place barriers to rehabilitation, such as being unable to find and take up work and keep in contact with families, factors well evidenced to reduce the risk of reoffending. This briefing explores these issues in more detail along with problems with the fitting and functioning of tags, and specific challenges some groups face.

We urge Government to address these barriers before expanding the use of electronic monitoring to ensure it has the best chance of success.

Summary of our main recommendations

At the end of this report, we set out recommendations to ensure electronic monitoring supports rehabilitation and contributes to safer communities. These include:

- **The role of electronic monitoring:** Government must ensure that electronic monitoring must not be seen as a replacement for one-to-one human relationships and person-centred rehabilitative work, and should not be assumed to be right for everyone.
- **Homelessness and electronic monitoring:** Government must ensure that everyone released from prison has somewhere to live on the day of release as otherwise electronic monitoring remains unviable for this group.
- **Fitting of tags:** Government and HMPPS must ensure that devices are fitted without delay, in a timeframe that does not prevent people from attending other vital appointments, and with clear communication with the person who will be subject to monitoring.
- **Amending curfew times:** HMPPS should introduce a consistent and structured framework for approving changes to curfew times, which includes the ability for probation officers to make expedited decisions.
- **Advancing technologies:** As new technologies are commissioned, Government must ensure they are inclusive of all body types, offer more discreet options, and address current reliability issues.
- **Recall:** Government must ensure that decisions about recall in non-urgent circumstances are informed by key professionals in the individuals' network and an expedited review process should be introduced where someone is recalled to prison due to an electronic monitoring breach.
- **Coordination between agencies:** Government must ensure that coordination, communication and information sharing protocols are strengthened between all agencies.
- **Further research:** Further research and evaluation on the effectiveness of electronic monitoring in reducing reoffending is required.



Nacro Electronic Monitoring Survey key findings:

57 people completed the survey between April and October 2025:

- > 45 people (79%) were **subject to a curfew tag**
- > 4 people (7%) were **subject to an alcohol tag**
- > 8 people (14%) were **subject to a GPS location tag**

46 people (81%) said they **received clear and easy to understand information** about their electronic tag. However, nine people (16%) said they did not and two people (3%) were unsure.

60% of those who were working or looking for work believed that electronic monitoring and curfews **made it harder for them to secure or retain a job**.

18 people (33%) said they had problems with their **tag not working properly**. And of those, 60% said they had **problems 'often'**.

20 people (38%) thought that electronic monitoring has **helped them to stay on track or make better decisions** whilst 19 people (36%) said it did not (and 14 people were unsure).

Background: About electronic monitoring

Electronic monitoring was introduced in 1999 to enforce curfews using radio frequency devices.¹ These are still used when curfew is the sole requirement. From November 2018, GPS-enabled location monitoring was rolled out, and was nationally used by March 2021, allowing 24/7 tracking of movement. Alcohol monitoring tags were piloted in Wales in 2020 and extended across England in April 2021.² These devices take skin readings every 30 minutes and alert probation services if alcohol is detected.

If someone is subject to electronic monitoring a tag will be fitted³, usually attached to the ankle. With curfew tags a monitoring unit or wireless base station is installed in a place stated in the court order or licence conditions, usually in the home.

According to the Government, electronic monitoring is used to monitor curfews and conditions of a court or prison order.⁴ It is often considered as a cost-effective alternative to custody enabling the monitoring and management of people in the community.⁵

1. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gps-location-monitoring#:~:text=New%20satellite%2Denabled%20ankle%20tags,by%20the%20Ministry%20of%20Justice>

2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/sobriety-tags-launched-in-england-to-tackle-alcohol-fuelled-crime>

3. <https://www.gov.uk/electronic-tags>

4. <https://www.gov.uk/electronic-tags>

5. <https://hmiprobation.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/our-research/evidence-base-probation-service/specific-types-of-delivery/electronic-monitoring/>

The evidence is still limited on the impact of electronic monitoring but there is some evidence that suggests it can contribute to a reduction in reoffending, although more work is needed to fully understand the impact.⁶ Recent evaluation of pilot schemes by the Ministry of Justice show some reductions in reoffending when used for certain types of sentence, and demonstrate that electronic monitoring can have an impact on reducing reoffending during the time someone is being monitored.⁷ However, studies have also found that there is no reduction in further offending beyond the period of monitoring and no longer-term effect.⁸

“Before when I was not on tag, I would have left the city whereas now I have made the choice to do better in life.”

