

Electronic Monitoring In Scotland

Consultation response from Includem

Background

Includem is a specialist Scottish charity which provides intensive, personalised support for vulnerable young people and their families. We believe that no young person is beyond help and that with a responsive, consistent service at the time of most need we can rebuild relationships and deliver positive, sustainable outcomes.

Since 2010 we have worked in collaboration with Police Scotland to deliver our IMPACT programme in Glasgow. We engage with young people aged 14 to 25, who are causing the most harm to themselves and their communities through prolific, violent and often alcohol-related offending. Our work focuses on preventing reoffending, helping young people move away from a cycle of custodial sentences.

Our practice experience is in supporting young people in the community, and whilst a number of the young people we support are currently or have previously been subject to electronic monitoring, we do not specifically work as part of any electronic monitoring programme. As such, we don't feel it is appropriate to answer the technical questions relating to this consultation. We hope very much our more general comments, based on our experience of supporting young people subject to monitoring will, nevertheless be useful.

Consultation response

Whilst we recognise that electronic monitoring has a role as part of a range of justice options, our view is that its use acts only as a control mechanism, and does not in itself deal with the underlying risk factors and causes of offending. There is a need to further reduce reoffending levels and keep communities safe, and to reduce current rates of imprisonment. However we would question whether electronic monitoring and any potential expansion of the current system is the best way of achieving this unless it is implemented alongside structured support aimed at changing behaviour.

We would recommend that any attempts to introduce legislation or to further develop monitoring measures should be complemented by a similar focus on developing approaches which help individuals move away from the dangerous and offending behaviour which may lead to the need for monitoring in the first place.

We are aware that for some people electronic monitoring can be an effective way of maintaining desistance, but we would encourage the recognition that each individual needs a particular response and that one solution does not fit everyone. With this in mind we would stress that the impact on individuals is kept in mind when considering potential changes, such as providing courts with the option of tagging as an alternative to a fine.

From working with young people through both our IMPACT programme and other services we have encountered some of the difficulties with electronic monitoring. For example, we have worked with young people who as a consequence of being subject to electronic monitoring measures, and the resultant restriction of liberty, have lost their employment.

This negative impact can also extend to securing accommodation, and we have encountered young people who have become homeless or have been refused access to supported accommodation when subject to electronic monitoring, on the basis of them having such equipment. This has limited their opportunities to move on and desist from their offending behaviour, whilst also placing them at risk of harm and/or exploitation. Helping young people secure the stability that comes with having settled accommodation can provide them with opportunities to access routes to education and employment. Any risk to maintaining a tenancy that may result from electronic monitoring should therefore be considered.

Even for those young people living with their families, it is important to recognise that not all home environments will be conducive to a young person adhering to the conditions of an electronic monitoring programme. We have experience of supporting young people who have been subject to court orders incorporating curfews partially enforced by electronic monitoring, which both the young people and their families have found difficult to sustain. We would be keen to learn more about plans for additional supports to complement the measures proposed, to help ensure young people subject to such orders would be maintained safely at home in their local communities.

For more information on Includem or our services please contact Michael Shanks, Policy Manager on 0141 427 0523 or email michael.shanks@includem.co.uk.