



**PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS
2021-2022 Session**

**REPORT
of the
STANDING
PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**

**on the Report of the
Office of the Auditor General on
Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 -
August 2021**

*Laid on the Table of Parliament on this 8th day of December 2021 by the Chairman of
the Standing Public Accounts Committee, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.*

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**REPORT OF THE STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
ON THE REPORT OF THE OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL ON
FOLLOW-UP ON PAST PAC RECOMMENDATIONS 2021 - REPORT 1 - AUGUST 2021**

1. REFERENCE

The Standing Public Accounts Committee of the Cayman Islands Parliament, established under Standing Order 77(1), met to consider the following Report prepared and submitted by the Auditor General:

- *Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 - August 2021*

2. DOCUMENT CONSIDERED

In accordance with the provision of Standing Order 77(3), the Committee considered the following Report which was referred in the House of Parliament:

- *Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 - August 2021*

3. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

The following Members of Parliament are the present Members of the Standing Public Accounts Committee:

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP - Chairman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP
Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP
Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, MP

4. MEETINGS OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee held five (5) meetings to consider this Report on:

- (i) 11th August 2021 (*Administrative Meeting*)
- (ii) 22nd September 2021 (*Hearing*)
- (iii) 29th September 2021 (*Hearing*)
- (iv) 29th September 2021 (*Administrative Meeting*)
- (v) 12th November 2021 (*Administrative Meeting*)

5. ATTENDANCE OF MEMBERS

The attendance of Members at the meetings is recorded in the Minutes of Proceedings which are attached to and form part of this Report.

6. PERSONS IN ATTENDANCE

In accordance with Standing Order 77(8), the following persons were in attendance at the meeting held with witnesses.

- Mrs. Sue Winspear - Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General
- Ms. Angela Cullen - Deputy Auditor General (Performance Audit), Office of the Auditor General
- Mr. Kenneth Jefferson - Financial Secretary / Chief Officer, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
- Mr. Matthew Tibbetts - Accountant General, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

7. WITNESSES CALLED BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

In accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 77(4), the Committee invited persons to give information and explanations to assist the Committee in the performance of its duties.

The following persons appeared before the Committee to give evidence on **22nd September 2021**:

- Mrs. Teresa Echenique - *Previous Chief Officer, Ministry of Community Affairs* - Chief Officer, Ministry of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage
- Mr. Eric Bush, JP - Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development
- Ms. Stacie Sybersma - Senior Policy Advisor for Social Development
- Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams - Director, Department of Children and Family Services
- Ms. Melissa Smith - Deputy Director, Needs Assessment Unit

The following persons appeared before the Committee to give evidence on **29th September 2021**:

- Mrs. Nellie Pouchie - Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness

8. PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee agreed that in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 77(6), all meetings at which witnesses were invited to provide information should be held in an open forum. This decision was taken to promote openness and accountability in Government.

9. GOVERNMENT MINUTE

The Public Accounts Committee wishes to draw Government's attention to Standing Order 77 sub-order 7 which reads:

"The Government Minute shall be laid on the Table of the House within three months of the laying of the report of the Committee and of the report of the Auditor General to which it relates."

The PAC is disappointed that few Government Minutes have met the required three month timescale and many are very late.

The PAC expects the Government to honour the requirements of this Standing Order.

Between September 2018 and December 2020 the PAC tabled 15 reports. Only 3 Government Minutes were tabled within the required three month timescale. 6 Government Minutes were tabled after the three month timescale, ranging between five months and twenty-two months late; 4 of which were more than one year late. The Government has not responded to 5 PAC reports despite some being tabled in 2018. The PAC tabled 1 report in December 2020. The Government Minute for that report was not due by the time Parliament dissolved in February 2021.

The PAC calls upon the Deputy Governor, having responsibility for the Civil Service, to lay the Government Minutes on the Table within the required three month timescale.

10. PAC RECOMMENDATIONS

On review of the Office of the Auditor General's Report *Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 - August 2021*, which considered two earlier reports, *Ensuring Quality Health Care and a Healthy Population (January 2017)* and *Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need (May 2015)*, and on critical analysis of two days of witness testimonies and deliberations amongst the Committee Members, the PAC endorses and supports the Auditor General and her team's thirteen (13) recommendations for the Ministry of Health and Wellness and twenty-five (25) recommendations for the Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development.

The PAC makes the following additional recommendations:

- i. the PAC recommends the Honourable Deputy Governor, ex officio Member responsible for the Civil Service, be held responsible for honouring Standing Order 77 sub-order 7, as provided for in section 9, which requires the laying of the Government Minute on the Table of the House within three months of the laying of the report of the PAC and of the report of the Auditor General to which it relates; and
- ii. the PAC recommends the Honourable Deputy Governor, ex officio Member responsible for the Civil Service, be held responsible for driving the implementation of the PAC's recommended changes.

iii. on 29th September 2021 Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness appeared before the Committee to respond to questions on past PAC recommendations on health care. In the Hearing CO Pouchie gave the Committee the following twelve undertakings. To date, none have been satisfied.

1. To find out which Government Minute(s) remained outstanding from the Ministry of Health and Wellness and complete the Government Minute(s) for Tabling in the House.
2. To develop a national health care strategy and the operational plan to support the implementation of a national health care strategy, within the next six months.
3. To provide an update on plans to develop and roll-out a national health care standards programme and obtain a corresponding report from the Chief Medical Officer, prior to his departure.
4. To put forward recommendation no. 9 to the Minister, that Government should ensure that health statistics used for purposes of planning, management and accountability distinguish between Caymanian and non-Caymanian populations.
5. To request the Minister bring back draft legislation requiring doctors to report the incidence of cancer in the country, to create an accurate National Cancer Registry, and thereby enable informed decisions to be made about the prevalence of cancer.
6. To request the Minister further extend the CayHealth Programme to cover civil servants and HSA staff.
7. To review and update laws that govern health care and bring them to Parliament for Tabling, such as amendments to the Health Practice Act, the Pharmacy Act and the Public Health Act.
8. To recruit sufficient staff required to effectively execute the roles and responsibilities assumed by the Cayman Islands health care system.
9. To establish a written policy for the development of Caymanian doctors.
10. To provide to the Committee a breakdown of how the \$500,000 scholarship fund, intended for the development of Caymanian doctors, has so far been allocated.
11. To provide to the Committee the number of Caymanians who received scholarship funds to study medicine and who are currently:
 - a. studying within the medical field; or
 - b. practicing medicine in the Cayman Islands.
12. To advise the Committee if the Ministry plans to consider ways to reduce the cost of health care, for instance by removing duty from drugs and medical supplies, or by reducing the HSA's mark-up on the cost of drugs.

The PAC expects responses from CO Pouchie, in a timely manner, to satisfy these twelve undertakings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee is most appreciative of the efforts of the Auditor General and her staff for the support, assistance and constructive advice given throughout its deliberations.

The Committee also wishes to thank the staff of the Parliament for the assistance provided.

REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE TO THE HOUSE

The Committee agrees that this Report be the Report of the Standing Public Accounts Committee to the House on the following Report of the Office of the Auditor General:

- *Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 - August 2021*

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP - Chairman

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP – Member

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP – Member

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP - Member

Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCL, Cert. Hon., JP, MP – Member

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, MP – Member



Parliament of the Cayman Islands

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Meeting held

Wednesday, 11th August, 2021 at 10:00 am

PAC Members Present:

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP – Chairman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP - Member
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP - Member
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP – Member
Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP - Member
Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, MP - Member

PAC Clerk: Mrs. Patricia Priestley

Attendees: Mrs. Sue Winspear - Auditor General
Ms. Angela Cullen - Deputy Auditor General (Performance Audit)

1. Meeting to Order

There being a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 10:10 am.

2. Apologies

None.

3. Approval of PAC Minutes

- Tuesday, 20th July 2021 (*Hearing*)

On a motion moved by Ms. Barbara Conolly and seconded by Ms. Heather Bodden, the Committee unanimously approved the Minutes.

- Tuesday, 20th July 2021 (*Administrative Meeting*)

On a motion moved by Mr. Isaac Rankine and seconded by Ms. Heather Bodden, the Committee unanimously approved the Minutes.

4. Matters arising from Minutes

- Legal opinion on publication of PAC verbatim transcripts – CTCEC

The Chairman asked for the minutes to reflect the Committee's appreciation to the Honourable Attorney General for his Chambers' swift response to the Committee's request for a legal opinion.

The Committee reviewed and considered the legal opinion received from the Attorney General's Chambers dated 28th July 2021 re: PAC – web publication of 'verbatim transcripts'.

The Chairman advised the Committee that he was inclined to accept the Honourable Attorney General's legal advice and proposed that the Committee resolve to release the requested copies of the verbatim transcripts to the new CTCEC Board of Directors. Furthermore, the Chairman was of the opinion that in the interest of good governance and transparency the PAC should resolve to publish all verbatim transcripts of public hearings, as a matter of course, as soon as they become available, by uploading them to the Parliament website.

Discussion ensued.

Mr. Isaac Rankine moved a motion for the Committee to agree to the release of the requested verbatim transcripts of the PAC hearing on 18th & 19th November, and 1st December 2020, to the CTCEC Board of Directors. The motion was seconded by Ms. Barbara Conolly. The Committee unanimously approved the motion as stated.

The Clerk gave an undertaking to the Committee to deliver electronic copies of the requested verbatim transcripts to the CTCEC Board of Directors at the conclusion of the meeting.

The Chairman moved a motion, with relation to PAC witness hearings, that the Committee agree, going forward, as soon as verbatim transcripts are transcribed, PAC Members and Attendees (not Witnesses) be provided electronic access to transcripts, for seven (7) days, to verify the accuracy of their own words, before transcripts are uploaded to the Parliament website. Mr. Dwayne Seymour seconded the motion as stated and the Committee unanimously approved the motion.

5. Approval of Auditor General's Invoice

OAG's Invoice No. 207542 dated 30 July 2021 in the amount of \$50,740.52 was considered and discussed, and unanimously approved on a motion moved by Mr. Isaac Rankine and seconded by Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks. The Chairman acknowledged the Committee's approval by returning a signed copy of the invoice to the Auditor General.

6. Consideration of OAG Reports

- **Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 (August 2021) - [Health Care and Social Welfare](#)**

The Auditor General presented the report to the Committee.

The Auditor General advised the Committee that this report serves as the first in a series of planned reports in 2021 which the OAG intend to prepare to provide the PAC with an update on the Government's, and relevant Statutory Authorities' and Government Companies', implementation of past PAC and OAG recommendations.

The Auditor General recommended that the PAC hold witness hearings on the two reports identified in the Follow-up Report: (1) *Ensuring Quality Health Care and a Healthy Population (January 2017)* and (2) *Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need (May 2015)*, as these two reports showed very limited progress in the implementation of recommendations made.

The Chairman moved a motion that the Committee agree to support the Auditor General's recommendation to hold witness hearings on the healthcare and social welfare reports referred to in the *Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 (August 2021)*. Mr. Isaac Rankine seconded the motion and the Committee unanimously agreed the motion.

The Committee agreed that the following witnesses be requested to attend the hearings at the stated times:

PAC Hearing Date: Wednesday, 22 nd September 2021		
OAG Report: Ensuring Quality Health Care and a Healthy Population (January 2017)		
Witness	Government Entity	Time
Mrs. Nellie Pouchie	Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness	10:00 am - 12:00 pm
OAG Report: Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need (May 2015)		
Witness	Government Entity	Time
Ms. Teresa Echenique	<i>Previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs</i> Chief Officer, Ministry of Youth, Sports, Culture & Heritage	2:00 pm - 4:00 pm
Mr. Eric Bush	Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment, Innovation & Social Development	2:00 pm - 4:00 pm

The Committee further agreed to meet with the Auditor General and Deputy Auditor General (Performance Audit), Ms. Angela Cullen, in the large committee room of the House of Parliament at 9:30 am and 1:30 pm for pre-meeting briefings ahead of the hearings to discuss lines of questioning.

Mr. Dwayne Seymour stated that he intended to declare a conflict of interest as former Minister of Health, with respect to the healthcare report, and he would recuse himself from questioning the witness, Mrs. Nellie Pouchie.

- ISA 260 reports

The Auditor General presented the following completed ISA260 reports to the Committee which serve as a sample of the 40+ entities audited by the OAG in 2020:

- Auditors Oversight Authority
- Cayman Islands National Insurance Company Ltd.
- Ministry of Commerce, Planning & Infrastructure
- Ministry of Employment and Border Control
- Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports, Agriculture and Lands
- Ministry of Finance and Economic Development
- National Gallery of the Cayman Islands
- National Housing Development Trust

- Office of the Commissioner of Police
- Public Service Pensions Board
- The Port Authority of Cayman Islands
- Tourism Attraction Board

The Auditor General explained the purpose and content of the reports and advised the Committee that the final appendix in each report would be of the most interest to the Committee Members as it refers to the entity's control deficiencies.

The Auditor General did *not* recommend holding a hearing on any of these entities at this time.

The Chairman moved a motion that the Committee agree to support the Auditor General's recommendation to *not* hold a public hearing on any of the ISA260 reports at this time. Ms. Barbara Conolly seconded the motion and the Committee unanimously agreed the motion.

The Auditor General proposed and the Committee agreed, for future administrative meetings the Auditor General would not provide copies of the individual reports but would instead prepare and present a one page summary of the ISA260 reports, and where relevant would detail identified control points.

It was noted that the ISA260 reports are publicly available documents and can be found on the OAG's and each individual entity's website.

7. Review of Draft PAC Report

- Improving Financial Accountability and Transparency: Financial Management and Reporting - May 2021

The report was considered and discussed by the Committee.

The Chairman drew Members' attention to paragraph 9. PAC Recommendations, and paragraph 10. Government Minute.

The Chairman requested and received confirmation from the Clerk that the verbatim transcripts and minutes of meetings would be attached to the PAC report for tabling in the House.

Mr. Isaac Rankine moved a motion that the Committee, adopt and accept the draft *PAC Report on the Report of the OAG on Improving Financial Accountability and Transparency: Financial Management and Reporting - May 2021*, endorse the recommendations of the OAG, and table the PAC report together with the report of the OAG at the next sitting of Parliament. The motion was seconded by Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks and the Committee unanimously agreed the motion.

8. Auditor General's Update

None.

9. Any Other Business

PAC Inquiry Workshop

The Clerk notified Members of the CPA UK invitation to attend a virtual PAC Inquiry Workshop from 11th to 15th October 2021.

10. Scheduling of Next Meeting

The next meetings were confirmed for the following dates:

- Wednesday, 22nd September 2021 at 10:00 am (*Hearing*)
- Wednesday, 29th September 2021 at 10:00 am (*Administrative Meeting*)

11. Adjournment

There being no further business, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 11:26 am.



Parliament of the Cayman Islands

THE STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting with Witnesses
Wednesday, 22nd September 2021 at 10:33 am

FOLLOW-UP ON PAST PAC RECOMMENDATIONS 2021 - REPORT 1 (AUGUST 2021) **SOCIAL WELFARE**

PAC Members Present:

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP – Chairman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP - Member
Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP - Member
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP - Member
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCl, Cert. Hon., JP, MP – Member
Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, MP - Member

PAC Clerk: Mrs. Patricia Priestley

Attendees: Mrs. Sue Winspear - Auditor General

Ms. Angela Cullen - Deputy Auditor General (Performance Audit)

Mr. Kenneth Jefferson - Financial Secretary / Chief Officer, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts - Accountant General, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

Witnesses: Mrs. Teresa Echenique - *Previous Chief Officer, Ministry of Community Affairs* -
Chief Officer, Ministry of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage

Mr. Eric Bush, JP - Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development

Ms. Stacie Sybersma – Senior Policy Advisor for Social Development

Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams – Director, Department of Children and Family Services

Ms. Melissa Smith – Deputy Director, Needs Assessment Unit

1. Meeting to Order

There being a quorum present (Standing Orders 77(2) refers), the Chairman called the Public Accounts Committee Meeting to order at 10:33 am.

2. Welcome

The Chairman gave a brief welcome to Members of the Committee and Attendees, and thanked them for attending the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Hearing.