Nacro survey response, 2025

In our survey, 20 people (38%) thought that electronic monitoring has helped them to stay on track or make better decisions whilst 19 people (36%) said it did not (and 14 people were unsure).

“It hasn’t affected my choices, only made certain things and plans I have harder.”

Nacro survey response, 2025

As of 30th September 2025, 26,647 people were fitted with an electronic monitoring device in England and Wales.⁹ This figure is likely to increase substantially due to recent policy developments, including the increase in the maximum period of home detention curfew (when people are subject to a curfew tag) from 180 days to 365 days in June 2025¹⁰; proposals in the Sentencing Bill currently going through Parliament to suspend sentences of less than 12 months, and to introduce a presumption that people will be electronically monitored after being released from prison at an earlier point in the new earned progression model.¹¹ Recognising that these changes will increase the volume of people managed in the community, the Government also announced additional funding for probation of up to £700 million over the current spending review period, including additional funding for electronic monitoring.^{12 13}

6. <https://www.nao.org.uk/reports/electronic-monitoring-a-progress-update/>

7. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/687108f2fe1a249e937cc05f/Electronic_Monitoring_PNC_report_updated_acknowledgement_.pdf

8. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S004723522030026X>

9. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-september-2025/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-england-and-wales-september-2025>

10. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683eb2baa9b2749a8095e09f/home-curfew-pf.pdf>

11. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tens-of-thousands-more-to-be-tagged-under-biggest-ever-expansion>

12. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-sentencing-reforms-to-ensure-prisons-never-run-out-of-space-again>

13. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tens-of-thousands-more-to-be-tagged-under-biggest-ever-expansion#:~:text=It%20is%20the%20biggest%20expansion,offenders%2C%20and%20punishment%20cuts%20crime.>

We support the move to manage more people in the community. Evidence shows that community sentences and suspended sentences have lower rates of reoffending than short prison sentences. Community sentences can mean that people are able to keep their home where they have one, maintain family and community ties, allow people to retain contact with support networks and services, keep jobs, and continue with any childcare or caring responsibilities. We also understand the urgent need to address the overcrowding in prisons, and whilst we support the shift to managing more people in the community, it is essential that people can access the rehabilitative support needed to reduce their risk of reoffending.

Electronic monitoring is not a silver bullet and it should not be seen as a replacement for the building of relationships with support staff and rehabilitative work, both of which are key to reducing reoffending.

The benefits of electronic monitoring

While electronic monitoring is primarily a tool for supervision and risk management, it can also contribute positively to reintegration into society. From our work supporting people in the community, we know that being subject to electronic monitoring can offer order, stability and routine. For many, this is a vital first step towards long-term rehabilitation, particularly for those whose lives may have been marked by instability, unemployment, addiction, or other circumstances.

A number of the people we have spoken to in the development of this briefing said they wanted to be subject to electronic monitoring. They tell us that it ensures they have accountability, can prove their whereabouts, and it helps to prevent temptation (particularly with alcohol and drugs). In our survey, almost 38% of people thought it had helped them to stay on track or make better decisions.

“The property I was placed in was in a better area and that, together with my tag, therefore kept me away from trouble. Ideally, I’d want to be on GPS tag all the time and then they know where I am and also it will make me more accountable.”

“I would like to have had the option to stay on tag after the end of my licence. I’ve asked probation, but it isn’t allowed. When I came off tag I went back to crime the next day, and I wouldn’t have done that if I’d been allowed to keep the tag on.”

People supported by Nacro

Nottinghamshire Police have been piloting a voluntary GPS monitoring programme since 2023 which is available to all people managed by the police’s integrated offender management team. The programme aims to support people to successfully rebuild their lives after coming out of prison.¹⁴ Evaluation of this pilot will help us to understand whether voluntary monitoring may support rehabilitation and reduce reoffending.

14. <https://www.nottinghamshire.police.uk/news/nottinghamshire/news/news/2024/june/voluntary-tags-helping-to-stop-offenders-coming-out-of-prison-from-repeatedly-committing-crimes/>

Delays in fitting electronic monitoring devices

The Electronic Monitoring Service (‘EMS’) should make a first installation attempt for curfew tags on the same day if they receive notification before 3pm and the curfew start time is before 11pm. Where the notification is received after 3pm, the first attempt must be made the following day. Fitting should take place between 3pm and midnight (or 10pm for those who are under the age of 18).¹⁵

In our survey 41% of people said that their tag was not fitted on the day of release from prison, with almost a quarter of people (22%) saying their tag was fitted 48 hours or more after their release. Some said they were not tagged due to the EMS attending the wrong property and some did not have their device fitted for several weeks.

