# UK government launches £700 million overhaul to expand electronic tagging and reform sentencing



The UK government is embarking on a significant overhaul of its sentencing laws, bolstered by an ambitious investment of £700 million aimed at expanding electronic monitoring for offenders. The plan includes the acquisition of 30,000 additional electronic tags, which will enable nearly 40,000 individuals to be monitored simultaneously. Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood has championed this initiative, which reflects a commitment to reforming the penal system amid growing concerns about prison overcrowding. With the recent statistics indicating that jails in England and Wales are currently housing more than 88,000 inmates—exceeding capacity by 1,355—this overhaul aims to alleviate some of the pressures facing the justice system.

A core aspect of the proposed reforms is the introduction of new tagging technology, which includes innovative devices capable of measuring drug use through biometric data such as heart rate and blood pressure. Mahmood has referred to these devices as the 'holy grail' of tagging technology, particularly because a substantial number of offenders are motivated by substance abuse issues. This move is part of a broader strategy to ensure that the justice system not only punishes but also rehabilitates, addressing the root causes of criminal behaviour.

In addition to the expansion of electronic tagging, the government is working on a sentencing review led by former Conservative justice secretary David Gauke. His report, expected to propose sweeping changes to the existing framework, aims to reduce the minimum time that inmates serve significantly. In certain cases, well-behaved prisoners could find themselves released after serving only a third of their sentences. Such measures are designed to balance public safety with rehabilitation efforts and reduce the overall prison population.

The review is also set to incorporate the use of GPS monitoring as a preventive tool against reoffending. Offenders convicted of crimes such as burglary and robbery—especially those who have served sentences of a year or more—will be fitted with GPS devices that track their movements around the clock for up to twelve months post-release. This strategy aims to enhance law enforcement's ability to prevent further criminal activity by maintaining a close eye on high-risk individuals. This approach aligns with a recent government report emphasising that combining punitive measures with rehabilitation can indeed contribute to a safer society.

Furthermore, the government is exploring an expansion of its current early release initiatives. Currently, prisoners serving sentences for certain violent or sexual offences are ineligible for early release measures. However, as part of the new proposals, there is potential for changes that could allow other categories of offenders to benefit from reductions in their prison terms, provided they demonstrate good behaviour and engage in rehabilitative activities.

Regarding administrative developments, the Ministry of Justice is also interested in integrating technology to facilitate 'digital prisons,' which would allow offenders under house arrest to be monitored with electronic tags and other technologies. This three-tier system of incarceration—spanning from imprisonment to eventual community reintegration—reflects a comprehensive approach to offender management.

The initiative to enhance the Probation Service revolves around careful monitoring and supervision of low-risk offenders, utilising a blend of technology and rehabilitative strategies. Early trials of these strategies have yielded promising results, with data showing that a significant majority of participants comply with supervision conditions under existing schemes. These modifications to the justice system underscore a paradigm shift towards fostering accountability and rehabilitation while ensuring public safety, a response necessitated by the pressing issues of prison overcrowding and societal concerns about crime.

As the government prepares for these substantial reforms, the outcomes of this overhaul will be closely scrutinised, as they hold the potential for lasting impact on both the justice system and broader social safety in the UK.

**Reference Map:**

1. Paragraph 1: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14729449/Britain-investing-30-000-electronic-tags-criminals-amid-massive-overhaul.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
2. Paragraph 2: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14729449/Britain-investing-30-000-electronic-tags-criminals-amid-massive-overhaul.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tens-of-thousands-more-criminals-to-be-tagged-to-cut-crime-and-protect-victims)
3. Paragraph 3: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14729449/Britain-investing-30-000-electronic-tags-criminals-amid-massive-overhaul.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[2]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/radical-sentencing-overhaul-to-cut-crime)
4. Paragraph 4: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14729449/Britain-investing-30-000-electronic-tags-criminals-amid-massive-overhaul.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gps-tags-to-hunt-burglars-and-cut-theft)
5. Paragraph 5: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14729449/Britain-investing-30-000-electronic-tags-criminals-amid-massive-overhaul.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tens-of-thousands-more-criminals-to-be-tagged-to-cut-crime-and-protect-victims)
6. Paragraph 6: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14729449/Britain-investing-30-000-electronic-tags-criminals-amid-massive-overhaul.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490)
7. Paragraph 7: [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14729449/Britain-investing-30-000-electronic-tags-criminals-amid-massive-overhaul.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[6]](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-december-2023/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-england-and-wales-december-2023--2)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14729449/Britain-investing-30-000-electronic-tags-criminals-amid-massive-overhaul.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/radical-sentencing-overhaul-to-cut-crime> - The UK government has announced a comprehensive sentencing overhaul aimed at reducing crime and enhancing public safety. Key measures include longer prison terms for violent and sexual offenders, stricter community sentences, and the use of GPS electronic monitoring for burglars, robbers, and thieves upon release. The initiative seeks to balance punishment with rehabilitation, addressing the underlying causes of criminal behavior and improving offender supervision in the community. These reforms are part of the 'A Smarter Approach to Sentencing' White Paper, reflecting a commitment to a more effective justice system.
3. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/gps-tags-to-hunt-burglars-and-cut-theft> - The UK government is implementing a pioneering scheme to combat burglary and theft by fitting GPS tags on offenders released from prison. This initiative targets individuals convicted of burglary, robbery, and theft who have served sentences of a year or more. The GPS tags will monitor their movements 24/7 for up to 12 months, providing law enforcement with crucial data to investigate and prevent further crimes. The program aims to deter reoffending and enhance public safety by tracking the whereabouts of high-risk offenders.
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/tens-of-thousands-more-criminals-to-be-tagged-to-cut-crime-and-protect-victims> - The UK government is investing £183 million over the next three years to expand the use of electronic monitoring, nearly doubling the number of offenders tagged at any given time. This expansion includes tagging 10,000 prolific robbers, thieves, and burglars upon their release from prison, as well as over 3,500 high-risk domestic abusers to protect victims. The initiative aims to reduce reoffending rates and enhance public safety by leveraging technology to monitor offenders' movements and behaviors more effectively.
5. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-more-neighbourhood-criminals-to-be-gps-tracked-in-expansion-of-tagging-project> - The UK government is expanding its electronic tagging project to include an additional 2,000 criminals, allowing for more comprehensive monitoring of offenders upon release from prison. This expansion lowers the eligibility threshold, enabling offenders with sentences of 90 days or more to be tagged, thereby increasing the number of individuals monitored. The initiative aims to reduce reoffending rates and enhance public safety by tracking the movements of individuals convicted of theft, burglary, and robbery offenses.
6. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-december-2023/electronic-monitoring-statistics-publication-england-and-wales-december-2023--2> - The UK Ministry of Justice has released statistics on electronic monitoring in England and Wales as of December 2023. The data provides insights into the use of electronic tags for monitoring offenders, including information on compliance with court orders, curfews, and exclusion zones. The publication aims to inform the public and policymakers about the effectiveness and reach of electronic monitoring programs in the justice system, supporting efforts to enhance public safety and reduce reoffending rates.
7. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/expanding-tagging-sentences> - The Scottish Government is expanding the use of electronic tags to monitor offenders as part of their sentences. This initiative includes the use of GPS tracking technology to monitor individuals, building on expert advice and international research. The expansion aims to reduce reoffending levels and enhance community safety by providing additional security through restricted movements. The government is also exploring the use of electronic monitoring ahead of sentencing in cases where custodial punishment is unlikely, reflecting a broader approach to managing offenders within the community.