George Freeman MP
Member of Parliament for Mid Norfolk
House of Commons, London SW1A
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The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

The Rt Hon George Eustice MP
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs
[[sent via email]]

Monday 26th October 2020

Dear Matt and George,

Cranswick Foods, Watton

I was made aware yesterday that there is a very serious Covid outbreak at the Cranswick Country Foods plant in Watton in my constituency, with c150 cases confirmed yesterday out of the c300 already tested, suggesting a very high infection rate of c50%.

(This is precisely what I feared would happen when we had the outbreak at Banham Poultry in Attleborough (also in my constituency) back in the summer, when delays in authorising urgent LOCAL track and trace caused the infection to spread more widely, and the company to suffer much bigger losses (£10m) than was necessary).

I understand that on the advice of the Joint Biosecurity Unit the response to the outbreak has now been escalated for direct control by your Departments under your leadership.

I am liaising closely with my local District and County Councils who have set up a Norfolk Resilience Forum Gold Command team to co-ordinate the local response.

Having spoken to the Leaders of both councils extensively in the last 24-48 hours, I am writing to ask on their behalf for four things:

1) **We need a fast decision. If the plant needs to be closed, please move quickly. As we learnt at Banham, early delays have major consequences.**

2) **With over 4,000 pigs in the chiller or about to be processed, and many thousands more in the fields, we need a proper package of Culling Compensation in place to protect animal welfare and ensure that other food businesses are not discouraged from reporting outbreaks and co-operating with PHE, as has been the case at Banham and Cranswick. (This is why I wrote to you six weeks ago on behalf of the Poultry and Pork processing sectors and raised in the House at DEFRA Questions to warn of the dangers of our having no compensation whilst others countries pay 100% culling compensation).**

3) **DHSC Permission to conduct Community Testing of the entire town of Watton. My local council and PHE leaders want to be able today to start putting in place the local testing infrastructure for a whole town track and trace operation. I'm writing to support their request. (Whilst urging that the testing be focussed initially on tracking and testing those who have tested positive and their**

families / housemates to prevent further spread into the community and the danger of a local lockdown which would be devastating for the local economy.

4) **A short term furlough scheme to ensure that staff stood down as a result of the plant closing have enough to live on. (As we saw at Banham Poultry, the current Statutory Sick Pay doesn't provide enough to live on and without extra we will see again what happened at Banham, where staff with no incomes were forced to obtain employment in other food processing plants in order to make ends meet – thus spreading the virus. Probably to Cranswick, and Bernard Mathews which also has an outbreak.**

The Banham outbreak in the summer showed that it is essential that the containment operation be driven LOCALLY and that the necessary permission and support for local councils and PHE is made available FAST to ensure swift containment.

As the local MP please can your offices keep me updated on developments so that I can help support and co-ordinate the local measures that need to be taken to avoid another serious crisis in my constituency, which is avoidable with the right measures.

Yours,

George Freeman MP

cc. Cllr Andrew Proctor – Leader of Norfolk County Council
    Cllr Sam Chapman-Allen – Leader of Breckland District Council