The operating timeframes mean that people must remain in their accommodation each day between 3pm and midnight until their tag is fitted. The people we support tell us this can be very restrictive, especially on the day of release, as people often do not have basic provisions such as food and toiletries. People also tell us that they struggle to attend appointments until the device is fitted. When people leave prison, they often have a number of appointments in the immediate hours and days after release from prison, including Probation, the Job Centre, GP, local authority, mental health or substance misuse services. These are crucial for people’s successful re-integration into society and should not be compromised where avoidable. In the experience of our staff and the people they support it is very unusual for a tag to be fitted until after 6pm. We therefore propose that the earliest time for fitting of a tag should be amended to 6pm to allow for people to get the basics in place and attend any necessary appointments during working hours.

In our survey, almost three quarters (73%) of people released from prison who provided a time, said that their tag was fitted at 8pm or later and almost one third (31%) advised that their tag was fitted after 10pm, with three people saying it was fitted after midnight. Both our staff and the people they support report concerns around people being given a negative entry (a record that there has been a breach of licence conditions) if they do not hear when the EMS arrives to fit the tag, and this risk is much greater if EMS staff arrive very late at night. We propose that the latest time for fitting of a tag should be amended to no later than 10pm.

The Government has also announced that a pilot is to be launched which will mean that people are tagged before leaving the prison gates.¹⁶ We support this development as it has the potential to resolve the issues outlined above.

We suggest that use of simple, available technology could be better utilised such as a text message system for updating arrival times to the person being tagged. This would require that everyone released has a mobile phone, which is an essential tool for engagement with Probation and wider statutory and support services.

“I was told by the court that it will be fitted in the next 3 days, but it took over a month to be fitted.”

“I waited in and EMS did not show for 4 days as they visited the wrong house.”

Nacro survey responses, 2025

15. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-december-2022/technical-note#:~:text=The%20Electronic%20Monitoring%20service%20provider,01:00%20the%20next%20day.>

16. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tens-of-thousands-more-to-be-tagged-under-biggest-ever-expansion>

Electronic monitoring devices not working properly and recall to prison

18 people (33%) said they had problems with their tag not working properly. And of those, 60% said they had problems ‘often’. Technology challenges have also been highlighted by the Public Accounts Committee who noted that electronic monitoring systems rely on outdated technology.¹⁷ We regularly hear from people whose electronic monitoring devices have malfunctioned. This includes: power cuts affecting performance of the base unit located in their place of residence; ankle tags not charging properly or failing to hold charge; devices sending alerts that they are not at home and in breach of their curfew or indicating that they have entered an exclusion zone when this is not the case; ankle tags which appear to be defective and regularly vibrate without reason; and issues with the perimeters of the property being set too restrictively so that people are unable to access some parts of their home during curfew hours or access an enclosed back garden.

People tell us that these problems create significant anxiety about the implications, including potential recall to prison. Some told us they were too anxious to leave home at all in case it led to recall, which acts as a barrier to engaging with rehabilitative services. Some people also told us that device failures have led to them being recalled.

Improving technology will be critical to any expansion plans. We also believe that should anyone be recalled to prison as a result of a breach of electronic monitoring requirements, there should be an expedited review of the case to ensure that there was no technological error involved, and an opportunity to rescind the recall, should that be the case. Recall to prison can be hugely damaging to people’s lives, as can the fear of it due to a technical error, and we must ensure recall only happens when necessary and does not happen as a result of inadequate technology.

Ronnie’s story

Ronnie believes that a fault with his curfew tag led to him being recalled to prison.

“Being subject to electronic monitoring causes me a lot of stress. By being on tag I feel like I have been treated badly. There was one occasion where 56 days in a row there was a glitch with the tag box which said I left the house for 30 seconds every morning at 2:30am. This was not true, but I was taken back to court and was given a 3-year sentence for it. How can that be fair?

I have now got to the point that I do not leave the house as I am scared to in case the tag/GPS is not working correctly. I do believe tags are a better option than short prison sentences, but before they roll them out to more people the Ministry of Justice need some serious investment to ensure the technology actually works and doesn’t punish people when they’re not doing anything wrong. The impact that poor technology has had on me, my family and many others is terrible.”

17. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/30446/documents/175605/default/>



“First fitting was not set properly and therefore not connected so was not monitored. Second fitting the staff thought I was on a GPS tag (which I wasn’t), which caused a further delay before the tag was fitted. The bathroom is at the ground floor rear of the property and the tag doesn’t detect when using this room. This means I cannot have a bath after 7pm. EMS said stand in bathroom for 10 seconds and then wander around the house but this has not resolved the issue of the tag not being detected in this room and it’s inconvenient to me not being able to use the bathroom after 7pm.”

“At least once a week it would notify them I wasn’t at the address but I was.”

“The tag was vibrating although I was at home fully charged. Alerts being raised with probation regarding exclusion zones when I was actually sat in the Approved Premises.”

“It was always losing signal, I was having the tag box ringing all times of the day and night. Lucky I was always in at the time due to mental health issues.”

Nacro survey responses, 2025

Inflexible curfew times

Curfews are a common condition imposed as part of a community sentence, a condition of bail, as well as a condition of early release from prison under home detention curfew. A curfew requires someone to remain at a specified address, usually their home or approved accommodation, for set periods, typically during the evening and overnight hours. Standard curfew hours for home detention curfew are from 7pm until 7am and must be for at least 9 hours per day.¹⁸

While electronic monitoring is an alternative to being in prison, its effectiveness is dependent on how it supports and enables rehabilitation. Research suggests that adjusting curfew hours to accommodate employment, education, or caregiving responsibilities supports reintegration and reduces reoffending.¹⁹ However, we regularly hear that this is not always the case, and that there is a lack of consistency around altering curfew times and people don't always understand why an amendment is denied.

Inflexible curfew times impact on:

1 .Family commitments and access to support networks

Over half of the people we surveyed (52%) who were subject to a curfew and had family or caring responsibilities said their curfew negatively impacted on being able to meet those responsibilities. People have told us they are unable to care for children, take/pick them up from school or to care for elderly parents. It is important to ensure that being subject to electronic monitoring does not have a detrimental impact on people's ability to rebuild their lives including maintaining their family connections, a known preventative factor for reoffending.²⁰

Compliance rates with curfews are typically lower for women than for men, often due to caregiving responsibilities or managing essential household needs. The design of electronic monitoring systems often fails to accommodate the practical realities of women's lives, such as childcare, leading to non-compliance with curfew conditions, with single mothers particularly vulnerable to breaching the conditions of their monitoring.²¹

18. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683eb2baa9b2749a8095e09f/home-curfew-pf.pdf>

19. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/electronic-monitoring-uses-challenges-successes/pages/7/?>

20. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a81d6b2e5274a2e87dbfc00/farmer-review-report.pdf>

21. <https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/designed-men-also-worn-women#:~:text=It%20makes%20no%20distinction%20between,breach%20rates%20for%20this%20group>

Case study: Lee

“When I was released from prison, I was placed in accommodation which was 80 miles from my home area. To be honest, being on an electronic tag made life a lot harder than I expected — especially when it came to seeing my little girl.

My curfew was from 7pm to 7am, which meant I had to be back at the house every day by seven in the evening without fail. My daughter lived about an hour and a half away by train, so it was really tough to get there, spend any proper time with her, and make it all the way back within my curfew time. It basically ruled out any chance of seeing her in the evenings after school during the week.

I asked probation if they’d let me have a later curfew so I could spend more time with her, but they said no. I wasn’t really given a reason. It was frustrating because I was trying to do the right thing, stay on track, and be there for my daughter, but it felt like the system was making it harder, not easier.

What made it worse was that these decisions didn’t seem to be the same for everyone. It felt like a lottery — some people got curfew extensions, others didn’t, and no one could explain why. I got on well with my probation officer at the time — in fact, I would have been willing to move even further away just to stay under their supervision because they actually listened to me. But when it came to things like changing my curfew, it still felt like I was hitting a brick wall.

All I wanted was a bit of flexibility so I could be a proper dad to my daughter. Having that time with her would have made a massive difference — not just for me, but for her too. I really wish the system could recognise that and make these decisions clearer and fairer, especially for people who are genuinely trying to turn things around.”

2. Work commitments and employment opportunities

Standard curfew times of 7pm to 7am²² for those on home detention curfew can prevent people from working in a number of roles. We often hear from people we support who want warehouse jobs or similar. These are often more accessible to them due to their criminal record, but some struggle to get amendments to their curfew times to accommodate shift patterns. More than half (60%) of those surveyed who were seeking work said their tag made finding employment more difficult. Some told us that they didn’t feel able to look for work at all whilst they were tagged.