The Chairman invited PAC Member, Mr. Isaac Rankine, to begin proceedings with a prayer.

The Chairman stated the purpose of the Hearing was to examine the Office of the Auditor General's report, *Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1*, published in August 2021. This report provided a summary of past PAC reports tabled between September 2018 and December 2020, and a status update of the Government responses to the reports and implementation of PAC and OAG recommendations. This report identified two earlier reports which were assessed as showing limited progress in the planned implementation of recommendations; namely, *Ensuring Quality Health Care and a Healthy Population (January 2017)* and *Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need (May 2015)*.

The Chairman explained that the first witness scheduled to appear before the Committee to answer questions on health care was Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness; however, Mrs. Pouchie had contacted the Clerk earlier in the day to request a postponement of her appearance as she was unwell.

The Chairman then invited Mrs. Teresa Echenique, Chief Officer, Ministry of Youth, Sports, Culture & Heritage (*formerly Chief Officer, Ministry of Community Affairs*) to appear before the Committee to answer questions on social welfare.

The Chairman invited the Auditor General, Mrs. Sue Winspear, to make an opening statement and present the OAG's report, *Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 (August 2021)*.

The Auditor General presented the OAG report, *Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 (August 2021)*, in particular as it related to the OAG's earlier report, *Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need (May 2015)*. The Auditor General summarized the recommendations made; management and Government responses to those recommendations; the OAG's interim assessments on the progress of implementation of those recommendations; Government's responses to the OAG's interim assessments; and finally the OAG's comments on the very limited progress of implementation of recommendations up to present day. The OAG's initial report published in May 2015 made 12 recommendations. The *Follow-up Report* published in August 2021 made 25 recommendations.

The Chairman recognised and welcomed the witness, Mrs. Teresa Echenique, and reminded her to state her full name and title for the record before answering the first question addressed to her.

The Chairman began questioning the witness.

The Chairman then invited Committee Members to question the witness.

PAC Member Ms. Heather Bodden declared her interest as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister responsible for Social Development and asked for the Chairman's guidance on her participation in the Hearing. The Chairman acknowledged Ms. Bodden's declaration and stated that in his opinion Ms. Bodden need not recuse herself from questioning the witness as the report being discussed predated Ms. Bodden's recent interest, and therefore her declaring this was sufficient for her to participate.

Committee Members questioned the witness.

Discussion ensued.

Before departing, Mrs. Echenique was thanked by the Chairman on behalf of the Committee for attending the Hearing.

The Chairman suspended proceedings at 12:48 pm.

Proceedings resumed at 2:15 pm.

The Chairman recognised and welcomed the witness, Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development.

Mr. Bush presented Members with a document entitled, "Appendix 2 – Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need (May 2015)". The document provided an update on progress on all recommendations made by the OAG and PAC in relation to the original OAG report and subsequent PAC reports i.e. 25 recommendations in total. The document identified who made the recommendation and when. The document included a table which identified each of the original recommendations, management responses provided in 2017 (to OAG), management responses provided in Government Minutes in October 2016 and updates provided by management to OAG in August 2018 and June 2021. The table also included OAG comments and assessments in July 2017, October 2018 and July 2021. In addition, Mr. Bush provided a document from the Ministry of Community Affairs entitled, "Summary Report Relevant to PAC Feedback 2019–2021" which provided 4 focus points:

- (1) Indigent Medical/CINICO Services;
- (2) Collaboration of Entity Services and Enhancement of Services to Seniors;
- (3) Resources to enhance the operations of NAU; and
- (4) New Legislation specific to NAU.

The Chairman began questioning the witness and reminded the witness to state his full name and title for the record before answering the first question addressed to him.

The Chairman then invited Committee Members to question the witness.

Mr. Bush provided an undertaking to the Chair to have new Legislation before Parliament in the first quarter of 2022.

On Mr. Bush's request, the Chair permitted Ms. Stacie Sybersma, Senior Policy Advisor, Social Development, to respond to Members' questions on behalf of Mr. Bush.

On Mr. Bush's request, the Chair permitted Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director, Department of Children and Family Services, to respond to Members' questions on behalf of Mr. Bush.

On Mr. Bush's request, the Chair permitted Ms. Melissa Smith, Deputy Director, Needs Assessment Unit, to respond to Members' questions on behalf of Mr. Bush.

Mr. Bush provided reassurance to Members that the Older Persons Active Ageing Centre (OPAAC) will be reopened and services of the OPAAC reactivated.

Before departing, Mr. Bush and his staff were thanked by the Chairman on behalf of the Committee for attending the Hearing.

3. Any Other Business

The next meetings were confirmed for:

- **Wednesday, 29th September 2021 at 10:00 am (*Hearing*)**
Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer Ministry of Health and Wellness, to be re-invited to appear as a Witness to respond to questions on health care.
- **Wednesday, 29th September 2021 at 2:00 pm (*Administrative Meeting*)**

4. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:12 pm.



PARLIAMENT OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

**FOLLOW-UP ON PAST PAC RECOMMENDATIONS 2021 -
REPORT 1 (AUGUST 2021) HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL WELFARE**

*Official transcript relating to the Official Report of the
Standing Public Accounts Committee Meeting
held on 22 September, 2021*

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Ms. Paulinda Mendoza	25, 27
Ms. Melissa Smith	26 – 27
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PRESENT WERE:

PAC Members: Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP, Chairman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP, Member
Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP, Member
Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, MP, Member
Ms. Heather Bodden, OCl, Cert. Hon., JP, MP, Member
Mr. Isaac Rankine, MP, Member

In attendance: Mr. Kenneth Jefferson, Financial Secretary and Chief Officer
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

Audit Office: Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General

Ms. Angela Cullen, Deputy Auditor General
(Performance Audit)

Witnesses: Mrs. Teresa Echenique
Previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs
Current Chief Officer, Ministry of Youth, Sports, Culture
and Heritage

Mr. Eric Bush, JP
Chief Officer - Ministry of Investment, Innovation and
Social Development

Ms. Stacie Sybersma,
Senior Policy Advisor for Social Development:

Ms. Melissa Smith, Deputy Director,
Needs Assessment Unit

Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director,
Department of Children and Family Services

PAC Clerk: Mrs. Patricia Priestley

**OFFICIAL VERBATIM REPORT
STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY
22 SEPTEMBER 2021
10:33AM**

**FOLLOW-UP ON PAST PAC RECOMMENDATIONS 2021 -
REPORT 1 (AUGUST 2021) HEALTH CARE AND SOCIAL WELFARE**

Verbatim transcript of the Standing Public Accounts Committee Meeting held on Wednesday, 22 September 2021, at 10:33 am, in the Chamber of the House of Parliament, George Town, Grand Cayman.

[Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Chairman presiding]

The Chairman: Good morning, everyone. Thank you all for being here and on time; we are just a few minutes beyond our scheduled start time.

I want to welcome everyone to this meeting of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Before we get started with our agenda this morning, I would like to invite the Member for East End to lead us in a short word of prayer.

PRAYER

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Let us pray.

Father God, help us to be united in this Public Accounts Committee (PAC) meeting, the same way you are in unity with your son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. May we be of one Spirit and have a common purpose, as we deliberate the business of our country for the betterment of our people; Holy Spirit of God, fill this place with your power and help us walk in unity. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

Before we move on with the substantive agenda, I need to let the public watching and listening know that there is a change to the schedule that we originally published.

We were to hear first this morning from Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness. She is actually unwell and unable to be here this morning, so the Committee will reschedule the Hearing in order to accommodate her once we know that she is well and able to attend. Instead, we will move to the group of witnesses that were scheduled for this afternoon. We will hear from Mrs. Teresa Echenique first this morning.

By way of introduction, in terms of the purpose of today's meeting, the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) issued a report, "**Follow-up on past PAC recommendations**" in August 2021, just a short month ago, which provided a status update on all of PACs

reports Tabled in the House between September 2018 and December 2020. It also provided a reassessment of the government's implementation of past recommendations for the report "**Government Programmes, Supporting Those in Need**" that was issued in May 2015. The Office of the Auditor General had previously assessed in October 2018 and it was the subject of a PAC Hearing in January 2019.

That is a report that we are going to be examining this morning and so at this point, I will turn things over to the Auditor General and invite her to make an opening statement.

Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Good morning to you, Members of the Committee, colleagues and the listening public. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to make some opening remarks. I will add to the introduction you have just given Mr. Chairman. The follow-up report—

The Chairman: Madam Auditor General—

I think it may be appropriate for us to invite the witness to come in at this time.

Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General: Sorry.

The Chairman: It is my fault and I apologise. Page, would you please allow the witness to come in?

[Pause]

The Chairman: Good morning, Mrs. Echenique and welcome to the Committee.
Auditor General.

**OFFICE OF THE
AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning again.

Following on from the Chairman's introduction, I am pleased to make some opening remarks. The report that we are considering at today's Hearing relates to our report in May 2015, which is about **"Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need"**. When we did this report in 2015, we found there were a dozen welfare support programmes and we made 12 recommendations around strategy, policy, gaps in criteria, overlaps in provision, and—most fundamentally—the Poor Persons (Relief) Law, which dated back to 1997, and we found in urgent need of updating, but after a strategy had been delivered.

Twelve recommendations were made in February/March 2016. There were a series of witness Hearings held by the Public Accounts Committee at that time and evidence was heard from Mrs. Doreen Whittaker, the Chief Officer, and several other senior officials.

In June 2016, the PAC Tabled its report in the then Legislative Assembly and added an additional two recommendations of its own. In July 2017, we published our first follow-up report on past PAC recommendations and at that time we assessed the progress on the recommendations made in that report as Red: limited progress.

In August and September 2017, the PAC took evidence again from Mrs. Doreen Whittaker, the Chief Officer, and other senior officials. In March 2018, the PAC Tabled its report in the Legislative Assembly and made a further three recommendations, taking the total up to 17.

In June 2018, the Government Minute was published and you will see the responses are given in the Appendix to the Follow-up Report.

In October 2018, we did a further follow-up report on past PAC recommendations, and in January 2019, Chief Officer Mrs. Echenique—who had taken over from Chief Officer Whittaker—then attended the PAC Witness Hearing along with her Deputy Chief Officer and other senior officials.

In April 2019, a further four recommendations were made by the PAC, taking the total up to 21 and that was Tabled in April 2019. As of today, we have done a further follow-up as you alluded to in our recent report Mr. Chairman and we continue to assess the progress made on the series of recommendations in the original 2015 report as Red: very limited progress.

I have Ms. Angela Cullen with me today and we will be happy to assist the Committee.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Auditor General.

I'm going to kick off the questioning of the witness this morning. Once again, welcome, Mrs. Echenique. I have to ask the very broad and open-ended question: Why such a delay? What are the reasons for the Ministry's or Needs Assessment Unit's (NAU) delays in implementing the recommendations of both the Auditor General and the PAC?

Can you share with us what is really going on here, as the original report was done since 2015?

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, *previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage*: Good morning and thank you, Mr. Chair, for giving me the opportunity to share some information and offer clarity on some of these pieces today.

If I may give my full name and my existing title at this point: my name is Teresa Echenique, Chief Officer for the Ministry of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage.

As it relates to the question, we understand and appreciate that, yes, there are delays. When we looked at some of the work that was done prior to my coming into the Ministry, and other senior managers who also joined the Ministry—because let me first say, that particular Ministry went through significant changes in management from late 2017 into 2020; so there were pieces, internal to the Ministry itself, that we recognise we were trying to equip ourselves to ensure that we were able to address all of the concerns at hand.

With that said, again, we appreciate the recommendations that were made. We would have loved to accomplish some of them in a timelier manner, but we had to take into consideration several things; manpower was one of those aspects that we had to take into consideration, but also the sensitivity of the subject area that we were looking at and focusing on. We did not want to be hasty in making drastic changes to that organisation without doing some very in depth and thorough assessments on certain areas.

Although we did not have the opportunity to finalise and establish the overarching strategic plan for that organisation, there were aspects that we did focus on, from an operational perspective, to try to enhance the services and ensure that the clientele was benefiting from it. So again, we understand and appreciate the concerns about the delays.

In an ideal situation, I would have loved to come here today and say to you, "we have accomplished everything." That is not the case, sir, and we are hopeful that some of the pieces that we started—significant pieces that we started—will be continued by the existing Chief Officer; needless to say, unfortunately, the circumstances with COVID also redirected our focus significantly away from some of these projects.

The Chairman: Thank you, Mrs. Echenique.

The report itself having been done so long ago, if I remember reading information we had, I think you came before the Committee maybe in 2019, when they

took further evidence. I read that you made certain commitments to get things done but, this is literally a six-year-old report. If I may be so bold to say, very little really has been done; how do you respond?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Mr. Chair, again, I don't think that this is a subject area where we wanted to be extremely hasty, especially when it came to Legislation itself.

We worked diligently to ensure that we had a group looking at the revision of Legislation and ensuring that we had drafted Regulations in place. When I came in and gave my information in 2019, we were in the process of doing that and had made significant progress. The intent was to move out to consultation and, again, those were the areas that were delayed as a result of COVID.

The Legislation itself was a major driving factor with some of the changes that would have taken place within the organisation, to guide processes and to better establish services, so that was a key component that we worked on and placed significant focus on, when I came into the Ministry. It is an aspect of work that I am sure you will appreciate takes time, and it has to be a situation where we can see the benefit of changing the Legislation and enhancing services.

As it is now, the drafted Bill and Regulations have been passed on to the new Chief Officer, with the hope that the consultation and the finalisation of those pieces will be completed; that was a critical piece for us, with regards to moving and changing some of the processes within that organisation. Because of the Law being so outdated there was no clear guidance, from the Law, for the Department. Those were some of the challenges that we faced, sir.

[Pause]

The Chairman: I now open questioning from other members of the Committee. I recognise the Member for West Bay Central.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: If you wish to make follow-up questions you can, or you can move on directly into the next session.

Perhaps I might ask then: are there follow-up questions to this?

Okay, if you have follow-up questions, do so recognising that the Member for Savannah has follow-up questions as well.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: I just need to make it abundantly clear that in my role as Parliamentary Secretary under Social Development, I am able to ask

questions, but I will be guided by the Chairman on this matter.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member for Savannah.

Yes; we do recognise that you are the Parliamentary Secretary for the now Ministry that has oversight for these programmes.

My view is—and we had some discussion about this—that the report itself really predates you and everyone in this room. I don't see any conflict whatsoever with you questioning a witness this morning, since it does predate you, as well as all of us.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that response seeing that the role I am now involved in is part of my passion.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you Mr. Chair, good morning; good morning to the witness.

I will start with strategic direction, but I will just do a little bit of background reading for the audience, so that they can have an understanding of the questioning.

Paragraphs 17-20 of the Auditor General's 2015 report states that the Government did not have **“a coordinated strategy and priorities for providing social assistance”**. The Office of the Auditor General found that the **“social assistance programmes had evolved on an ad hoc basis over the years, based on the responses of governments to particular circumstances and pressures. [...] there was no overall strategy that sets so what the government wants to achieve and that guides the provision of social assistance.”**

The Office of the Auditor General first recommended that: **“The government should develop a coordinated social assistance strategy, including clear priorities and the specification of desired results to provide overall direction for planning and delivering social assistance and monitoring the results achieved.”** The original management response, agreed with the recommendation but did not provide an implementation date.

In the Government Minute of October 2016, the Ministry reiterated its agreement with the recommendation and stated that an Outline Business Case (OBC) had been prepared, which included this recommendation within its scope. In response to recommendation 3, the Ministry stated that subject to an additional resource being provided, they expected that the strategy would be implemented in the 2016/17 budget year.

Later in August 2018, the Office of the Auditor General met with the Ministry to discuss progress. At that time, Ministry officials stated that they were in the process of reviewing data, statistics, and research to

inform the development of a strategy for social assistance, and an internal working group had been developed to take forward this work during the remainder of 2018.

The Ministry also stated that the strategy needed to be developed first to support the implementation of all of the other recommendations. That is something that I want to point out: the strategy needed to be developed first, before we could even talk about the Legislation.

