Dear George,

Improved approach to surveillance for animal disease threats

Thank you for your letter dated 4 December 2013 regarding the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories Agency's new approach to surveillance for animal disease threats. As you understand, this is an important issue for the Committee as agriculture is considered a key sector within the Welsh economy. Welsh farms account for approximately 11% of the total UK cattle, with 2 million cattle in South and Mid Wales – the second densest area within the UK for dairy cattle. In addition, there are 5 million sheep in Wales.

During our inquiry in the future of AHVLA veterinary laboratories in Wales, we expressed concern that the decision to centralise laboratory testing, thereby ceasing testing at labs in Carmarthen and Aberystwyth, would have a detrimental effect on post-mortem examinations in the long-term. There is, and needs to be, a strong and close relationship in Wales between farmers, local vets and AHVLA staff. This is vital for intelligence gathering and for the identification of new and emerging diseases.

We therefore welcome the announcement that a post mortem centre will remain in Carmarthen, and will become a centre of excellence, thereby maintaining the facility near a main centre of population of farmed animal species in Wales. We note that the Welsh Government has also welcomed this announcement. However, we are disappointed that the AHVLA facility at Aberystwyth has had no such assurances and that its role will be reviewed after April 2014.

I ask that you keep the Committee informed as to the future of post-mortem examination services in Aberystwyth.

Yours sincerely,

David Davies MP
Chair, Welsh Affairs Committee