It is well evidenced that being in employment is a key factor in reducing reoffending. For those released from prison between July and September 2023 the proven reoffending rate for those who were unemployed at six weeks after release was 36.5%, compared to 20.2% for those who were employed.²³ Electronic monitoring should enable rehabilitation and not act as a barrier to people maintaining or obtaining employment.

22. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/683eb2baa9b2749a8095e09f/home-curfew-pf.pdf>

23. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/proven-reoffending-statistics-july-and-september-2023/proven-reoffending-statistics-july-to-september-2023#reoffending-by-employment-status-at-six-weeks-post-release-from-custody>

“I was self-employed and got offered a contract worth around £10,000 for 2 months’ work but it was out of area. Probation would not move my tagging address to the accommodation where I would be staying whilst working and so I couldn’t take up the opportunity. I am still out of work 12 months later due to issues with Probation not approving roles that I apply for or their location in relation to where I’m living. I don’t know how this is supposed to be rehabilitative. If anything, it is the opposite.”

Person supported by Nacro

People have told us they live in continuous fear of unavoidable breach, such as breaching curfew due to transport problems, or technical failures that are outside their control. And that this significantly hinders them taking steps which would be positive for their rehabilitation journey. To address this, ensuring flexibility to support family contact and engagement with work and other services is important, as is improving the technology and systems available to minimise the reality and fear of technical failures.

“One of the things that really made me anxious was relying on public transport. Trains get cancelled, buses run late, and every time that happened, I’d panic, worrying that I might miss my curfew and get recalled to prison, even though it wouldn’t have been my fault. That fear was always there in the back of my mind. I did ask probation once if they’d extend my curfew to make things easier, but they just told me ‘no’ without giving any real explanation. I didn’t feel like I could question it or push back, it was like their decision was final and that was that.”

Person supported by Nacro



Case study: Marcus

“I was really pleased to get a job offer for warehouse work which I was informed about at the start of the month, and I told my probation officer about the job offer. Two weeks later my future employer contacted me at about 1pm on the Friday afternoon to confirm that I was to start work on the Monday morning for training.

I contacted my probation officer immediately, who said I needed to provide a copy of my rota and a letter from my future employer before I could attend work as it was outside of my curfew hours. (I was on an electronic tag and had a 7pm to 7am curfew). My new job was the early shift from 6am to 2pm. I needed to leave the house at 5am as I was relying on public transport to get to and from work.

All I had received was a text message sent to me by my manager stating my training days and the hours of my training, no rota or letter as requested by probation. I wasn't able to reach anyone from the admin department in my workplace as it was closed for the weekend. I felt stuck, I couldn't do right by my work and right by probation at the same time.

I could either go to work as asked and risk all sorts of trouble from probation and possible recall to prison for breaching my licence which I certainly didn't want. The second option was to inform my new employer that on the very first day of work, that I had told them I was ready and available for, that I would not be attending. I knew that this may well result in me losing the job before I had even started. I got really stressed out, worried and upset.

In the end, I took the gamble and I went to work. Fortunately, I didn't get recalled but it was very stressful with the fear of recall hanging over me, when I felt I was trying to do the right thing by getting a job.”