In evidence to the Public Accounts Committee in January 2019, Ministry officials stated that they had developed a strategic framework for social assistance that included a mission and specific and broad goals. This would help provide direction and be developed further. A copy of the draft framework was submitted to the Public Accounts Committee at that time.

As at June 2021, the Ministry provided an update which is reproduced in the Auditor General's 2021 report. The Ministry's response does not specifically mention the development of a strategy for social assistance.

My first question to the witness ties in with the Chairman's first question, in relation to the progress with this strategy for social assistance. You already indicated that there were some delays; you also indicated that COVID had something to do with why we have not gotten anything implemented as yet but looking at the chronology, this was presented back in January and COVID did not happen until March of 2020. That gives us a full year.

Could you elaborate on exactly what happened in that period that would have prevented the implementation?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, some of the pieces that we looked at and took into consideration—and it was driven by the framework that we did establish—was the importance of us going into a process of in-depth consultation.

Needless to say, it was not a situation where we felt we could accomplish all of these pieces specific to one entity. It had to be extremely broad because the clientele that we were working with were covering so many other aspects within the public and private sector that it was important for us to go through a process of in depth assessment and consultation. A working group had been established to do some of those pieces and again, the frameworks were guiding this process.

We also recognised that it was important for us, while doing some of the pieces from a strategic perspective, that we started to definitely work on the Legislation itself, because that would be a driving factor behind the implementation of a number of processes within the two organisations that fell immediately under us. So, although there were ongoing pieces of work done, the strategic process was not finalised.

Changes were made from an operational perspective and they were operational pieces that were also looked at and taken into consideration that tied in with the framework for the strategic process itself, but the strategic process was not finalised.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Are you able to elaborate on what those changes looked like, between that period? I am trying to understand and also help the public understand, the lengthy delay.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Internal to the two entities that worked with us, one piece that we were looking at was how collaboration could better take place between those two entities to enhance services.

One of the changes made was having social workers actually partner, and be present at NAU for intervention services for those significant/repeat persons that were coming into the system because, again, we realised that persons coming into the Needs Assessment Unit (NAU) were not coming in because they had financial needs only. There were other significant needs that had to be met, so we were looking at the services from a broader perspective and looking more at that in-depth intervention that could have been offered. That was one aspect that we looked at and took into consideration.

We were also working with the Ministry of Health because we recognised that a piece of key Legislation that was under their Ministry was also guiding the process in terms of persons who required indigent medical services. And again, we were working along with that Ministry to ensure that the changes they would be making within their Legislation would have a positive impact on our day-to-day operations and the timeliness and suitability of persons getting indigent medical.

We also looked at pieces that focused specifically on our ageing population. We recognised that we had a significant number of the ageing population coming to us for services and we wanted to know that we were meeting their needs in a specialised manner, as opposed to from a very broad and general perspective. Despite the fact that the framework or the strategic process itself was not finalised, there were a number of aspects that we were working on that tied into the framework.

Again, working on the drafting of the Legislation and the regulations was with the hope that when the strategic process was finalised and all of the consultation was completed, we would be further ahead because we would have worked on the Legislation and some of the operational pieces at the same time.

I hope that helps answer some of the questions.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: It helps with understanding a bit, especially for the listening audience because persons have many concerns with the delays, and having this framework in place would essentially change the lives of our most vulnerable. I wanted to get some clarity on that. Thank you.

The Chairman: George Town South

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Through you to our witness, you mentioned that an internal working group had been developed to look at the strategy for social assistance.

Can you indicate who that working group would have been made up of; public and private sector reps?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, that particular group was mainly an internal working group with entities and ministry representation. As need be, we then pulled on external bodies depending on the subject area that we were having dialogue on at that particular time, but it was about the internal bodies looking at some of the operational pieces and areas that was felt needed to be addressed as matters of priority.

It was a makeup of ministry and departmental staff that fell under that particular Ministry at that time, which was Community Affairs and then pulling on external bodies as necessary.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: My second question then, in terms of including other government ministries, I think Health would be an area that you should also include in that working group. Were they considered?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, as previously indicated, we did have numerous meetings and consultation with the Ministry of Health. Because one of the significant pieces that we were focusing on with that internal working group was the indigent medical aspect. We pulled on the Ministry of Health as and when necessary to see how we could best enhance those services. The piece of Legislation that fell under that Ministry also guided some of the processes, so the two had to work hand in hand.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Is that internal working group current?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, unfortunately, I am unable to speak to that because the subject area is no longer my responsibility.

I am hopeful that the Chief Officer now responsible for that subject area will be able to address that.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: I thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning, Chief Officer Echenique.

In regards to the indigents and medical: what is the process?

One of the recommendations that you were working on with this strategic group was to tighten the arrangement between NAU and the HSA, in terms of medical emergencies. Was anything done to try to speed up this process?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you, Mr. Chair, matters that were presented as urgent matters through HSA were indeed handled as 'urgent'. We relied very heavily on the guidance from HSA on these matters because needless to say no one within the NAU had a medical background, so many of the pieces were driven through the doctors and the medical practitioners.

I think it is important for us to recognise and understand that the work NAU did and contributed towards was just the assessment process to help guide and determine suitability; they did not have the final say. Many of the pieces were driven from a medical urgency and that came through HSA.

Again, the importance of us having the Ministry of Health revise the Legislation that guides that, was because they were decision making pieces and there were external entities involved with that process that were, it was felt, unnecessary.

It was also becoming very time consuming. The funding and some of the final decisions were with the Ministry of Health and then we had the Ministry—at that time—of Community Affairs that were contributing to the assessment component. It was not strategically very well structured, but it was the way that the Legislation had it outlined, so the driving factor to making some of those changes was to ensure that the Legislation itself would need to be revised.

Information was provided to the Ministry of Health to try to guide that process and as a result, we were leaving some of those pieces with them. However, internal to us, what we did make an effort to do was try to ensure that these matters were not disadvantaging the clientele. We tried to extend the length of time that persons were placed on indigent medical; so if it was a senior, that their medical circumstances were not going to change, we would not have looked at the recommendation for them getting six months, but we would have made it for a significantly longer period in an effort to not disadvantage them.

Some of these matters were dealt on a case by case basis, but indeed, it was necessary for us to work very closely with the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Thank you very much, Chief Officer. Mr. Chair, if I may.

I duly respect that you're not the Chief Officer in this area anymore and I am trying not to drill down too hard, but I would really appreciate if you can try to help me and guide the public as to where it is now, in terms of two things.

You said something just now in terms of seniors and length of medical, whether that's by CINICO or otherwise, and the length of time—you said something in regards to six months or longer. I am wondering: if it is a senior, why are we giving them an expiry date, knowing full well that that their situation may not change?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, again, those were some of the adjustments that were made in terms of looking at extending the period of time depending on the individual circumstances, so if it was a senior, and if there were pre-existing medical conditions that we did not anticipate would change, we did extend it for a significant period of time—some of them were three years, some were longer.

Again, it is not normal that we have these services on an open-ended basis because circumstances may change and so, it is a necessity for these services to be reassessed. That is why it is important that some of them have specific timelines.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Chair, thank you and thank you for that answer.

I think what really happens is over the years, especially when it's extended and if it's a senior, my experience with this situation is that it's a bit of a humbug because if they get it for three years or more they tend to rely on the fact that they have a card. When it expires, I think they need to be reassessed; am I correct? Do they need to be reassessed?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: That was the normal process, that after the expiration of the coverage they would be reassessed to determine whether their circumstances had indeed changed or not.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Thank you for that answer.

In terms of strategy Mr. Chair, I will just go ahead and ask the question at this time, in terms of district focus. I know the Department—possibly before you left—was doing district visits.

I am constantly reminded that one of the fastest growing districts is Bodden Town—in fact, my constituency is the largest constituency. Why haven't we thought about trying to get a centralised location

that would service the Eastern districts? Most of the persons who rely on this assistance normally have to either get a ride there—get a taxi or a bus—and they really don't have the money to get to George Town.

These are some of the complaints that I have had over the years, and I am still baffled as to why they had not found an office in the middle of the country to try to service the Eastern districts. I think this would be more help to NAU than a hinder. I know there was something there at some point and then it was moved, but I think you would be able to drill down a little bit better if you have a centralised location in the eastern districts.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, I am seeking clarity if the question is about the services being extended to the districts?

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: No, it's about the convenience.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, what I will say in regard to that is: we recognise and we so appreciate, especially for our seniors that it is not always convenient for them to have to come to our main office in George Town. That is why the district visits started.

Prior to my move to another Ministry, we were running that as a pilot programme to see what the true needs were and what the uptake was by the officers going into those areas; that was a pilot programme that would have driven and would have been able to allow us to advocate for offices within other districts.

I am sure you will appreciate that, from a cost saving perspective, and knowing the tight budget that we had, we were very conscious that we could not open offices in all of the various districts but as much as possible we tried, for the convenience of the clients, to have officers do district visits. That would have guided where the needs and demand truly were coming from and how we then would need to further develop our services.

Then, of course, for the ageing population that was extremely active and more than capable of coming out, we had established a centre that was specific for them, that they did not have to go to NAU's main office and be a part of the general population; so some of the pieces were in play, and have been passed on to the new Chief Officer. I am very hopeful that they will continue to develop those pieces.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: I have a final question, through you Mr. Chair, going back to the strategic direction.

I understand all the delays now; are you able to advise us if the strategy part had been completed prior to your hand over to Chief Officer Bush, or is that something that is still ongoing?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: The general framework was what was handed over, with some of the operational pieces that were critical because we saw them as priorities to meet the needs of the clientele and it was tying in with the strategic process.

So to answer your question, only the framework itself and some of the operational pieces that had been developed, or had been started, were handed over, and that was inclusive of the drafted Legislation and Regulations.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the witness, you spoke to the senior centre that's located in George Town that would accommodate and facilitate our seniors. Is that operational or should I leave that question for the Chief Officer responsible who will be appearing this afternoon?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, I left it operational. I cannot answer to the existing circumstances; perhaps the Chief Officer who is coming in this afternoon will be better equipped to speak to that.

The Chairman: Before we move on to the next section I have one follow-up question—more of a personal question for you, given your time there.

You hear complaints all the time about accessing NAU services—it is a very daunting task, it is very time-consuming, it causes a lot of frustrations and does not appear to ever be a very simple process to be able to do it or to access the services and programmes that you provide. In your time there, what are some of the things you felt could be done that would allow for a better experience with clients who are in need of social assistance?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Thank you very much for that question, Mr. Chair; that is a million dollar question.

There are several pieces that I would like to focus on and take into consideration, and I am very mindful that time might not allow me to really answer that question in depth, because I feel that there was so

much that we could have continued to work on and develop. I don't feel that it should have been done in a hasty manner by any means, but I felt that with collaboration, and ongoing assessment of the services, we definitely could have seen many more changes come about.

What I will say to you at this point, welfare services, as it is known internationally, is a very challenging subject area. I don't think that any one jurisdiction has it right, and so for us here, it's extremely unique and we have to look at it very, very carefully, because we were taking a lot of aspects into consideration. We had a growing aging population that services had not been properly planned for. They did not have pension when they were working, so that group of persons became dependent on the government system at this point.

I want to, out of respect, extend my gratitude and appreciation to the NAU staff. Yes, we had the complaints and yes, there were times when persons felt that services did not always go the way that they wanted, but the team there worked really, really hard to try to ensure services were met; and I have to put balance to this sir, because there are many times when reports would come to the Ministry and when we would look into the circumstances, they were very valid reasons why the individual did not receive services or why there was a delay in services. So it was not always a negativity on behalf of the organisation, but it could have been other deciding factors.

I think another area that is extremely important is that we do not look at this as a financial handout entity, but that it is seen from a social perspective. It will be extremely important that you have qualified social workers in that organisation to ensure that the overall needs of the individual are being met.

Those were some of the things, again, that would have come out as part of the Legislation. We were hopeful that some of the job descriptions would be further developed, because it was not only about the financial assessment component. *What were the holistic needs of the individual? What did we need to do to truly intervene and to bring about changes in individuals' lives?* I think the first step to that was having the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and some of the social workers work closely with that organisation.

That was the first step but that was just in the beginning stages; there is still a lot to take into consideration and develop. I have full confidence that the Minister responsible for this subject area will drive these pieces forward, because I know how passionate he is about them and he also worked very closely with us in Community Affairs. Like I said, that was a million dollar question sir. There is a lot that we could have continued to develop to try to enhance and specialise services, and it was just at the beginning stage.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you. Member for East End.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Through Mr. Chair: good morning, Ms. Echenique.

There is a general premise, especially in the Eastern constituency and I have experienced the same sentiment from other members of our community of what they see as disparity in how they as Caymanians are treated at the NAU versus other nationalities. How do we dispel that, and assure the Caymanian public that we are doing what we can to assist them?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, I think sometimes we have to be very careful because...

The Chairman: Ms. Echenique, can I ask you to speak a little more closely into the microphone? I am not able to hear you properly. Thank you.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Thank you, sir.

I think that we have to be extremely careful because bearing in mind that sometimes persons are speaking from their perception, and we are very mindful, again, knowing some of the concerns that have come through the Ministry when I was the Chief Officer. We recognised that emotions were really high. It is not about the nationality or the individual, it is about overall consistency in our approach. It is ensuring that we are allowing cases to be assessed sometimes on a case-by-case basis but still being guided accordingly by clear guidance and legislation.

One of the other pieces that I want to emphasise is the misunderstanding that many people have that any and everybody can just walk in to NAU and obtain services. The priority and the criteria was for Caymanians to obtain services and that is where the focus has been, so in regards to who is receiving services through NAU the majority—unless there were exceptional circumstances—is our very own Caymanians.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you.

The Chairman: The Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Mr. Chairman through you, we are moving on and our next line of questioning is under objectives for and results from social assistance that is covered in the Auditor General's May 2015 Report.

Through you to our witness, paragraphs 30-32 in the report, stated that **“social assistance programmes do not have clear objectives that set**

out desired results”. The OAG found that clear objectives setting out what is expected to be achieved had not been specified by any of the social assistance programmes. There were no performance indicators and no processes were in place to measure the performance of any of these programmes. Recommendation 5: The Auditor General's Office recommended that, **“the government should set clear, realistic and measurable objectives for each social assistance programme to provide a basis for assessing its performance.”**

The original management response to the recommendation stated that the Ministry had policies in place for some payments and was using eligibility criteria approved by the Cabinet for other payments. The Ministry also stated that it was preparing proposed revisions to eligibility criteria based on a 2013 internal audit for Cabinet approval; however, the response went on to say that the NAU was severely understaffed and the recommendation could not be implemented without additional resources.

In the Government Minute of October 2016, the Ministry stated that revised criteria for assessing applications for assistance for seamen had been approved by the Cabinet. Further proposed changes were with the Minister for consideration and a policy decision was needed in relation to insurance for seamen and veterans. The response reiterated that additional resources were needed to implement the recommendation.

In August 2018, the Ministry stated that the implementation of all OAG recommendations were dependent on the development of a social assistance strategy—and here again, it is all about the social assistance strategy in order for any of these recommendations to be considered.

As at June 2021, the Ministry stated that NAU had received staffing and support to accommodate the transition of seamen and veteran services; however, it also stated the intent for these services to be managed by staff at the senior centre, that I spoke of earlier, but it was uncertain what direction the responsible Ministry wanted to take.

My question to our witness, Mr. Chairman: has there been any progress in developing clear, realistic and measurable objectives for social assistance programmes?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, in some aspects, yes, there were clear objectives developed. We also took into consideration and looked at improving existing policies that we had control over. We, again, were mindful that some of the aspects in the Legislation and the Regulations were going to drive these areas.

You mentioned the seamen and veteran services; again, in an effort to ensure that those

services were not immediately added to the responsibility of NAU, we continued to have that process through the Ministry itself; but we did revise the guidelines and the policies that spoke directly to that. The intent was for the NAU to gradually take over that service as a part of that senior centre, and additional staff was allocated for that particular service.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you Mr. Chairman, can the witness indicate whether at that time you had adequate resources?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, we had increased our resources and we were continuously assessing the process to determine whether or not additional resources would have to be included in the upcoming budget cycle, because we were looking at expanding services and looking at specialised areas.

