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Dear Prime Minister

Bailiwick of Guernsey's actions to combat Covid-19 – urgent need for continued access to testing

Summary

The Bailiwick of Guernsey is playing its part in the regional and global fights against the Covid-19 pandemic. We have implemented a currently successful containment strategy that relies heavily on test results provided by a UK testing centre. **We need your Government's commitment to ensure that the testing centre in question (or a similar UK based facility) continues to support us with our testing policy until our own on-island facility is open.** Failure to do so would endanger the lives and health of our population and would risk damage to our critical national infrastructure and economy. It may also place an unnecessary additional burden on UK services.

Earlier this week, the testing centre (that had previously partnered successfully with us) ended its support for our community testing regime. Yesterday, we received welcome confirmation that test processing can now restart in accordance with the Bailiwick's current urgent need *[phrase redacted – relates to numbers of tests]. [sentence redacted – relates to another jurisdiction]* The number of tests is small but the ability to have them (and the current backlog) processed rapidly in accordance with our own testing regime is vitally important for us. **If there are any further delays, our critical opportunity to limit effectively the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the lives and health of our entire population will be seriously compromised.** Support for our approach is firmly in the strategic interests of the UK, as it will reduce any demand we might have to make from UK hospitals and medical supplies at this time.

Further detail

As the Bailiwick and the UK each manage the unprecedented challenge that we face with the Covid-19 pandemic, it is critical that the longstanding relationship between the Bailiwick and the UK works effectively. Our ability to manage the situation we currently face depends on it. This is the biggest public health challenge that the Bailiwick has faced since the final stages of the Occupation of our islands during the Second World War when the population was starving.

The Bailiwick (population c.65,000) currently has two confirmed cases of Covid-19 and is still, fortunately, in the 'contain phase' of this pandemic. This is unlike the UK, which has already moved to the 'delay phase'. The Bailiwick is making its own evidence-based decisions to safeguard lives and health. Those decisions take into account the evidence from the vital test results that we receive from our UK test centre partner, the lower resilience of finite health resources as an island, our essential supply routes and our community's demographic profile. The differences between the Bailiwick's and the UK's phases, sizes, infrastructure and resources, mean that there will naturally also be differences in approach and timing.

The Bailiwick has one general hospital with limited intensive care provision that will be quickly overwhelmed if we cannot continue to manage the situation in accordance with our own needs. We must be able to curb strongly the transmission of SARS-Cov-2/Covid-19 in our population in order to 'flatten the curve' to the extent that our healthcare system can cope with demand. Our public health advice is to delay the peak of infection in Guernsey so that it occurs *after* that experienced in the UK. This will be through similar self-isolation and social (physical) distancing measures as those being used in the UK, albeit deployed at different times.

We have already imposed self-isolation requirements on all new arrivals (including residents) except for essential workers. There are strict guidelines for some others to self-isolate, regardless of travel history. Social (physical) distancing measures have been introduced. These and other steps in our Bailiwick have taken into account the particular demands and threats involved in fighting against a pandemic in our small island communities. Our own testing facility is being established on island, which is intended to service all our testing needs [*phrase redacted – relates to another jurisdiction*]. It will soon be in place but we cannot wait until it is operational to continue our testing regime. **The ability to continue community Covid-19 testing during this stage is essential for our strategic response to the pandemic, otherwise we will be forced to allow community transmission to go unchecked and enter into the 'delay phase' earlier than anticipated.** If we cannot continue to implement our testing policy we will be left without a critical tool that could enable us to manage demands on our limited critical care and national infrastructure and the impact to our economy. Consequently, we would likely have to seek further healthcare support from the UK at a stage when the demand in the UK will already be very high.

I reiterate that we require the UK Government's immediate support to guarantee continued swift processing of our tests by a UK testing centre for a limited period. The impact on the UK's testing facility will be minimal, but the impact on our Bailiwick communities at this critical time will be huge. I hope we can continue to have your ongoing support.

I am copying this letter to the Lord Chancellor and senior representatives from Alderney, Sark and Jersey. As the Bailiwick's constitutional relationship is with the Crown, I am also sending a copy to Her Majesty The Queen's Private Secretary for information.

Yours sincerely

Deputy Gavin A St Pier
Chief Minister of Guernsey/*Le Prumier de Giernes*