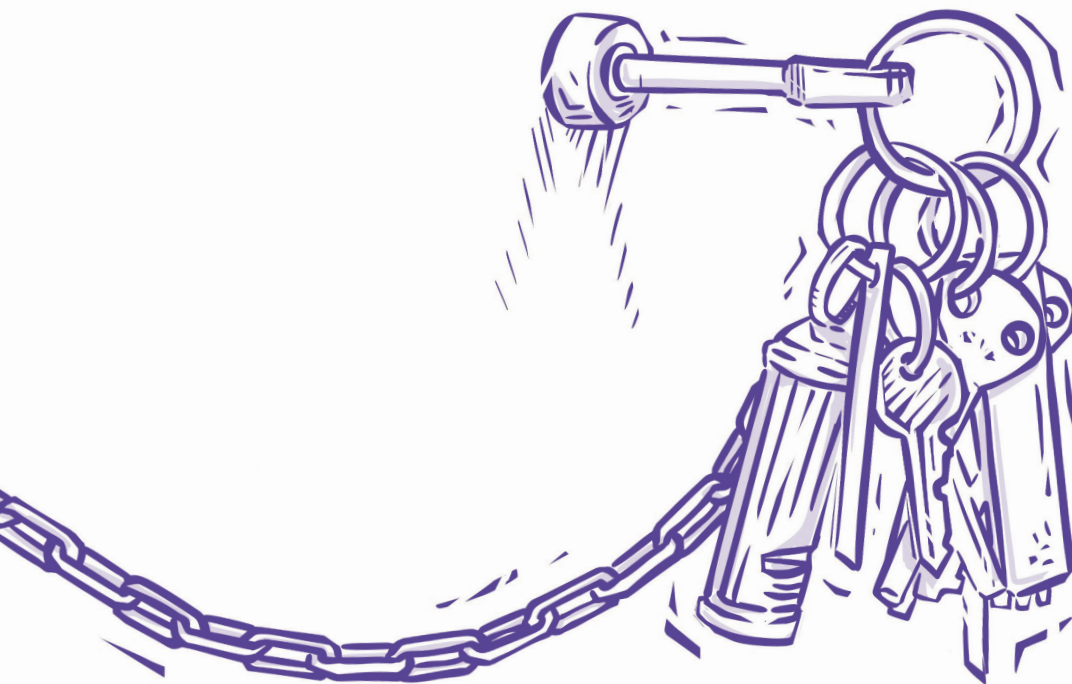
We recommend a more consistent and structured framework for approving changes to curfew times to support family contact and employment, which includes the ability for probation officers to make expedited decisions. There should also be transparent communication with people as to the reasons for decisions. We would also suggest that a formal monthly review process for curfew times would encourage rehabilitation and employment.

When people breach the terms of their licence

When someone is subject to electronic monitoring, a breach is recorded if they break the conditions of their licence linked to the electronic monitoring, such as a curfew or exclusion zone. This can also include interfering with the monitoring device or not meeting other specified requirements. The EMS receive notification of a breach and an investigation takes place which can result in action by the probation officer, such as issuing a warning or, in more serious cases, a recall to custody.

We hear both from some of the people we support and some support staff that they aren't always clear as to how decisions are made about the consequences of a breach, and some staff tell us they are rarely consulted if someone breaches their licence conditions and can be unaware if someone is recalled to prison. Strengthening coordination between agencies and improved communication and information-sharing protocols between the EMS, the Probation Service, and other support services, including voluntary sector agencies would help prevent operational failures such as missed appointments or contradictory instructions and would improve people's understanding of the consequences of breach and how decisions are made.

Organisations and services working with people who breach should have an opportunity to provide information and evidence to inform breach decisions, particularly where this may result in a return to custody. We often see that people continue to engage with our services even where their relationship with their probation practitioner has broken down. Taking a more rounded view of a breach and the circumstances that led to it, by considering information from all agencies involved, can also help to ensure that decisions are made based on whether the support and assistance required was in place to support someone during their time on tag, and if not, then steps can be taken to rectify this and further support the person in the community.



The impact of electronic monitoring for different groups

The impact of electronic monitoring can vary from person to person, dependent on a range of factors including lifestyle, age, their home and family circumstances, and whether they are able to reside close to their support networks or employment opportunities.

People released from prison homeless

The Government must consider how a presumption in favour of electronically monitoring all prison leavers could work in practice when, for example, 1,000 people are released from prison each month without somewhere to live, making curfew tags unviable. Although there has been a clear focus on tackling prison leaver homelessness in recent years, we need to push even harder to ensure that everyone has a roof over their head on the first night of release from prison, and that there are pathways into long term, suitable and sustainable housing for all people leaving prison. This must not become a barrier to people being released from prison under the earned progression model.

Physical health issues

People we have spoken to have reported examples of the physical impact of wearing a tag. These include swelling caused by tags being fitted too tightly, skin irritation, and sores around the ankle area. In one case, a tag was incorrectly fitted on a leg where a blood clot was present, which later had to be removed in A&E. People have also told us that they had to go to A&E to have their tag removed where it has been fitted too tightly, and one person said they were advised by the EMS to cut off the device themselves due to swelling, with a replacement tag later fitted on the other leg.

“The alcohol tag that was fitted was too tight. I tried to contact EMS to have it loosened but there was no response. Eventually I went to A&E and they cut it off as the skin underneath was infected.”

Person supported by Nacro

Many people tell us they feel stigma and shame from wearing a tag, including assumptions that those wearing tags are dangerous, regardless of the nature of their offence. This can reinforce feelings of shame, and negative identities, which can impact people’s reintegration into communities and, ultimately, their rehabilitation. As Government explores new technologies for electronic monitoring, we would recommend that more discreet options are explored.