We had some additional staffing to accommodate that, but as the need grew, if it was based on some of the pilot programmes that we would have to expand further, then additional resources would definitely have been necessary; but it had to be continuously assessed and revised. From budget cycle to budget cycle, the intent was, *'are we utilising the existing staff members to their full potential or do we need additional staffing?'* It would have been at that point that we would have made increases to the staffing or not.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Moving on then to the results from social assistance programmes.

Paragraphs 22-24 report that **"the results achieved from the social assistance programmes are not measured, monitored or reported. As a consequence of the lack of clear objectives and performance reporting, there is no effective accountability for these major expenditures."**

"Recommendation 3: The government should develop the means to measure and monitor performance, and to provide the Legislative Assembly [now Parliament] with regular feedback on the results achieved by social assistance programmes."

The original management response to the recommendation stated that the Ministry agreed with the recommendation and that it would form part of the coordinated social assistance strategy, however, as above, no date was provided for implementation.

In the Government Minute of October 2016, the Ministry repeated that they should form part of the strategy and that all agencies involved were expected to develop mechanisms for monitoring, evaluating and reporting.

The Ministry also stated that subject to additional resources being provided, they expected that the strategy would be implemented in the 2016/17 budget year.

In August 2018, the Ministry stated that the implementation of all OAG recommendations was dependent on the development of a social assistance strategy. As at June 2021, no update was provided.

Can the Chief Officer state the outcomes expected from social assistance programmes and how these will be measured and reported?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, the outlines, as it related to specific services through our entities, were taken into consideration as a part of their outputs.

We recognised and appreciated that the monitoring and the evaluation laid very heavily on some of the statistical pieces that were lacking in the organisation and one of the areas that we looked at further developing was the database to help us gather information continuously and to be able to truly monitor trends and know the direction that we needed to have further development in. That would have also allowed us to get a better indication of the client numbers we were being faced with—were there any increases to those clients, and where the needs were for further growth and development. The review of the database started and there were adjustments made to the database to help with that process. That was one of the areas that we worked on and made adjustments to.

Since I have indicated the database as a tool for us to gather information and monitor some of these areas of work, I also think it is very important that I mention that, although we made adjustments to the existing database, it became very obvious that it was just not adequate to meet the needs of the organisation. The next step was not to invest anymore trying to advance that database, but to look into getting a brand new database that would help us with monitoring, evaluation and statistic components. Those were some of the pieces that we had started to work on.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you Mr. Chairman to the witness. in terms of the database, have you all procured that or is that still outstanding, because bear in mind that this report was back in 2015; based on the time lapse, what is the position with regard to the new database?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, I am most grateful for the reference made to 2015, bearing in mind that I did not join the organisation and take up the post of Chief Officer until 2018. Some

of the pieces I found coming into that organisation and I appreciate some of the works and consideration was done prior to me coming in.

As I indicated, on arrival, what we looked at and took into consideration was trying to advance and further develop the database that was there. It was the understanding, after we went through a process with an external entity, that despite efforts to upgrade the database it just was not meeting the needs of the organisation. The recommendation from a cost-saving perspective was to have us move to getting a completely new database.

Those are pieces that were intended to start in 2020 and continue into 2021 in that budget cycle; unfortunately, I don't think that it got as far as we would have liked because of being side-tracked by COVID in 2020, and it was not a piece that was finalised by me prior to leaving.

[Pause]

The Chairman: If there are no further questions on this section from the Committee, then we will move on to responsibility for social assistance.

Member for East End.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you. Mr. Chair.

In the Auditor General's report, paragraph 21 says: **"the manner in which roles, responsibilities and budgets for the social assistance programmes are assigned across ministries may hinder the development of a coordinated and consistent approach. For example, while responsibility for ex gratia payments to seamen and benefits payments to ex-servicemen rest with the Ministry of Community Affairs, it is the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development that has responsibility for enrolling Seamen and Veterans for medical insurance coverage with CINICO and the Ministry of Health that is responsible for assisting to meet the cost of the tertiary medical care."**

"Basically there are three Ministries involved in providing benefits to Seamen and Veterans. In the case of medical care for indigents, although the Ministry of Health pays for the care, it has no role in determining the policy or criteria that determine who qualifies as an indigent for this purpose. That function is exercised by the Department of Children and Family Services within the Ministry of Community Affairs."

Based on the aforementioned, can you share with this Committee some specific issues or challenges arising from the roles, responsibilities and budgets for the social assistance programme being spread across government during your time as a Chief Officer?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you

Mr. Chair, I think that as it related to the Seamen and Veterans, because the expectation for Community Affairs was very focused on their benefits as opposed to the medical components, that was easy for us to budget; we were able to track the numbers and make some determinations about increases. From a budgetary and management perspective, the numbers were relatively small so that was easy for us to budget for and manage.

As it relates to the indigent medical, that was always a concern. The budgeting and the funding for that did not fall rightfully so, as you indicated, within our Ministry. We were contributing to the assessments and working very closely with other entities to determine whether or not the individuals were suitable for these services, but we were not, at any point, involved with the budget process or how much should be budgeted, and those numbers fluctuated quite frequently.

That was an area, again, that we hoped to have closer collaboration on and some of those pieces would indeed have been addressed by the change in Legislation; that the Ministry of Health was also looking at and taking into consideration, because the funding sat with the Ministry of Health and then the assessment sat with the Ministry of Community Affairs. We played a small role in the process, but the funding and the budgeting perspective sat with the Ministry of Health.

Closer collaboration would have definitely been to our advantage as it relates to that, because I am mindful that that is an area that required supplementary funding through that Ministry on several occasions.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Thank you Mr. Chair.

I want to ask something that I think is quite sensitive but over and over I have been getting these complaints or expressions.

In talking about responsibility for social assistance, I don't know what the officers at NAU are trained in or what their backgrounds are, et cetera, but some persons who enter your facility at the main office get a feeling when they approach the officers, almost like it's their fault why they are in that position. I'm not sure what kind of training, as I said earlier, that the officers are given to deal with this type of customer, if I may say that.

It would be helpful if you could give me some background as to the training that these officers receive before they are given that responsibility in dealing with citizens in need, albeit, the country at some point needs to accept responsibility for some of these woes, whether that is education or otherwise. It would be helpful to the public if you could give me the background on some of the training and skills-sets that they are armed with.

Thank you.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you, Mr. Chair, some of the senior officers had a background and qualification in social work, which was to the advantage of working with the clientele that came through the doors on a regular basis, understanding and appreciating that they came in with multiple issues.

As I previously indicated, it is not that when they walk through the door their need is for financial services and that is it. There were so many other issues that had to be looked at and taken into consideration. Some of them had mental health issues. The staff there were not necessarily trained in those specific areas. The staff of NAU obtained basic training and intervention skills, but they were not at a social worker level. They did not have any specialised training to deal with the more unique clientele that came through the door. They did their best to address the issues and the concerns; tried to work in the most professional way with the clientele that came through the doors, even when that clientele were not necessarily the easiest people to deal with.

Again, because of the nature of the clientele that was coming in, it was a discussion surrounding whether or not the staffing qualifications and level needed to be revised, further looked at and taken into consideration; but training was extended to the staff to better equip them to handle the population that was coming in to them.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Chair, I thank the Chief Officer for that response. I guess we can only recognise some of the frustrations that some of our Caymanian people go through, Mr. Chair, in terms of standing in long lines, the delays, the expectations of things that people think they should not have to provide. The first frustration is trying to find a ride, or transport, to get to NAU; then it is the long wait, hence my reason for always bringing this up—and I have been at it for some time now. I think that the situation would be less hostile if the Department considered opening up an Eastern district office. I think there would be less hostility when persons recognise that the Department, or the government, is looking at their convenience and comfort.

I thank the Chief Officer.

As she said, some of those customers are not the easiest to deal with, and I applaud the staff of NAU for the hard work that they are doing, sometimes handling situations that they were not even trained to deal with; we must appreciate that the job that they are doing is not an easy one. As the Chief Officer said earlier, around the world and doing her research, social assistance is not an easy thing to deal with and no one has a found complete cure. I thank you for that answer.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Mr. Chair, if I may, just for the benefit of clarity, although we were speaking specifically on NAU, I want to share that the Community Development Officers, through the Department of Children and Family Services are very much involved with the community as well.

Just to reiterate that the pilot programme, as it relates to officers going out into the districts—depending on need and demand—would have guided whether or not we moved in the direction of offices being in other districts. However, we had to be able to properly assess that from a cost-saving perspective to know that the needs and demands were there, before we incorporated it into a budget process.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: I appreciate that Chief Officer Echenique but one of the things I thought they would have done, in terms of their assessment, is to recognise that Bodden Town, East End and North side probably has some of the older persons residing there; some of the older districts. I think that we should have recognised that there would be more persons in need from these. I don't know what the starts are but if they look at the fabrics of how those districts are not made up, that assistance—and I am being very careful as to how I have mentioned this but there is some truth in there.

I think it is high time now that we that we considered... I know it's not the witness' responsibility anymore, but I will drill down again a little later with the actual Chief Officer of the day, in regards to trying to... I think it's going to help them in developing another office in the eastern districts.

The Chairman: Okay, were are going to turn now to the legislative framework.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Before we move forward Mr. Chair, I would like to just ask one further question on the responsibility for social assistance.

The Chairman: Yeah, please go ahead.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Through you Mr. Chair, I would like to ask the witness, in relation to recommendation number 2: incorporate a coordinated social assistance strategy. I did not quite get clarity.

I understand you set out the background on the difficulties with trying to incorporate a coordinated social assistance strategy, but I wonder if you could let me know, for my own purposes, if there has been any progress at all in implementing that. Has there been any start to trying to implement it?

I am curious, as looking at the report there has not really been any indication of an update. I know you expressed some of the setbacks that you were having,

but has any progress been made with establishing that framework?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: At this point, I am probably going to say yes and *no*.

On a large and broad perspective, no—there was still much room for growth and development. Some of the implementation pieces that were implemented and moved forward, and we were monitoring, had to do with the collaborative pieces between two entities: NAU and DCFS. Those were aspects that we recognised were critical because the clientele with both entities were very, very similar and sometimes the same.

Those were starting points that we looked at and placed much emphasis on; some broader pieces, because they included other entities, were not developed any further.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you.

The Chairman: Any other questions before we move on to the next section?

The Chairman: Member for Savannah.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Moving on now to legislative framework in relation to the Ex Gratia payments to seamen and ex-servicemen.

It states here that **appropriate management control frameworks were not in place for social assistance programmes**. The Office of the Auditor General found that there was no legal basis for paying ex gratia benefits to seamen and ex-servicemen and that **payments made were based on motions passed by members of the Legislative Assembly**. The report also stated that there were no policy or procedures relating to these two programmes, and **documented eligibility criteria of a somewhat rudimentary nature have been in place since their inception**.

The Office of the Auditor General recommended **the government should develop Legislation that provides appropriate authority for programmes to pay benefits to seamen and ex-servicemen, and arrange for the subsequent development of policies, criteria and operational procedures consistent with the Legislation**.

The original management response to the recommendations stated that the Ministry had revised the criteria for benefits, and recommendations were before the Cabinet for approval and these should form part of the elderly Legislation and social assistance strategy. No date was provided for implementation.

In the Government Minute of October 2016, the Ministry repeated the original management response. The Office of the Auditor General noted that the Older

Persons Act 2017, passed by the Legislative Assembly in March 2017, did not include any provision to pay benefits to seamen and veterans.

In August 2018, the Ministry stated that the implementation of all Office of the Auditor General recommendations was dependent on the development of a social assistance strategy. As at June 2021, the Ministry stated that a member of staff was seconded from the Cabinet Office in 2020, to assist with review of the older person's action plan and establishment of a senior centre to ensure that all services for all people aged 60 and over were considered and administered by one Ministry. The senior centre opened in April 2021, but review and further development were ongoing. This does not directly address recommendations 6 in the Auditor General's report; however, the Ministry's response also stated that revised Legislation has been drafted and handed over to the new Ministry.

Can the witness please advise the proposed changes to the Legislation, and how these will address the Office of the Auditor General's original recommendation?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you, Mr. Chair, there was, indeed, no Legislation that guided the seamen and veterans' process as indicated however, there were criteria and clear guidelines, in terms of how persons were eligible for such services.

The secondment by the staff member from the Cabinet Office to revisit some of these pieces was taken into consideration, not only as it related to the Legislation that guided the Older Persons Council and some of the action plans that were coming out of that, but also to look at areas within the NAU Legislation that were being revised, that would address these aspects. The benefits for seamen and veterans were included in drafted Legislation and Regulations for the NAU.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you very much. I appreciate that answer.

Now, this question is in relation to Poor Relief Payments. It states that the Law governing "Permanent Poor Relief" and "Temporary Poor Relief Assistance", the Poor Persons (Relief) Law (1997 Revision) is very brief and that the government had previously identified the need to develop regulations to deal with Poor Relief awards in its Strategic Policy Statements, although these had yet to be developed.

The Office of the Auditor General found that policies and related eligibility criteria have been developed for both Permanent Poor Relief and Temporary Poor Relief Assistance, however, there was a lack of "[...] **comprehensive, documented procedures that would guide officials in delivering the programmes**." The OAG's "**review of the eligibility criteria, identified several issues that**

called into question their consistency with the requirements of the Poor Persons (Relief) Law and their suitability as practical guides to programme delivery.”

It was recommended by the OAG that “[...] the government should follow through on the 2013/2014 Strategic Policy Statement to amend the Poor Persons (Relief) Law and to develop accompanying regulations so as to provide sound legislative authority for poor relief programmes including the basis for the development of criteria needed to effectively manage the programmes.”

The original management response to the recommendations stated that the Ministry had drafted Regulations for the Poor Persons (Relief) Law. These were due to be presented to the Cabinet by June 30, 2015. The response also stated that the Poor Persons (Relief) Law needed to be amended to reflect the overarching philosophy of the social assistance strategy and practice. No date was provided for the revision to the Law.

In the Government Minute of October 2016, the Ministry stated that a policy decision was needed from the Cabinet and that after unforeseen delays, draft regulations were being reviewed by Legal Drafting, although no date was provided for completion.

In the Government Minute of August 2018, the Ministry stated that it was reviewing the Poor Persons (Relief) Law and this was due to be completed by the end of 2018, after which revised Legislation would be drafted; however, the Ministry also stated that revisions to the Law were linked to the development of the social assistance strategy, for which no date was given.

In the January 2019 PAC Hearing, Ministry officials stated that significant work had been done to revise the Poor Persons (Relief) Law. They stated that the Law was very outdated, inadequate, and did not meet the needs of potential users. On this basis, the Ministry had decided to do a full revision of the Law with a view to repealing the 1997 Law and replacing it with modern financial assistance Legislation that included, among other things, eligibility criteria and an appeals’ process. Ministry officials indicated a draft Law should be ready for consultation by the end of January 2019, and debated in the House before the end of 2019. The Regulations would follow shortly thereafter.

In its 2019 report, the PAC recommended that Legislation to replace the Poor Persons (Relief) Law should be brought to the Legislature as soon as possible.

As of June 2021, the Ministry stated that despite delays in 2020, a draft Bill and Regulations had been provided to the new Ministry with oversight for NAU, to finalise.

Could the witness tell us the reasons for the delays in updating the Poor Persons (Relief) Act and bringing it to the House for debate and approval?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, *previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage*: Through you Mr. Chair, as rightfully indicated, the existing Poor Persons (Relief) Law is significantly outdated. I think efforts were made initially to look at whether or not that could be reviewed and it was felt that we would be in a better position to establish a complete new piece of Legislation. With that in mind, and appreciating that we were adding additional aspects to that piece of Legislation, it was taking significant time.

We wanted to ensure that the entities involved were very much involved with the process of developing the piece of Legislation because we had to ensure that what was in Legislation and Regulation was going to guide some of the concerns from an operational perspective, so it took significant time for that to be done. The next step was for us to ensure that public consultation was also taken into consideration.

That piece of Legislation—along with regulations—was handed over to the new Chief Officer and Minister. I know that initially we said that the Regulations would follow, but we had the Regulations drafted along with the Legislation itself.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mrs. Echenique.

