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# The Tagging Game

How convicted criminals wearing electronic tags are now four times more likely to commit crime compared with when the Home Detention Curfew scheme was originally trialled.

Research and report by Grant Shapps MP

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When electronic tagging was introduced in 1999 just 1 in 40 individuals committed a crime whilst wearing a tag – last year the figure was 1 in 9.

This report asks what has gone wrong with the much trumpeted Home Detention Curfew scheme.

## Summary

Home Detention Curfews (HDC), often referred to as electronic tagging or electronic monitoring, were introduced in 1999 following apparently successful trials<sup>1</sup>.

At the time Home Office research claimed that, 'Overall the Home Detention Curfew scheme has been a success and has operated largely as planned.'

Data from the year 2000 indicates that re-offending rate whilst wearing a tag was around 2.5% and the Home Office was able to declare that the scheme had therefore generally met its objectives by allowing prisoners within 60 days of the end of their custodial sentence to be released into the community, without dramatically increasing crime.

However the fresh research contained within this report reveals that in subsequent years the number of crimes committed by tagged individuals has quadrupled.

The author of this report believes that the rise in re-offending by those under the Home Detention Curfew can, at least in part, be directly linked to the necessity to eject offenders from prison in order to alleviate the problem of prisons being at or near capacity.

The data in this report demonstrates that a shortage of prison places appears to be a strong motivation for use of the Home Detention Curfew and as a result the "wrong" kind of prisoners are being released leading to a large increase in the number of crimes committed; and thereby endangering the public.

<sup>1</sup> Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate  
[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/r110.pdf](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs/r110.pdf)

## Key facts

- The frequency of criminals released on electronic tags re-offending has increased by 4 times in the last 5 years.
- Four and a half times more crimes were committed by tagged offenders in 2005/6 as were in 2000.
- Nearly 7 crimes are committed every day by tagged offenders.
- When electronic tagging was introduced in 1999 just 1 in 40 individuals committed a crime whilst wearing a tag – last year the figure was 1 in 9.

Parliamentary Question (Written answer 259).

## Introduction

Since its introduction in January 1999, over 137,000 people have been placed on the Home Detention Curfew (HDC) scheme, one of the biggest electronic monitoring programmes in the world.

The scheme, which allows prisoners to leave prison early, applies to offenders who are serving sentences of between three months and under four years. On leaving prison, offenders are electronically tagged and notified of the hours they must remain at their house or hostel; typically between 7pm-7am.

According to the Home Office the scheme was 'designed to ease the transition of prisoners from custody to the community.'<sup>1</sup>

However, seven years and £342 million<sup>2</sup> later, the scheme has proven to be expensive and inefficient, whilst contributing to an increased level of crime.

Compiled via a combination of Parliamentary Questions and desk research, this report illustrates the increasing failings of electronic tagging due to inappropriate prisoner selection. The report concludes that the process is now being driven by a Home Office requirement to rely on tagging in order to ease the over-crowding in our prison system.

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<sup>2</sup> Parliamentary Answer No.406

## Results

While costs for the electronic tagging system have risen, it is clear that the scheme itself has become increasingly ineffective.

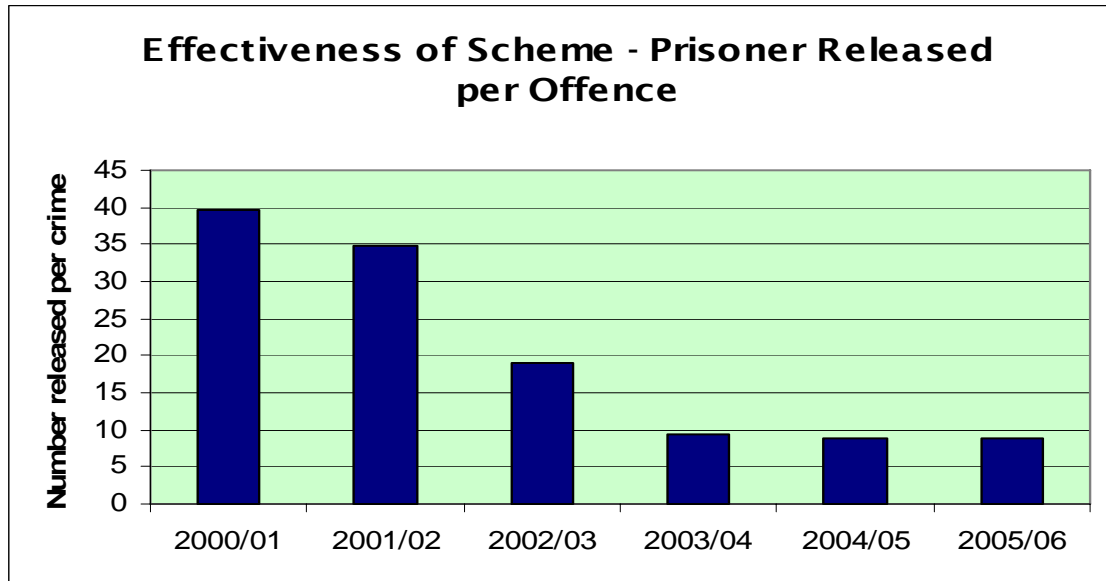
In the last two years, the system has granted early release to 36,590 offenders, costing the taxpayer £161.9m. However, more than 4,000 have re-offended while subject to the conditions of the tag.