Women

The lack of options for women needing different size tags was highlighted when Gaie Delap²⁴ was returned to prison because a tag could not be fitted to her leg because of deep vein thrombosis, and the EMS did not have a device that was small enough for her wrist. Additionally, some of the women we have spoken to talked about the challenge and cost of adapting their clothing choices to conceal their ankle tag which can restrict what they can wear, particularly during warmer weather. Wearing a tag can also increase women’s vulnerability to exploitation by inadvertently exposing their vulnerabilities²⁵ and we are aware of cases where women have been recalled to prison due to breaching their electronic monitoring requirements as a result of fleeing an abuser.

24. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c1el32g75p8o>

25. <https://revolving-doors.org.uk/a-closer-look-at-electronic-monitoring-and-women/>

Case study: Lottie

“When I came out of prison, I was given a 7pm to 7am curfew for six months and had to wear an electronic tag. It was my first offence. I’d spent years in an abusive relationship with a partner who used drugs and controlled every part of my life. I took money from my family to fund his habit and to try to stop the violence.

Because my legs were swollen after prison, the tag was fitted on my wrist instead of my ankle. I didn’t realise how much that would affect me. It was always visible, and I felt ashamed and constantly judged. Men would stare or ask what it was, which made me feel vulnerable and unsafe after years of abuse. I wore sweatbands and wrist supports to hide it, even lying to friends about why I had them on. It felt like I was wearing my past on my arm for everyone to see.

The tag often malfunctioned. I lived in an old house with thick walls, and from the first night, the box kept going off saying I wasn’t home even at 4am. This went on for weeks, and I lived in fear of being recalled to prison. EMS eventually moved the box to my bedroom and even told me the duvet’s tog rating might block the signal, so I slept with my arm outside the covers for months. I barely slept, my fibromyalgia got worse, and my anxiety was constant.

Sometimes EMS staff arrived without warning, once at 1am which felt frightening and invasive, especially as a woman living alone. I already struggled with anxiety and depression, but the tag made it worse. I stopped going out, put on weight from comfort eating, and completely lost my self-esteem.”

People from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities

People from Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities can find that they are unable to live at home whilst being electronically monitored as monitoring for home detention curfew requires that people are released to an address which has an electricity supply, and this is not the case for some traveller sites. As the Government explores new technological solutions, they should ensure that a solution to this issue is sought so people can return to their own homes as much as possible.

“My home traveller site has a generator which cannot guarantee 24/7 electric for the tag box so returning there was refused. It was discrimination as ordinary houses can have power cuts so why discriminate due to the location of my family home?”

Nacro survey responses, 2025

People with literacy issues, learning difficulties or disabilities

We hear from some people we support and our staff that many people leave court or prison unsure as to what their licence or electronic monitoring conditions mean. A significant proportion of people subject to electronic monitoring experience challenges with literacy, language, or have neurodiverse needs²⁶ and additionally, leaving court or prison can be a stressful or overwhelming time when it can be difficult to absorb information. Although four in five people in our survey (81%) said they received clear and easy to understand information about their electronic tag, it is notable that one in seven (16%) said they did not and a further 3% were unsure. It is essential that all documentation is accessible, clearly written, and explained in straightforward terms to ensure understanding and compliance.

The future of electronic monitoring

There is a clear intention from Government that electronic monitoring will take on a bigger role as part of the management of people in the community who have committed offences. The challenge with the scale of this increase should not be underestimated.

Government must ensure the technology and infrastructure is improved and in place to support this expansion. But we also urge the Government to address the challenges set out in this report and ensure that monitoring people to ensure they can safely serve their sentence in the community supports rehabilitation and doesn't set people up to fail if the conditions that people have to adhere to are too onerous and work against rehabilitation.

We believe that electronic monitoring has a role to play as an alternative to custody but we urge the Government to not see it as a silver bullet, or assume it is right for everyone, or that it can replace the human contact and person-centred support that is vital to support rehabilitation. This includes guarding against an increase in use of electronic monitoring for people who would otherwise have served community sentences without monitoring. It also includes a recognition that there must be discretion for people leaving prison, taking into account individual circumstances.

Investment in new and existing technologies and the Probation Service must go hand in hand with increased investment for the voluntary sector organisations and community services that provide the person-centred support that is vital to support people to turn their lives around.