Could you give us some idea of the proposed changes to the Legislation, and how these align with the yet-to-be-developed Social Assistance Strategy?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, *previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage*: Through you Mr. Chair, there were a number of areas that we looked at and took into consideration to enhance operations of the entities that we were responsible for, and that fell into that piece of Legislation.

One of the concerns had to do with the timeliness of services. It was one of the areas that we looked at very carefully in that Legislation; to ensure that persons did not have significant periods of time when coming in for services; that their services would [not] be delayed unnecessarily. There were numerous pieces that were taken into consideration, along with additional services that were not originally included in the Poor Persons (Relief) Law.

Another aspect that we wanted to ensure was covered, was the appeals’ process. If persons were not pleased with the services that they were obtaining, what would be the steps moving forward, as it relates to how clients could be empowered to question why they did not get services and appeal that process.

There were a number of areas that we looked at from an operational perspective, and took into consideration to enhance services; but we also wanted to know that needs of the clientele, as part of us empowering them, was taken into consideration.

Another area that was critical and key—because on a number of occasions people said to us, *NAU is giving services to people and it's encouraging them not to actually go out and seek employment*; we wanted to somehow be able to ensure that, even without employment, if someone was getting services through NAU they were still giving back to the community. Therefore, we incorporated a component into that piece of Legislation that spoke about community service. So while an individual was obtaining services from NAU, they could also be required to complete community service.

Again, it was on a need-by-need basis because some people might not have been fit to do some of this work, but if it was an able-bodied person, those were areas that we were looking at and taking into consideration.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mrs. Echenique, and I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you very much for answering these questions so eloquently.

I know your position right now is not in this Ministry, but you have done an excellent job of answering the questions. That was the end of my questions at this time.

The Chairman: Do other members have questions?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Through you Mr. Chair, just a quick question on the draft Legislation, since it was already handed over to the Minister.

Can you speak a bit in relation to the Regulations—does that have any proposed change to the way the assessment process will be conducted? Just elaborate a little in terms of the net household salary; does the policy change the formula that is currently set out?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you, Mr. Chair, we did try to take into consideration—obviously, the Legislation itself takes a broader perspective. The Regulations dive into some of these pieces; it is a little bit more specific. And we did try to take into consideration the fact that cost of living has changed and some of the baselines that we were utilising were not necessarily in line with existing times. Those were aspects that we looked at and took into consideration with the establishment of the Regulations.

I think that it was necessary for us to get information as it relates to the ongoing cost of living within the Cayman Islands and utilise the statistical information as a baseline for some of the guidelines and regulations that we were trying to implement.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Good. That sounds good. Thank you.

Just one additional question in relation to the Regulations. Can you speak to persons who would fall into particular categories? This goes back to assessment purposes—for example, do the Regulations set out different means of assessment for elderly or disabled persons?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, the assessment process was more on a consistent basis, but what we did take into consideration persons who may have had special needs and what type of benefits they would require, that someone without special needs might not.

So, the general assessment process, when we talk about assessing the individual, is to determine whether or not they are suitable for the services and whether they have any form of means to support themselves; those are basic things that would be applicable to anyone who would be walking in the door asking for services.

If their circumstances, based on confirmation from a medical practitioner, indicates that they have long term illnesses, then that might determine what services they get, the length of time they get them, things of that nature. So the services might change depending on the individual needs, but the assessment process was more on a consistent basis.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you.

Just to clarify why I asked that question: it is quite burdensome—in particular for the elderly and disabled persons—to be reassessed every six months, and I would hope that the Regulations set out something that will make life easier for those persons who are already set back a bit.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, the initial assessment and the determination of the person's circumstances, if they require long term support and assistance, would be taken into consideration as part of their services but we try to keep the standard of the initial assessment process—to determine the baseline and suitability—for anyone coming into the organisation; but a senior, or someone definitely with a long term illness, the length of time that they obtain their services would definitely be different.

Even without the Legislation in place, some of our seniors are getting permanent financial assistance. Again, that is not something that they have to be continuously assessed for; it's not automatically stopped at a six month or one year period. It is permanent financial assistance, so that would continue until they pass.

There are times when, for auditing purposes, we will run general assessments to determine: *have this person's circumstances changed in any way at all?* And just to confirm that, *yes, indeed this is someone who is still living and is still in need of services*, but for the most part, those are some of the pieces as it relates to the seniors or some of the persons who have been identified as having permanent medical illness. They are already in a position to obtain permanent financial assistance even without the new Legislation.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay, let's move on to the next section, which I think we were dealing with the eligibility criteria.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Yeah, that is where we are now moving to. Thank you.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you Mr. Chair. I will move on to the application of eligibility criteria.

The Office of the Auditor General reported that some eligibility criteria existed for each of the social assistance programmes. The application of eligibility and documentation to support decisions in paragraphs 28-29 of the report stated that there were inconsistencies in the criteria being applied to determine eligibility for benefits. Paragraphs 60-63 also reported a number of gaps in the documentation and client case files to support the decisions that had been made, and in some cases, the entire file was missing.

The Office of the Auditor General recommended that the Ministries responsible should take steps to ensure that eligibility for benefits is determined by robust and transparent application of eligibility criteria and clearly supported by evidence in programme files.

The original management response to this recommendation stated criteria were in place, however, in response to recommendation 5, the Ministry also stated that it was preparing proposed revisions to eligibility criteria for approval by Cabinet. In the Government Minute of October 2016, the Ministry repeated the response and stated that the revised criteria were implemented in September 2014, and in the scope of the Outline Business Case.

In response to recommendation 5, the Ministry also stated that revised criteria had been approved by the Cabinet and further proposed changes were with the Minister for consideration.

In August 2018, the Ministry stated that the implementation of all the recommendations was dependent on the development of the Social Assistance Strategy—this Social Assistance Strategy keeps popping up, it's holding everything up.

In June 2021, the Ministry stated that ongoing review of the criteria was being guided by the DCO, however, changes were subject to the progress of the Legislation.

Mrs. Echenique, my first question: Can you please update on the revised eligibility criteria?

Thank you.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, the criteria were dependent on the type of services, so there were aspects that we looked at and recognised that there was a need to revise some of the criteria and guidelines, and as a result move forward with those pieces. There were other areas that the criteria and the guidelines still seemed very relevant and very strong. The checks and balances were in place, so we continued to utilise them but those adjustments were made more as it related to the various services. So, there might be criteria and guidelines in place for example, for the Permanent Financial Assistance that were slightly different from someone who was only coming in for temporary services.

Again, these were some of the pieces that were taken into consideration as we reviewed the Legislation itself. The Legislation clearly looked at all aspects of the services within the entity, as well as provided in the Regulations, clear guidelines and the relevant templates that would have been utilised by that entity because again, I appreciate that there were concerns about the documentation of these in files and supporting documentation from client to client. Again, these were all aspects that were taken into consideration as it related to the Legislation and the Regulations itself. Then of course, our looking at a new data management system would have contributed to that process, because we were hoping to have some of these pieces electronically to move away from the paper file process.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you.

Additional question going back to the criteria: can you then give any assurances that the eligibility criteria is being or has been consistently applied?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, I would like to sit here and confidently say 'yes' because I am very hopeful that the team that is assessing individuals walking through the door is going to be very sensitive to their needs and is going to apply the criteria to the individual on a consistent basis.

Although, I would like to also indicate that I am mindful that that entity was not perfect and there were times when there were areas that an officer—and this

is applicable not only in NAU, but other entities as well; there are checks and balances that we have to go through—who is working with the individual and doing the assessment might have missed something in the process, and so the next step would be for the senior officer to look at it and take into consideration prior to approval. So we are hoping that when one area might have been missed by a staff member, it might have been caught by another staff member.

With that said, the checks and balances are there. I am very hopeful that we will have that consistency and it would be applied across the board.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you.
I have no further questions.

The Chairman: I know we are getting well into the lunchtime period, but if it is at all possible, I would like for us to finish questioning this witness before we take the lunch break.

In the interest of trying to move things on, Mrs. Echenique, I will just ask you to discuss with us the measures that the Ministry has in place to deal with appeals against decisions taken by a particular unit or person who is adjudged on an application.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Mr. Chair, we recognised that was an area where we had some gaps in the system; that is why it was so important that it was clearly outlined within the drafted Legislation but, pending the implementation of the Legislation, we ensured that there were tiers within the organisation in which individuals could put their concerns and their appeal forward.

If the decision was made at supervisory level, and the individual seeking services was not pleased with the outcome, it could have been escalated to the Director for her to review and to take into consideration. The next step: if at that level it was not resolved, then it would come to Ministry level for us to look at and to take into consideration. There were legal matters and discrepancies where we had to involve the police for investigation and we allowed the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service (RCIPS) to then take those necessary steps as it related to services that were misused or abused.

To answer your question, Mr. Chair: although we were expanding on them through the drafted Legislation itself, we also ensured that as an interim measure, we had some checks and balances in place at the Department level, and then at the Ministry level as well.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Just one final question surrounding that. It appears to me that most people I talk to, having made an application, had a response that they were not

happy with, and were not necessarily aware that there is an appeal process. Is that process communicated on the Ministry's website?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Mr. Chair, I am not certain that it is clearly indicated on the website. If someone comes in and they are not happy with the outcome, staff members are encouraged to advise the individual accordingly, but I am not aware if it is clearly outlined on the website or not.

The Chairman: Thank you.

I'm going to move on now to the operating procedures. I believe there may be one or two questions there? Yes. The Member for East End and then we are going to conclude with resources.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you Mr. Chair.

We are well aware of the issues surrounding the reports that we have here—2015 and onwards—predating the new Chief Officer, but in the Auditor General's report recommendation 13 [the PAC] recommended "[...] a major overhaul of the procedures and policies to devolve authority and reduce the bureaucratic duplication that was clearly demonstrated in the public Hearings may be a better use of Government resources."

There was no response from the Ministry in October 2016 or 2018, and none in 2021 but during your time as a CO, was there any meaningful progress in updating the policies and procedures, and if not what were the hindrances?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, as I indicated, there were some aspects as it related to specific services that we looked at revising policies and criteria to ensure that it was of more benefit not only to the clientele, but also to the staff members who were having to go through some of these pieces.

I think that, again, we were looking at a thorough assessment on the day-to-day operations of some of these pieces to ensure that when we were making changes, we made meaningful changes; not making changes just for change sake, because we did not want to frustrate the clientele and the public anymore by making changes that were only going to make them frustrated or cause further confusion.

Some of the changes that were made were done very gradually and were done very, very, slowly but it was with the intent that we not only wanted to make changes to enhance service, but that the changes were again very, very meaningful. So there were some areas within the service that we looked at and revised, and tried to make it much more user friendly for the clientele themselves.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you.

The meaningful changes—and we go back to previous sections where it says “roles and responsibilities”—that you were making, did you have cooperation from any of the other entities that they would have impacted?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, again, it was very necessary for us to have collaboration and cooperation from some of the other entities because...I want to say almost 99 per cent of the time the clientele that we were working with were also working with other entities, and we were looking at how we could better meet the individual's needs from a more holistic perspective, so it did require us collaborating with other entities.

I am sure you will understand and appreciate that even with some of the changes that we made internally, if another entity did not make the adjustments, we did not have any direct control over that, but the collaboration was there and we did our best to work with other entities when we were looking at bringing about some of these changes—and also recommending to those other entities how we could best work together if they made certain changes.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you, Ms. Echenique.

The Chairman: Member for George Town South we are going to move on now to talk about resources.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Through you to the witness, paragraphs 68-70 reported that services were not always provided in accordance with policy and in a timely manner, and there was no systematic information available. The Auditor General recommended that social assistance programme terms and conditions are consistent with the resources available to the government for these purposes, including the resources required to administer the programmes and provide quality services.

Can the witness say, prior to your departure from the Ministry of Community Affairs, were you satisfied that you had adequate resources to administer these various programmes?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, unfortunately, with us being faced with COVID, and that increased the demands on the entities, to say that we would have had adequate staffing at that time, I cannot sit here confidently and say that. However, throughout two budget cycles, we did look at and enhanced/increased the human capital

for the entities to try to ensure that they were better equipped to meet the needs. Also, because of the increase that we were seeing and faced with as a result of COVID, there were additional staff members brought on; some of them were on an interim basis, and only for the period of time that we were under some major demands, but we also had some that remained with the organisation.

Based on the funding we had in the budget cycle, we did the best that we could to ensure that entities got additional staffing. It is very, very, challenging to say because of the increase in demands that we have seen as of late, that they have adequate staffing at this point. I cannot confidently see that.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Mr. Chairman and this is not a question. Perhaps I would say that in terms of the technology we have today and having an updated database, we may not need as much human capital to carry out these programmes and services.

I will address that with the Chief Officer this afternoon, in terms of the update on the database and being able to use that in a more efficient way.

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Just to add to that Mr. Chair: I completely agree with that comment, but I think that it is important—because of some of the clientele that we have—that we ensure that we have a good balance.

We understand and appreciate that some people, especially some of our seniors—and this is not across the board for all of them, because some of them are very savvy when it comes to technology—just don't have the ability to complete forms online or to utilise some of the electronic systems. Having a good balance between the electronic systems as well as caring, compassionate, understanding and helpful staff members is going to be critical with this process as well.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Through you, Mr. Chair, I also just want to make a statement which lines with what the Member for George Town South just raised. I think it goes back to the need for that strategic framework to be in place, because how else do you measure whether or not you have enough staff?

That framework would obviously set out who are the clients of NAU, what are their needs and how we address them, so I think it goes back to the elephant in the room and the fact that we need to get that addressed.

The Chairman: I wholeheartedly agree with you member, and I think that is an issue we want to air quite extensively with the Chief Officer this afternoon.

Member from Savannah.

Ms. Heather D. Boddén: Mr. Chairman, thank you.

I just want to make a statement in regards to what the Member for Bodden Town East mentioned earlier, in regards to perhaps considering an office in the outer districts.

In my position now as Parliamentary Secretary under the Ministry of Social Development, I have all intentions of ensuring that that happens, but I also want to make it known that CINICO just opened an office in the Savannah community, which has been helping tremendously with those persons from the outer districts that they don't have to drive into Town to deal with their issues at CINICO. That office in Countryside has been providing tremendous service to those from the outer districts.

Hopefully in the near future an office for the Department of Children and Family Services, as well NAU, will become a reality in the outer districts.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Chair thank you so much.

I just want to express my appreciation for the Parliament Secretary for taking this up and hopefully this can become reality over this term. I know some of the problems we have in trying to move services to the Eastern district is space. I saw that CINICO office there and I know that it's doing a tremendous service to the Eastern districts. I thank you so much, Member for Savannah, for agreeing to champion this cause.

Thank you.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I would just like to relay my thanks and appreciation to Mrs. Echenique for being here with us. You have done a tremendous job in answering our questions and I so appreciate you.

Thank you.

The Chairman: I said we were going to conclude with resources, but I realise there is another section here and that is social assistance payments.

Member for Bodden Town East, I believe you agreed that you would lead with that section and then we will conclude.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Thank you Mr. Chair.

To the Chief Officer: in its 2018 report the PAC recommended the Government consider the creation of a standard rate of payment for welfare recipients, whether they are classed as indigents, seamen, veterans or those receiving temporary assistance. This can be found on pages 53 to 55.

In August 2018, the Ministry and the Needs Assessment Unit agreed with this recommendation and stated that they were currently working to modernise enabling Legislation in order to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of financial assistance services. This

included a review of the Poor Persons (Relief) Law in order to prepare updated financial assistance Legislation. As part of this process, the Ministry and NAU are looking to standardise payments and services in order to provide the necessary clarity required. It was anticipated, Mr. Chair, that the review will be conducted by the end of 2018.

In June 2021, just a few months ago, the Ministry stated that draft Legislation and Regulations had been transferred to the Ministry with oversight for community development to pursue and finalise this process. It also stated that approval was made in the 2020/21 budget to accommodate an increase by \$100 per year for indigents, seamen and veterans, in an effort to address the cost of living. Due to the substantial implication on the budget, considerations may be given each budget cycle for necessary gradual increase to these services.