Table 1

	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06
Prisoners released on electronic tags	15,510	13,649	20,456	21,188	19,294	17,296
Offences committed or allegedly committed	392	392	1,071	2,272	2,155	1,982
Number released per crime	39.6	34.8	19.1	9.3	9.0	8.7
Percentage of prisoners re-offending	2.53%	2.9%	5.2%	10.7%	11.2%	11.5%

Table 1 demonstrates that whereas only 2.5% of tagged prisoners originally re-offended whilst being part of the HDC scheme, that figure has now risen to a re-offence rate of 11.5%.

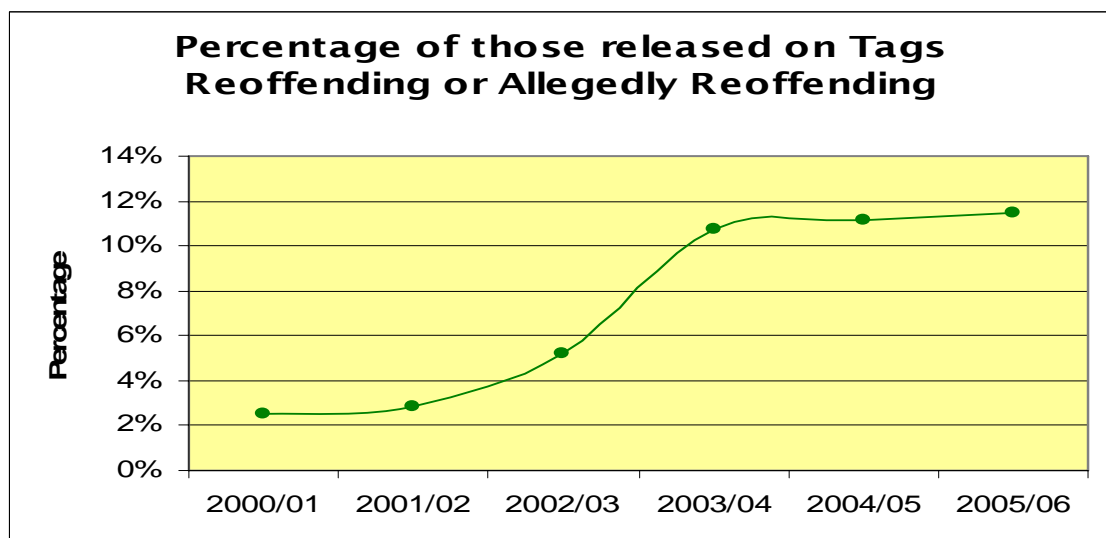
Table 2



The graph above shows that in 2000/01 just one out of every forty prisoners released on an electronic tag committed a further crime while wearing it. Last year the equivalent figure was less than 1 in 9.

That means that 11.5% re-offended while subject to a curfew in 2005/06 – nearly five times as many as in 2000/01.

Table 3



## Reaction to this report and key quotes

Report author Grant Shapps MP

“Whilst initial pilot schemes for electronic tagging appeared to demonstrate that this was a cost effective method of releasing prisoners from jail early, the research contained within my report indicates that the policy is now in disarray.

“Far from saving money, the fact that 1 in 9 of those wearing tags re-offends means that the social cost of the Home Detention Curfew programme is much higher than had originally been thought.

“It’s now very clear that the prison population crisis has led to thousands of additional crimes by prisoners who have been selected for electronic tagging and thereby released too early from prison.

“With our prisons once again expected to reach capacity later this month, the public will be rightly concerned to learn that, contrary to the initial Home Office Findings, the Home Detention Curfew scheme is now failing both the prisoners and the general public who are exposed to increased risks of crime.”

### **Shorter tabloid version Grant Shapps quotes:**

"This shock report reveals yet another example of the calamity-ridden Home Office desperately trying to free up prison spaces even if it means that crime will soar.

"The figures prove that crimes committed by tagged prisoners on early release have sky-rocketed over the past few years, but the Home Office would prefer us to believe that their Home Detention Curfew scheme actually works.

"This report has revealed the blind panic at the Home Office as they invent ever more creative ways to release prisoners too early, all because our prisons are at operating at breaking point."

## Conclusion

The report shows that prisoners released under the Home Detention Curfew tagging scheme are now much more likely to commit crime.

The Government's original statement that tags would be 'prison without bars' has now become laughable with more than 4,000 crimes committed by those within the tagging scheme during the last two years alone.

It is increasingly evident that the Government's tagging system is in disarray. It is obvious that the public are being put in danger due to a lack of foresight about the number of required prison places.

The Home Office has predicted a prison population of around 100,000<sup>3</sup> people by the end of the decade, but has only budgeted space for around 80,000. This poses serious questions about what other measures the Government will come up with in order to release criminals from prison before they have served their sentence, or to stop them from going to prison in the first place.

Electronic tagging should be used as an addition to prison, not simply as a cheap alternative as a result of the Government's monumental failure to address the chronic lack of capacity in Britain's jails.

Whilst the pilot scheme for tagging appeared to have been effective, it has now become clear that chances of an offender committing a further crime whilst wearing a tag has increased alarmingly.

The author of this report calls on the new Ministry of Justice to urgently review the Home Detention Curfew scheme.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/345-43k-10 May 2007](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/345-43k-10%20May%202007)