26. <https://cy.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/educationandchildcare/articles/theeducationandsocialcarebackgroundofyoungpeoplewhointeractwiththecriminaljusticesystem/may2022>

Summary of our recommendations

Electronic monitoring is only a partial solution

Electronic monitoring plays an important role in ensuring that people can be safely supported outside prison in our communities, but **it must not be seen as a replacement for one-to-one human relationships and person-centred rehabilitative work, both of which are key to reducing reoffending.**

If the Probation Service are to have the capacity and capability to manage those subject to electronic monitoring then **it is vital that the voluntary sector is adequately funded to play an increased role, which would both ease the pressure on probation and enhance service delivery.**

Presumption in favour of electronic monitoring

If a presumption to electronically monitor people released from prison under the earned release scheme is introduced, Government must ensure that:

- No one is released from prison homeless.
- Probation officers have discretion as to its use and there is clear guidance as to when the presumption should not apply.

Fitting of electronic tags

Government and HMPPS must:

- Ensure that devices are fitted on the day of release from prison by:
 - Improving processes so all notifications for the fitting of a device are complete, accurate and issued by 3pm on the day of release from prison.
 - Fully assessing the potential for fitting of devices before release from prison in line with the recently announced pilot.
- Amending the current timeframes for fitting devices for those people with a curfew tag so that they are fitted between 6pm and 10pm.
- Ensuring that all documentation and communication about electronic monitoring, curfews and other licence conditions is accessible and clearly written.
- Introducing a text message system for communicating about fitting appointments.
- Providing mobile phones to anyone released from prison who does not have one.

Use of new and enhanced technologies

Government must:

- Ensure that monitoring devices are suitable for all body compositions, fitted appropriately and that consideration is given to health needs, and the particular vulnerability of women, to prevent harm.
- Explore more discreet electronic monitoring options in order to reduce embedding shame and stigma.
- Investigate solutions so Gypsy, Roma and Traveller backgrounds can return to their own homes as often as possible.
- Address current technological inadequacies to enhance the reliability of electronic monitoring devices.

Recall

Government must:

- Enable key professionals working with people who have breached to inform the decision-making process regarding the consequence of breach, particularly where this may result in a return to custody.
- Introduce an expedited review process if someone is recalled to prison due to an electronic monitoring breach to ensure technological error was not the cause. The ability to rescind the recall decision should then be available.

Greater flexibility to amend curfew times

HMPPS must introduce a consistent and structured framework for approving changes to curfew times, which includes the ability for probation officers to make expedited decisions.

Coordination between agencies

Government must ensure that coordination, communication and information sharing protocols are strengthened between all agencies, including prisons, the Probation Service, EMS, other statutory services and the voluntary sector to help prevent operational failures such as missed appointments or delays in tags being fitted.

Further research

Further research and evaluation on the effectiveness of electronic monitoring in reducing reoffending is required.

Conclusion

It is undoubtedly the case that electronic monitoring will play a significant role in the future of the criminal justice system if we are to tackle the population prison crisis. However, if it is to support people to turn their lives around and create safer communities for us all then it is important that any increase in electronic monitoring goes hand in hand with a renewed focus on providing the one-to-one rehabilitative support that helps tackle the root causes of offending so that people do not become trapped in the cycle of offending and punishment without rehabilitation. We spend a phenomenal amount of public funds on the mechanisms of punishment, but to create safer societies and fewer future victims of crime we must ensure that there is a relentless focus on effective resettlement and rehabilitation. We need to follow the evidence that demonstrates what genuinely works to support rehabilitation and the rebuilding of lives for people caught up in crime. This means investing in rehabilitation and community services for the long term.

About Nacro

At Nacro we see people's future whatever the past. That's why our housing, education, justice, and health and wellbeing services work alongside people to give them the support and skills they need to succeed. It's also why we fight for their voices to be heard and campaign together to create lasting change.

We work across the criminal justice system (CJS) and our justice services aim to break the cycle of crime and disadvantage. We directly support people in the CJS who are on a community order or on release from prison, including advice with accommodation, personal wellbeing and finance, benefits and debt. We deliver the Community Accommodation Service (CAS-2) on behalf of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), housing prison leavers on Home Detention Curfew and those bailed from court in need of an address, as well as a range of supported housing projects for people leaving prison. And we run a Criminal Record Support Service providing professional advice to thousands of individuals and employers.

We believe that rehabilitation must be at the heart of an effective justice system. And that for people who enter the criminal justice system it should be the start of building something better, not a road to nowhere. We've been working in this field for almost 60 years – we know that with the right support, people can and do turn their lives around.

We are grateful to all members of the Justice ExChange for giving their time, energy and ideas to help focus our campaigning work.

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