Chief Officer Echenique, what provisions are in the draft Legislation in relation to the standard payment rates?

Mrs. Teresa Echenique, previous Chief Officer - Ministry of Community Affairs, Chief Officer of Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage: Through you Mr. Chair, existing implementation was completed as it relates to services for seamen, veteran and PFA recipient to ensure that those receiving funding were consistent and to ensure that they were increased, as just indicated.

As it relates to some of the temporary services—as I indicated when I answered another question—that was taken into consideration when we drafted the Legislation and the Regulations, and we looked at the cost of living to guide that process.

As it exists now, we have some level of flexibility, in terms of decisions that we might have to override even though we have standards in place, because we understand and appreciate that based on the existing cost of living, what might have been a baseline for rental assistance, for example, if individuals cannot find accommodation within that price range, we then have to make some internal adjustments to be able to accommodate the prices that are on the market at this point. So whenever there are changes in the market, we also have to take those factors into consideration, but some of the pieces within the Legislation are guided by information that is relevant to the cost of living in the Cayman Islands.

We will have to continue to review those pieces; that is not going to be something that is set in stone. Similarly to the PFA and seamen and veterans, we have made a decision within the last budget cycle (2020 and 2021) to uplift each of those areas by \$100 each, per year; and so that is something that we review from budget cycle to budget cycle, and take into consideration.

If it is incorporated into the budget, then we definitely will ensure that the clientele benefits from it.

[Pause]

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Chair, I want to thank Chief Officer Echenique for her contribution here today and for the answer. I appreciated your assistance and support while you were in the position and even now, as you so eloquently answered our questions here today and agreeing to come on to be a witness. I thank you so much for the work that you did while you had the responsibility, and I know wherever you have landed now, you will continue the same professionalism and quality of work.

I thank you.

The Chairman: Are there any other questions from the Committee? Member for East End.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: I don't have a question, Mr. Chairman. I would like to echo my colleague from Bodden Town East's sentiments and thank you so much Mrs. Echenique, for being here and answering our questions today.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Well, that brings us to the conclusion of this segment of today's Hearing.

Mrs. Echenique, you have been a real trouper today. We sat here and questioned you for nearly three hours and you have held up remarkably. At one point, I have to say, I was thinking of asking if you would you like for us to take a break, but I figured you probably want to get through this as much as we do and so you could get on to your regular work as well.

I just want to extend as well, my sincere thanks to you on behalf of the Committee for being here today and for the frank and very honest responses, I think you have given.

Thank you very much for the time today. I know you are in a new Ministry, a new role. I just want to wish you continued success in your work as well. With that, we will conclude the proceedings at this time for the lunch break; it is now 10 minutes to 1:00. We will reconvene at 2:00pm with the final witness for the afternoon. Once again, thank you all. Let's recommence promptly at 2:00pm.

Thank you.

Proceedings suspended at 12: 48pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:15 pm

The Chairman: Good afternoon, everyone.

Thank you all for being back quite promptly to start the second part of our Hearing today. With us in the Chamber is the now Chief Officer of the Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development, Mr. Eric Bush.

Mr. Bush, I want to welcome you this afternoon. I am grateful for your time to appear here and answer questions.

Today we have been examining and discussing the Auditor General's Report entitled: **A follow-up on past PAC recommendations - 2021** that was issued by her last month, August. We went to great lengths interviewing the previous Chief Officer and we learned a number of the issues. The fact is that the report goes back to 2015 and subsequent Hearings and updates reflect that not very much has been accomplished in almost six years since it was first issued by the Auditor General, so we had big discussions around it.

Of course, the former Chief Officer is no longer able to speak to what has happened since she is no longer there so really, this is now your baby, if I could use that term, and the responsibility now falls to you and to your team there to see that these issues are addressed. Many of them to me seem really fundamental to the successful operation of the unit, social development and different programmes that we have and are offered by the Government.

I am going to kick things off this afternoon, sir, and invite you to give us an update on where the current state of play is. In particular, we have heard much today about the strategy and the framework that, I think, are critical to the Unit's success and delivery of services.

I would like to understand what was really handed over to you; what have you found since taking over as Chief Officer?

MINISTRY OF INVESTMENT INNOVATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Thank you, Mr. Chair and good afternoon, Committee members. My name is Eric Bush, I am the Chief Officer for the Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development.

In short, Mr. Chair, a lot. A lot was handed to us; the entire social welfare, social development offerings and protective nature that the government offers to the most vulnerable and/or special needs. Now, it's fair to say, as you said in your introduction, that this has been going on for quite some time—the first Auditor General's report issued in May 2015, with various government responses and follow-ups and responses; and here we are in this iteration.

We think we took advantage of the way in which the Auditor General's Office, quite in their own words, tried to make it as user friendly as possible because, as I say often, Social development—used to be called Community Affairs—is a behemoth of a

subject matter. What we found too is, just like anything else in life, it's a growing subject. Within the 25 different recommendations made over the years, every PAC Hearing, we noted that there were two to five more recommendations given.

I fully expect that to be the case after this as well, because life does go on; but what we try to do in the spirit of accountability and transparency, is add to that in writing, what the Ministry has done in the five months since we have been handed over ministerial responsibility and using the Auditor General's Office's own format in talking about what the Ministry has done; so, thank you Mr. Chair for allowing us to hand those to each member and of course, we can speak to any particular one or all, as members wish.

The Chairman: What can you tell us then about the existence of the strategic framework that is so important to this whole process? If you could speak about the framework itself, the strategy. The other critical element is the update of the Legislation.

Those are key elements that have come out of the testimony this morning that I think we really need to understand where you are at with them.

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Sure—and some of these recommendations understandably overlap with each other; some are very similar.

The first, if I may, Mr. Chair, is **“the Government should develop a coordinated social assistance strategy, including clear priorities and the specification of desired results to provide overall direction and planning and delivering social assistance and monitoring the results achieved.”**

In Q2, the Ministry commissioned Ernst & Young (EY) to facilitate an internal strategic stakeholder workshop to develop a strategic plan for social development, bringing together the policy leads from the Ministry, as well as the Department Heads of DCFS, NAU and the Sunrise Training Development Centre, as well as senior managers within those departments. That allowed us to understand where we were as a team and where each department was and, through that, better definition of the values, mission, and vision of each department and what the collective needed to be of social development itself.

Then on August 30th 2021, Caucus approved the creation of a Social Development Strategic Planning Committee which is chaired by the Minister of Social Development, the Honourable André Ebanks and co-chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary, Ms. Heather Bodden.

This Advisory Committee, which meets weekly, has met for the last three weeks, and the intention and the vision is to support the needs of the vulnerable in the society and enhance the capabilities of the vulnerable to sustain themselves. The mission is in rough form and is to transform and strengthen the

provision of comprehensive and sustainable social development services.

What we believe we have done in the first five months is taken stock, taken ministerial possession, if you will, of this massive topic.

We have also categorised and catalogued all of the various reports that go back to the 90s. We have documented and categorised all of the various recommendations, not just from the Auditor General's report but from others, as I said, over the last 20 years. And now through that, the way in which we have decided to create some organisation around it, is look at each report in the three categories of how we have divided up the population of service. So we have taken the service provision first, and what we have done is categorise it in:

- Children or youth;
- Adults and family; and
- Older persons.

So every report, every recommendation, is now divided into those three categories, understanding that the needs in the three categories may be different—or will likely be different—but some will be the same. That is the way in which we are creating some organisation around all of the work, all of what has been written and said that should be done and trying to carve up this mammoth task into bite-sized chunks. Once we do that, then we will prioritise on what we can achieve, and create a road map with timelines—that we will hold ourselves accountable to—to the Public Accounts Committee, to the Government and to the public, of how we will achieve this, and start moving the dial forward towards enhancing better service and protection for our most vulnerable.

[Pause]

The Chairman: So then, if I understand you correctly, you are going to be recreating or preparing a new strategic framework or will you be taking that one and working with it?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: I think it is fair to say there are many iterations of a strategic framework.

I guess it is fair to say that we are taking a new tact, in terms of dividing up the population and understanding that the customer base will be different, but in terms of the recommendations and all the reports, no, we are certainly not starting over. What we are doing is taking everything into account and dividing them into these sections of population to better prioritise.

What we have also done within the Ministry framework is assigned a policy lead for each of those. One of the things you will see in here, that was a

recommendation from the Auditor General's Office, is that the Ministry responsible, for example DCFS and NAU, should better focus on strategic policy and policy direction and performance management, rather than delve into operational responsibilities that the departments themselves have.

Early on when we assumed responsibility, both directors were given HR and financial delegations with an understanding that they are the directors of their departments. It's the Ministry's job to ensure that the policy direction is clearly communicated and assist in ensuring that the resources necessary to deliver on the government's priorities are provided and then hold the departments accountable for that; we think we are on our way in achieving that.

The Chairman: The information that was shared with us this morning is the draft and the need for updated and modern Legislation because what is there, I think, is probably well more than 20 to 25 years old. Can you talk to us about that, and what your plans are in terms of your time frame for having that completed, and hopefully approved by Parliament?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I am just trying to find my notes in particular to that—if you would just give me one minute.

[Pause]

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Yes. Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

On the 13th April, the most recent draft of the Financial Assistance Bill and the Regulations were released by the Portfolio of Legal Affairs for internal review. Having received ministerial responsibility for social development in late April, we then reviewed them ourselves and discussed with the Minister what the priorities are and the direction of the government of the day.

We have received that direction and the Minister has asked for a number of focus groups to be formed and conducted with the draft Bill to determine and test, if you will, its resolve in achieving what we are trying to do in updating the Legislation for this.

The expectation is that the Bill itself will be taken by the Minister in the first quarter (Q1) of 2022, with regulations being presented in Q2 of 2022, with the entire package, if you will, enacted in Q2 of 2022.

The Chairman: These focus groups that you mentioned—who will be comprising those focus groups?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: That list is

being compiled. In fact, the committee that I mentioned before is tasked now with populating that.

The Chairman: Okay.

I guess what I was looking for is just some flavour as to who would make it up; is it all going to be made up of people from within the Ministry, within the Department, or are you looking for external participants?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: If I could just have a minute to consult.

The Chairman: Sure.

[Pause]

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Thank you Mr. Chair.

That's why it is great to have a great team—can't rely on all of my memory. There are four main focus groups:

1. Government stakeholders: government users and individuals who have been responsible for providing the service for many years;
2. Clients: the individuals who actually receive the service. Getting their understanding and testing what the Legislation is looking to achieve—does it actually do that?
3. The service providers: as we know, there are many different types of the assistance we provide; through that, we have partnerships with service providers, landlords, grocery store owners, utilities, et cetera; and
4. Not-for-profit organisations.

The Chairman: I know this may be tough but why is it taking so long to get this Legislation done?

I mean, it has been dragging now for years; a long time. What are your thoughts there?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Honestly Mr. Chair, I don't know. It was given to us in late April; [we are advancing and we put a timeline and published that timeline to have it ready before Parliament in Q1 of 2022.](#)

The Chairman: Can we hold you to that commitment?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: [Absolutely, sir.](#)

The Chairman: I know you are a doer; I have confidence. Members of the Committee?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes, thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, just a question in relation to the Legislation. You are speaking about working groups, is it safe to say that the Legislation in its current form will then require further amendments and that is the reason why you are gathering the working groups to further amend the Legislation in order to get it ready for public consultation?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Through you, Mr. Chair, thank you for the question.

Having reviewed the Legislation itself, I expect it is a good platform to build on. Utilising the focus groups and testing the Legislation itself, I do expect that there will be amendments made to it, but I would not say we are starting from scratch. A lot of good work has gone into it.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you.

Through you, Mr. Chair, Are you able to speak at all about some of the enhancements that this draft Legislation might bring to the public or is it too early?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Through you, Mr. Chair, with respect, I think it is a bit premature...

Mr. Chair, if you could give one minute.

[Pause]

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Mr. Chair, with your permission I would like to ask Mrs. Stacie Sybersma, my Senior Policy Advisor for Social Development to assist in answering the question as fully as we can.

Thank you.

Ms. Stacie Sybersma, Senior Policy Advisor for Social Development: As Chief Officer Bush shared, my name is Stacie Sybersma and I am the Senior Policy Advisor for Social Development.

Some of the improvements proposed in the draft are to mandate that able-bodied clients work; that is currently not in the criteria and it leads to potential individuals who could be in the workforce, not necessarily pursuing employment.

Another key part would be the Appeals Regulations. There are policy-level criteria that outline how appeals are done; these would really cement those [already] in Regulation so that it is transparent.

There are also regulations specific to eligibility itself, for example:

- Age;

- Formalising how someone is deemed permanently disabled;
- Adding stronger parameters around temporary unemployment through different circumstances, whether it's a temporary medical leave versus temporarily falling on hard times.

I think the broader and, I guess all-encompassing, benefit of the proposed Regulations and the Legislation itself is that it adds more transparency to what this service looks like; how to access the service, and how to ask questions or appeal when you do not feel that your needs have been met.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you very much. It sounds beautiful.

Ms. Stacie Sybersma, Senior Policy Advisor for Social Development: You are welcome.

The Chairman: Mr. Bush, completely rewriting, publishing and passing the Law—will that take place before or after the strategies put into place are approved by the Government?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Mr. Chair, as I said before, we are not intending to rewrite the strategy itself; we are trying to better organise the way in which we report and function, in terms of social development.

We are fixing our finances in the same way so hopefully, as time goes by and we have this mechanism set in place, the Government will be able to understand and report how much it has spent in social development for children and adults; how much it has spent for older persons, and what is done in terms of those areas.

As I mentioned, we do not intend to rewrite the entire draft; we intend to use these focus groups to understand—as it is implemented—how it will effect change or not.

The Chairman: If I understand things, there is no overarching document that sets out and lays out in any real terms, what Government's objectives are in terms of providing these services. How will they measure, really, the outcome of all the services that they provide? That is what I am getting at with this strategy, because I think it is really important that there is an understanding, and that everyone is on the same page here.

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Absolutely Mr. Chair, I agree with you.

What is in the document that was circulated is that we are evaluating all of the government services that are offered, and understanding the business

process and is there an ability to insert technology for the betterment of the customer experience and also efficiency from the government back-end. That is one thread of the strategy, if you will.

In terms of understanding and going through that process, establishing what the key performance indicators should be for the said process but never losing sight—and I think this is where a lot goes wrong in any organisation; you get into the weeds so much, you lose sight of the forest. We cannot lose sight of: *are we doing well; are we achieving what we set out to achieve in our vision and our mission?* I think that is a key responsibility of the Ministry.

The Chairman: I would agree with you. I think it is extremely important that Government has reliable ways of measuring what the outcomes are, to know whether it is getting value for money from all of these social programmes that we have had in place for all these years.

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: I agree, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Questions from other members of the Committee?

Member for West Bay Central.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Chair, through you, to follow-up on your question about the strategic framework.

In relation to recommendation number 1 and the comments in the document that we were provided with: Is it safe to say, Mr. Bush, that the implementation of the Social Development Strategic Planning Committee would, maybe, be an indication of a way forward with getting the strategic policy up and going?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Through you Mr. Chair, Yes, Ma'am.

That is the team, if you will, of individuals who are relevant and have the necessary expertise, ability and desire, to effect positive change.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you.

The Chairman: Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Mr. Chairman; through you to the Chief Officer, I actually have a question on the database. Can you update us on what obtains now in terms of the database for your agencies—NAU and Department of Children and Family Services—and what that will be designed to accomplish?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Through you, Mr. Chair, I thank you for that.

As you may be aware, we are in the budgeting phase of the cycle. From our perspective, we have asked for funding to assist with the re-development of a database, a system similar to what the recommendations ask us to do, that allows internal government agencies to better talk to each other.

There is a live example of an NAU application whereby some of the information requested therein is [already] held by another Government Department. The E-government unit is ably assisting in designing a system for us. We expect to have that in the budget cycle of 2022/23—if we are lucky enough to receive the funding—whereby we have a process that is not only utilising technology and mobile technology fully, but also allows us where possible, and legislation permits, to go in and receive information from other government entities, thus reducing the requirements for the applicant.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you, Mr. Chairman to the Chief Officer, in that vein, in terms of working with all the other Ministries, are there challenges? Do you have challenges in working across Government to deliver social assistance?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Through you Mr. Chair, from the Ministerial level, I haven't received any resistance or challenges. We have both the Director of DCFS and the Acting Director of NAU here, if you want to pose the question to them; but through the first five months that we have had Social Development, anything we have asked for we have had cooperation.

If I could elaborate on that as an example, Mr. Chair. There is a recommendation in terms of indigent health care, I think it's called. We have had conversations with the Ministry of Health on effecting that change, understanding that the Legislation may not be appropriate to give the responsibility to DCFS or the Minister responsible for Community Affairs or Social Development, but rather keep that within the Ministry of Health. Just a live example of that conversation; and it was well received, so we are looking to effect that change.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Mr. Chairman and thank you to the Chief Officer.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Good afternoon, Mr. Bush.

Earlier today, the witness spoke about some pilot programmes that are being implemented. Have you had any feedback on that and is that something that will be continued under your Ministry? The pilot programmes she mentioned included getting some of

the community development offices out into the districts, versus having people come back into George Town, et cetera.

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Mr. Chair, if I could ask the Director of DCFS to assist me.

Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director of Department of Children and Family Services: Good afternoon, Mr. Chair. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director of the Department of Children and Family Services.

Through you, sir: DCFS community development officers are in the district; it is fieldwork, they do report to the office for administrative purposes, but the majority of their time is spent out in their communities. They are engaging with the schools, our seniors, our families, they are the eyes and ears of the Department, in terms of referrals for those same populations, so they are in the community more than they are in the office.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you so much, Ms. Paulinda.

I think they started bringing the NAU personnel to the district on certain days of the month. What I was really referring to was, how much of that programme is going to continue? Do you see that being enhanced or, for example, putting an office somewhere East which would stop our seniors having to come all the way down here on the bus.

Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director of Department of Children and Family Services: Through you Mr. Chair, that would be the Director or Acting Director of the Needs Assessment Unit.

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Mr. Speaker, if I may and thank you for that: the intention is to enhance the customer relationship. There are many ways we can look to achieve that, but we are focusing on the business process of the application: *does an individual have to come into any place, whether it be within the community or not or can they do it from the comfort of their own home utilising a mobile device? Should the application itself be mobile-friendly? Should they be able to take pictures of the documentation that is on their dining-room table and submit the application virtually?*

We currently have district days whereby the NAU officers visit the districts, but I think it is fair to say the direction we are going is to truly leverage technology and try to enhance and simplify the user experience in making these applications and generally communicating with the Departments.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you, sir. Just to add further commentary: while I understand the need to improve technology-wise, there are still sectors of our community that are not going to be able to do that. How are you going to accommodate them?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Through you, Mr. Chair, we will continue to have the outreach within the communities but as you know, sir, the resources are limited in this space. Our hope is that we can utilise technology as much as possible, but where that stops, we always have an avenue for in-person applications where the officers themselves can assist our clientele.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you, I am actually glad you brought up the resources issue because that was going to be my next question. Do you think you have adequate resources to do what you need to do in order to implement these recommendations?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Certainly that is not what the Department Heads say; they clearly stated that they need more human resources.

In fact, being quite open and transparent, we provided the numbers within a written update that we provided to all members; it clarifies what the DCFS, the NAU and the Sunrise Adult Training Centre have requested. Whether that is palatable and achievable in the 2020-23 budget is for the Government to decide, but parallel with that, we are looking, as I said, to redevelop the business processes so we are not solely reliant on adding human resources to the organisation.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you sir.

Just one last question from me: earlier today, the witness mentioned an appeal process. Prior to today I did not know there is an appeal process at NAU and if I did not know that, I am sure there are many other customers who do not know that.

What is your office going to do to ensure that people are aware of these processes in order to utilise the service much better?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Yes. Through you Mr. Chair, we are redesigning the NAU website, which we hope will become the main mechanism and vehicle of communication in getting the relevant information out to the customer base. That will present the application process clearly, as well as the option of appeal and in fact, just like any other good governance structure, anytime a negative response from a government entity is communicated to an applicant, the method of appeal should be recorded and should be relayed at that point.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, Elected Member for East End: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: My pleasure.

The Chairman: Mr. Bush, are you saying that right to appeal is presently communicated to the people, or it will be?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Mr. Chair, if you will, it is. In fact just give me one minute.

[Pause]

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Mr. Chair, if I could ask the Acting Director of the NAU to respond, please.

Ms. Melissa Smith, Deputy Director, Needs Assessment Unit: Mr. Chair through you, in response to the question: there is a current and active appeals' process at the Needs Assessment Unit.

If an individual applies for service and is then denied that service, they are advised that they are able to appeal or request that the decision be revisited. If the supervisor or the individual who review that decision, come to the same decision—or if a change cannot be made—then the Compliance Department will review it. Our Compliance Department will issue an official letter advising the individual that if they disagree with the decision that has been communicated, they are able to appeal to the Director. At that point, if they disagree with the decision that the Director makes, they are able to appeal to the Office of the Ombudsman.

The Chairman: Can I just ask you state your name and position again for us, for the record?

Ms. Melissa Smith, Deputy Director of Needs Assessment Unit: My name is Melissa Smith, Deputy Director of the Needs Assessment Unit.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you, Mr. Smith.

As a follow-up question to your statement: I understand the process you have inside, but how many people outside know that process? You said they are told; I am not going to say that it doesn't happen, but the feedback I get from people is, *'oh, they just told me that they denied me and they have not said to me in any aspect that yes there is an appeal process.'*

All I'm trying to get at is that there needs to be better communication to your customers that there is an appeal process.

Ms. Melissa Smith, Deputy Director, Needs Assessment Unit: Mr. Chair through you, thank you, that is noted.

The individuals who do come in, will usually query and what we have found is that they will go to a higher body and there will be communication with our Department on that individual's behalf; we will liaise with the client, but they are advised that they are able to appeal if they are dissatisfied with the decision that is made.

We have a link to the complaints process on our website and that is available for persons; Freedom of Information (FOI) is also available there and persons have been utilising the avenues that have been made available to them.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you Ms. Smith.

The Chairman: The Member for George Town.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Chief Officer, the senior centre was opened I think, in April of this year to facilitate our seniors, in order for them not to have to go to the main NAU centre on the waterfront. Is that operational? Can you give provide us with an update on the services that they offer?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Through you Mr. Chair, that is correct.

The operation or the management control of the Older Persons Active Ageing Centre—OPAAC as it is known—was opened prior to the election. When we received ministerial responsibility of it, both the Director of NAU and the Director of DCFS expressed concern about the centre itself.

There were a number of health and safety concerns in so far as there were limited fire exits, as well as the acoustics of the building, whereby it is essentially an open-roof style with walls that go two thirds of the way up, so the sound travels. That proved difficult for an individual to be interviewed; providing the necessary privacy when disclosing personal information to an NAU officer. As a result of that, we are looking to mediate those issues in having a second door—a fire door—created in the building itself, as well as looking to have a drop ceiling to address the acoustics issues.

So to be clear, the services of the centre were paused, but we are looking to reactivate them as soon as possible once the acoustics and the health and safety issues are addressed.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Chief Officer.

Ms. Heather D. Boddén: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chief Officer, will you please give the public the reassurance that this centre will be reopened, because we are hearing that it's closed permanently.

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Through you Mr. Chair, absolutely. I am happy to give that reassurance and maybe I am calling her out, but the responsibility, as I said, was given to the Department of Children and Family Services; the operational responsibility in line with the overarching strategy that the Ministry is not there to be operational.

If I could ask the Director to give a bit more detail of what is planned, particularly for Older Persons month and beyond; if that's okay, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director, Department of Children and Family Services: Through you, Mr. Chair, OPAAC is currently open but not in the vein that it originally started up to be. We have started since the start of September; we have been running some small programmes out of the facility.

We have a schedule set up for this month, as well as planned events which are streamed back due to the situation of the community spread, so the facility is operational. However, we are taking our time to ensure that we have the right resources and personnel to conduct the programmes that we are going to be doing out of it.

The Chairman: Can just add your name and title for us please?

Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director, Department of Children and Family Services: Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director of the Department of Children and Family Services.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thanks for that update Miss Paulinda.

Could you also give us some information on what is going to take place during the month of October? Senior Citizens' Month is something that our seniors look forward to every year, the month of the elderly. Can you give us any update on the schedule?

Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director, Department of Children and Family Services: In regards to Older Persons month at this time, we are revisiting the programmes that we had scheduled. Again, due to the current situation of the COVID community spread, our seniors are not going to be in a position or they are not going to feel comfortable, even though they are vaccinated, to come out and be in fairly large numbers for them.

The theme evades me but it is a digital theme for Older Persons Month; we will be using smartphones, the digital highway, to support events. We are in a position to review in the next couple of

weeks, to determine how we go forth in terms of having direct, face-to-face, events with our seniors. We have put some of the events on pause to have a review in the next two weeks or so to see what would be feasible for us to have.

To add, some events were supported through community partners. I can say here that those community partners have pulled back because of the community spread of COVID-19, so it's just going back to revisit what we can have on a small scale to engage our seniors, as well as looking towards the end of the month to support that. I can say that Cayman Brac is in a different environment than we are in Grand, so they are going ahead with their programmes.

Of course the first Sunday of Older Persons Month is dedicated to a church service. We are exploring with the church that is designated to host the Older Persons' Month church service, to determine how they would like to proceed. That is something that I believe we will be able to hold via digital and in person.

We had an expo that was scheduled in the early part of October. Again, looking to revisit that maybe towards the end of October so while some of the face-to-face events have been put on pause, we are revisiting to look at how we can use social media, smartphones and other digital devices, to support engaging our seniors and their families in productive and beneficial activities.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you very much. Through my involvement with seniors, I have been getting a lot of phone calls in regards to what is taking place because this is the month—next month—when the seniors look forward to getting together.

Thank you for updating us on that and I hope that things can be worked out where they can enjoy themselves at some point in time.

Thank you.

Mrs. Paulinda Mendoza-Williams, Director, Department of Children and Family Services: Thank you.

The Chairman: Are there any questions from the Committee? Member for West Bay Central.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a question in relation to recommendation number 2. I just want to read over it briefly where the Office of the Auditor General recommended that **“Government should assess the manner in which roles, responsibilities and budgets are assigned with a view to facilitating a coordinated Social Assistance Strategy.”**

We asked about this in the earlier session and I know that you, Chief Officer Bush, spoke briefly about the delegations that have recently been awarded to NAU and DCFS to allow greater operational efficiency.

Can you advise on any other measures in the pipeline that will facilitate this coordinated Social Assistance Strategy?

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Through you, Mr. Chair, it is essentially that, Ma'am. We are working with the senior management of the DCFS and NAU with a clear understanding of what we are trying to achieve. We are trying to enhance our clients' experience, but also ensure that the operations of the DCFS and the NAU are optimal and that is from providing the resources that are needed, or reforming the business practices.

The Chairman: Any other questions from the Committee? Last opportunity.

Okay, if there are no other questions from the Committee, I want to thank you again, Mr. Bush, for coming this afternoon and being very transparent with us in the way things are operating; what your goals and aspirations are, and what is actually taking place when it comes to these Social Assistance Programmes.

I also want to thank the members of your team who have come and quite ably supported you; thank you all. At this time we will go ahead and dismiss you from the Committee.

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Thank you, Mr. Chair; thank you to the Committee and also thank you to the Office of the Auditor General.

Believe it or not, this report actually helped. What I am saying is that it helped, from a ministerial standpoint to really point to where the issues are and explain the legacy of some of these issues and allowed us to focus on where many of the major pinch points are in delivering effective and meaningful services to our clienteles.

The Chairman: I believe you are right with that.

Mr. Eric Bush, Chief Officer, Ministry of Investment Innovation and Social Development: Thank you, and also a very big thanks to the team.

Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

The Chairman: Members of the Committee that concludes our proceedings for today. I want to thank you all for being here and for your participation.

Thank you, Auditor General and Deputy Auditor General for your support and also the Financial Secretary and the Accountant General for your presence and support as well.

I also want to thank the lady sitting next to me for her support as well, in all that we do; honestly this

Committee just cannot operate well without you and I want to acknowledge publicly the sterling work that you do, and have done, to support the Committee.

We were scheduled to have an administrative meeting next week Wednesday, at 10am but we need to reschedule the Hearing that we postponed this morning. So my proposal, and the discussion I have had, is that we should go ahead and reschedule this morning's Hearing to next week Wednesday morning at 10:00, and when we finish that, probably reserve about an hour in the afternoon for the administrative meeting, if that's convenient for everybody.

I know it means almost a full commitment of the day to this, but I think if we get it all done there is no need to come back again until the following month. That's my goal, I am just hoping that the witness will be out and available to us to for questions, but let's do it for next week Wednesday.

For the listening public, the next meeting will take place on the 29th September, 2021 at 10am.

Thank you and have a good evening everyone.

At 3:12 pm the Public Account Committee stood adjourned until Wednesday, the 29th September 2021 at 10am.



Parliament of the Cayman Islands

THE STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES of Meeting with Witnesses
Wednesday, 29th September 2021 at 10:17 am

FOLLOW-UP ON PAST PAC RECOMMENDATIONS 2021 - REPORT 1 (AUGUST 2021) **HEALTH CARE**

PAC Members Present:

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP – Chairman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP - Member
Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP - Member
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP - Member
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCl, Cert. Hon., JP, MP – Member
Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, MP - Member

PAC Clerk: Mrs. Patricia Priestley

Attendees: Mrs. Sue Winspear - Auditor General

Ms. Angela Cullen - Deputy Auditor General (Performance Audit)

Mr. Kenneth Jefferson - Financial Secretary / Chief Officer, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts - Accountant General, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

Witness: Mrs. Nellie Pouchie - Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness

1. Meeting to Order

There being a quorum present (Standing Orders 77(2) refers), the Chairman called the Public Accounts Committee Meeting to order at 10:17 am.

2. Welcome

The Chairman gave a brief welcome to Members of the Committee and Attendees and thanked them for attending the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) Hearing.

The Chairman explained that the purpose of the Hearing was to continue the examination of the Office of the Auditor General's (OAG) report, Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1, published in August 2021. This report provided a summary of past PAC reports tabled between September 2018 and December 2020, and a status update of the Government responses to the reports and implementation of PAC and OAG recommendations. This report identified two earlier reports which were assessed as showing limited progress in the planned implementation of recommendations; namely, Ensuring Quality Health Care and a Healthy Population (January 2017) and Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need (May 2015).

The Chairman further explained that on Wednesday, 22nd September, the Committee had examined the update on the report Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need (May 2015) and today the Committee would be examining the update on the report Ensuring Quality Health Care and a Healthy Population (January 2017).

The Chairman invited Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness to appear before the Committee to answer questions on health care.

Before beginning proceedings, the Chairman invited PAC Member, Ms. Heather Bodden, to lead in prayer.

The Chairman then invited the Auditor General, Mrs. Sue Winspear, to make an opening statement and present the OAG report.

The Auditor General presented the OAG report, Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 (August 2021), as it related to the OAG's earlier report, Ensuring Quality Health Care and a Healthy Population (January 2017). The Auditor General presented a timeline of key milestones in relation to the earlier report dating back to January 2017. Now, five years later, the Auditor General advised that status updates showed limited progress in the implementation of any of the 13 recommendations made by the OAG and PAC aimed at improving health care, despite assurances given to the PAC in 2018 and 2019.

The Chairman welcomed the witness, Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, and reminded her to state her name and title for the record before answering the first question addressed to her. The Chairman began questioning the witness.

The Chairman acknowledged the presence of PAC Member Mr. Dwayne Seymour and declared Mr. Seymour's direct conflict of interest as the report had been prepared during Mr. Seymour's tenure as Minister of Health. The Chairman advised that Mr. Seymour would not be questioning the witness.

The Chairman invited other Members to question the witness.

Discussion ensued.

Mrs. Pouchie provided the Committee with the following undertakings:

- i. To find out which Government Minute(s) remained outstanding from the Ministry of Health and Wellness and complete the Government Minute(s) for Tabling in the House.
- ii. To develop a national healthcare strategy and the operational plan to support the implementation of a national healthcare strategy, within the next six months.

- iii. To provide an update on plans to develop and roll-out a national health care standards programme and obtain a corresponding report from the Chief Medical Officer, prior to his departure.
- iv. To put forward recommendation no. 9 to the Minister, that Government should ensure that health statistics used for purposes of planning, management and accountability distinguish between Caymanian and non-Caymanian populations.
- v. To request the Minister bring back draft legislation requiring doctors to report the incidence of cancer in the country, to create an accurate National Cancer Registry, and thereby enable informed decisions to be made about the prevalence of cancer.
- vi. To request the Minister further extend the CayHealth Programme to cover civil servants and HSA staff.
- vii. To review and update laws that govern healthcare and bring them to Parliament for Tabling, such as amendments to the Health Practice Act, the Pharmacy Act and the Public Health Act.
- viii. To recruit sufficient staff required to effectively execute the roles and responsibilities assumed by the Cayman Islands health care system.
- ix. To establish a written policy for the development of Caymanian doctors.
- x. To provide to the Committee a breakdown of how the \$500,000 scholarship fund, intended for the development of Caymanian doctors, has so far been allocated.
- xi. To provide to the Committee the number of Caymanians who received scholarship funds to study medicine and who are currently:
 - studying within the medical field; or
 - practicing medicine in the Cayman Islands.
- xii. To advise the Committee if the Ministry plans to consider ways to reduce the cost of healthcare, for instance by removing duty from drugs and medical supplies, or by reducing the HSA's mark-up on the cost of drugs.

Mr. Kenneth Jefferson, Financial Secretary / Chief Officer, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, gave the Committee an undertaking to find out whether a general review of the Customs and Tariff Law was currently being undertaken.

Before departing, Mrs. Pouchie was again thanked by the Chairman on behalf of the Committee for attending the Hearing.

3. Any Other Business

The next meeting was confirmed for:

- **Wednesday, 29th September 2021 at 2:00 pm (*Administrative Meeting*)**

4. Adjournment

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 12:17 pm.



PARLIAMENT OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS
STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

**“FOLLOW-UP ON PAST PAC RECOMMENDATIONS
2021 - REPORT 1 (AUGUST 2021) HEALTH CARE”**

*Official transcript relating to the Official Report of the
Standing Public Accounts Committee Meeting
held on 29 September, 2021*

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PAC Members Present:

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP, Chairman

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP, Member

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP, Member

Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, MP, Member

Ms. Heather Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP, Member

Mr. Isaac Rankine, MP, Member

In attendance: Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

Audit Office: Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General
Ms. Angela Cullen, Deputy Auditor General (Performance Audit)

Witnesses: Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer
Ministry of Health and Wellness

Mr. Kenneth Jefferson, Financial Secretary/Chief Officer
Ministry of Finance and Economic Development

PAC Clerk: Mrs. Patricia Priestley

**OFFICIAL VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT
STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY
29 SEPTEMBER 2021
10:17 AM
*Meeting with Witnesses***

**“FOLLOW-UP ON PAST PAC RECOMMENDATIONS
2021 - REPORT 1 (AUGUST 2021) HEALTH CARE”**

Verbatim transcript of the Standing Public Accounts Committee Meeting held on Wednesday, 29 September 2021, at 10:17am, in the Chamber of the House of Parliament; George Town, Grand Cayman.

[Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Chairman, presiding officer]

The Chairman: Good morning everyone.

To all members of the Public Accounts Committee, welcome to this Hearing of the Committee. A very warm welcome also to everyone who is listening by radio or television today.

This morning the Committee is reassembled to continue the examination of the report issued by the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) entitled: “**Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021**” which was issued in August of 2021. The report that was issued provided a status update on all PAC reports that were Tabled in the House between September 2018 and December 2020. It also provided a reassessment of the government’s implementation of past recommendations for the two reports: “**Ensuring Quality Health Care and a Healthy Population (January 2017)**” and “**Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need**” that was issued in May of 2015.

Last week Wednesday, the Committee examined the update on the report of “**Government Programmes Supporting Those in Need**”, and today we are looking at **Health Care**. With those introductory comments, I’ll ask the Serjeant if he would allow the witness to come into the Chamber.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Good morning Chief Officer Pouchie, welcome to the Public Accounts Committee. Before we actually get started, I neglected to invite the Member for Savannah to lead us in a word of prayer, so I am going to ask her to do so at this time.

PRAYER

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Let us bow our heads.

Our kind heavenly Father, as we humbly bow our heads before you this morning, we thank you for

allowing us to see another day. We come to you today asking for your guidance, wisdom, and support as we begin this Meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. As we deliberate, help us to engage in meaningful discussion.

Lord, fill us with your grace as we do the work of the Cayman Islands, continue to remind us that all we do here today, all that we accomplish, is for the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of you and for the service of our country.

We ask all these things in your great name’s sake. Amen.

The Chairman: Thank you.

I am going to kick off the hearing at this point and lead off with the very first question.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Oh, my goodness.

I neglected an all-important step of inviting the Auditor General to make her opening statement with regard to this report; so Auditor General, I shall turn things over to you at this point in time and invite you to make your presentation.

**AUDITOR GENERAL
OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL**

Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General: Thank you very much Mr. Chairman.

Good morning to you, Committee members, colleagues and the listening public. Thank you very much for the opportunity to make some opening remarks and you’ve covered some of the ground already.

As you mentioned, this follow-up Hearing relates to a report that we published in January 2017, which was about “**Ensuring Quality Health Care and a Healthy Population**”; at the same time, alongside it, I also published a public interest report that described the healthcare system in the Cayman Islands, where it

is a mixture of private and public and quite complex. In that report, we also drew together some important data around underlying conditions, demography, and health related data for the population.

Further to that report, the Public Accounts Committee held several Hearing sessions with many witnesses in February 2017 asking questions and following up on that report.

On 27th March 2017, the Public Accounts Committee Tabled its report in the then Legislative Assembly. The PAC made a further three recommendations in addition to endorsing the nine recommendations made in my report.

In June 2018, the Government Minute with the formal response to the PAC's report, was Tabled in the Legislative Assembly. It's worth saying that Standing Orders require these to be Tabled within three months, so this was already a year late.

In October 2018, we published a follow-up report on past PAC recommendations as we do and, as you referenced, this is a further follow-up report. We assessed at that time that the progress made against the recommendations in the Health Care Report as **amber**, the main reason being that the government accepted most of the recommendations and we assessed it had some progress because most of the dates for implementation were yet to come; they were mostly due in 2019.

In January 2019, the PAC took evidence from the then Chief Officer of the Ministry. On 10th April 2019, the PAC Tabled its report in the then Legislative Assembly and made two recommendations additional to the three they made before and the nine OAG reports, making 14 recommendations in total. It is important to note that since April 2019, there has never been a response received to the Government Minute, which is contrary to Standing Orders.

This brings us around to this further follow-up report where we obtained an update in January from the Ministry, and I thank the Chief Officer for that. In August we published our follow-up report where we assessed the status as **red** now, as a number of dates have been missed and there is limited progress.

I have Angela Cullen with me today and we will be happy to help the Committee with any questions, but I just want to say that these recommendations are really important because the intention is improving the health of our Caymanian residents, whether served by the public or the private healthcare system and ensuring greater economy, efficiency and effectiveness out of that health system.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you Auditor General.

As I mentioned, I am going to kick off the questioning with the witness. When I ask the question, Mrs. Pouchie, just state your name and your position for the record.

Mrs. Pouchie, the Auditor General's introduction has outlined a timeline of key milestones in relation to this report, which dates back to January 2017. She mentioned that almost five years after the original audit, her latest update states that limited progress has been made in implementing any of the recommendations made by her Office and the PAC, which are aimed at improving health care. She mentioned, particularly, that specific assurances were given to the PAC in 2018 and 2019.

Can you tell this Committee what the reasons are for the delays in acting on this report? It really is close to five years now since the report was prepared and issued. I would be grateful for your overall views and the overarching reasons as to why there has been no progress.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Good morning, Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Good morning Mr. Chairman. In response to your query: obviously, we're looking back about five years and that is some length of time. However, to put things in context, I cannot speak to what was recommended/promised at that time, and in terms of the timelines that were given by which stuff would have been implemented prior to my acting role in this capacity at the Ministry, which was at the end of 2019. Prior to that, I cannot speak to specific delays and reasons for delays.

Within three months from my assuming the acting role, we were full-fledged into COVID; so that dominated my last two years in that acting role. Obviously the Ministry was dealing with the emergence of COVID from January of 2020, but it being full onslaught for us in March of 2020 dominated our focus at that time and continue to do so, unfortunately. So, in response to why we haven't implemented some of that, I can say that I have not been able to focus on those specifically prior to this point.

I've been appointed in this role effective September 1st, so it will take me some time to be able to go through and see what we have to do from a Ministry standpoint in that regard. Obviously, it will require resources to do so and we will get more into that aspect of it, but that's just the overall, overarching summary from my point.

The Chairman: Mrs. Pouchie, I don't hold you responsible for what transpired prior to you taking over, but to my thinking certainly, it would be people within the Ministry who would be responsible for this. I mean, it would appear to me, from the Auditor General's report that nothing really had been acted on. It's the Chief

Officer's role to drive the implementation of responses, but inevitably, there are others who are—for want of better words—doing the legwork in responding to these recommendations and implementing them, if they have been accepted.

Is it the case that the Ministry just has not picked this up and dealt with anything?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: To put our condition at the Ministry further into context, when I assumed the Acting Chief Officer role I had no deputy, I had no Chief Financial Officer; so at that time I was covering some of the key posts for quite an extended period of time. We obviously put in place a Chief Financial Officer within a few months after and that person has been on board and helping since then.

My deputy commenced in June of this year, the other deputy position never moved forward; we are just recruiting now, in terms of staffing up. In terms of our policy persons, we have two persons in policy in the Ministry of Health—a senior policy advisor and a policy advisor. It is against that backdrop that I look at what time frames were promised, in terms of implementation, given the very limited resources from then.

To continue, Mr. Chairman, it's not that the Ministry does not see these as important; they were accepted, deemed to be relevant and wanting to be implemented. Those were the assurances that were given, so I don't think that that is the issue. However, the resources behind doing the implementation within the time frames that were given to this body, I don't know if those were feasible before and certainly not within the time that I have been here, given that we have been dealing with COVID, sir.

The Chairman: Well, thank you very much for that explanation, Mrs. Pouchie.

What sort of commitments can you give to this Committee that this report will be looked at and actioned by the Ministry?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Since appointments, and since maybe two or three months now, getting a deputy, trying to get the Ministry reorganised, in terms of the human capital resources that we require to be able to fulfil our duties sufficiently and to the standard that we expect as well, we have gone through our restructuring and have looked at additional posts that we need to implement to be able to carry out these duties.

Obviously, as I said, with limited resources and being in a pandemic the focus has been on the pandemic. So, whereas many entities may have gone back to a bit more normalcy, in terms of being able to look at all other strategic goals and what they would like to accomplish and carry out, and moving ahead with

some of those, the Ministry has not had that luxury just yet, because we are still in the pandemic. There is so much that happens behind the scenes to be able to continue to provide all the necessary changes that happen in that. That is just one aspect.

I am not saying that to say, *well, we can't do anything because of COVID*, it's just that that's our reality at this point, in terms of the resources that we have. We have looked at how then do we strengthen our policy group to make sure that we have persons who can look at and drive these other aspects of it? We have a new Deputy Chief Officer and we have put out for an additional one; that recruitment process is just under way. We are hoping that we will get someone fairly shortly that will help us to strengthen it.

The Deputy Chief Officer we have now is specific to Health and Admin so that will help us focus on that, but as I said, we are in a pandemic, so it does not afford us the opportunity to just go business as usual. It is just not there yet.

We are strengthening our senior policy group at the top, in terms of Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and Medical Officer of Health; adding a few persons from the public health arena at that top level to help drive the national policy on Health; that is something that has been lacking a bit for quite some time, even in terms of data analysis, statistics and so forth. So we are strengthening that top level so that we are able to provide resources there and to be able to deliver at that point. We have also looked at adding Senior Policy Advisors and a Policy Advisor; persons to do specific project management. We see these as mini projects, things that we need to carry out and that you need to be able to focus on.

Our Ministry did not even have a Communications Officer so we have our policy people into that because COVID is ongoing. You have daily communication demands, so it's looking at those gaps and trying to fill them, and we have done that, in terms of getting the job descriptions, getting the necessary approvals and going through the recruitments so we are able to now staff that. Those have been budgeted for as well in the upcoming budget process.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Listening to you, it seems to me that you have a real issue, severe constraints, with lack of personnel within the Ministry. Is that a fair assessment?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Absolutely sir.

The Chairman: Are you getting support from the leadership with regard to trying to fill the posts that you have vacant and that you might be looking to fill?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Yes, sir; so far we have gotten

approvals to add these additional posts to our Ministry as well as budget approval, in terms of the upcoming budget, to be able to carry these posts forth. So currently we have both the resources to be able to fill them and the approval to do so. Yes, sir.

The Chairman: The other question I wanted to ask you: in the Auditor General's background or introduction to it, she mentioned that the PAC Tabled its report in the Legislative Assembly on 10th April 2019, but to date there has not been a Government Minute in response to that. Can you tell me why, more than a year later—almost a year and a half—there still is no response?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Okay sir, I am not exactly sure who is responsible for Tabling the Government Minute. I do not know that it is me; I stand to be corrected in that regard but... I am not aware of that.

The Chairman: I think the responsibility certainly lies within the Civil Service and I believe, or my view is, ultimately with the Chief Officer in the Ministry to which it relates to; that person is best placed to deal with it and respond to the PAC's recommendations. My recollection then is that, once it is done and agreed, the report itself goes to Cabinet for approval and submission here.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Okay.

The Chairman: However, there is a relatively short timeframe—it is three months, which I know can sometimes pose a challenge, but it just strikes me that 18 months is a bit much.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Yes, sir.

I would not even have been privy to a lot of this really until late last year/early this year. In terms of the Government Minute, I know that the Chief Officer was consulted and given the updates, but ultimately it was not Tabled by me.

The Chairman: Can we get a commitment from you to make sure that the Government Minute is completed and sent down to this House? Otherwise our work is incomplete.

We are the supreme body in this country, and it is important that the processes that are in place to ensure good governance are upheld and that we ensure they are followed. So from the Committee, I plead that you give us a commitment to look into this, and get the report prepared and sent here.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Absolutely, sir.

I will also endeavour to seek what else remains outstanding for our Ministry, so that I am aware of what has not been done.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Financial Secretary.

Mr. Kenneth Jefferson, Financial Secretary/Chief Officer, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development: Good morning Mr. Chairman, and Committee members. I want to elaborate on, and support, what you just said.

The procedure for the Government Minute being Tabled in the Parliament is relatively straightforward. As we all know, the Auditor General's report has detailed at least a half dozen Government Minutes that have not been Tabled in the Parliament, ranging from the Segregated Insurance Fund, a report on

CIMA's Financial Statements, the effectiveness of Summary Courts, et cetera.

The Ministry, Portfolio or Office that has the responsibility for that particular subject area would be primarily responsible for drafting a Cabinet Paper.

The procedure to get a Government Minute Tabled is: As a result of discussion with their Minister (their Official Member), the Cabinet Paper would essentially say, *'Here is a report from the Auditor General; it contains recommendations which are substantiated' by a report from the Public Accounts Committee.* The Chief Officer normally would say to the Minister, *'I think that we can agree to this or not, and within this timeframe I need to do a Cabinet Paper either rejecting or accepting the recommendations'* and so forth.

The Cabinet Paper is then drafted and taken by the respective Minister (Official Member) to Cabinet, to say *'This is the Government's proposed response to the Public Accounts Committee report'*. Assuming that it is approved in Cabinet, the next step is for it to be Tabled in Parliament, usually by the Minister responsible for that subject area, but it could be by the Premier, for example—it doesn't have to be specifically by that Minister.

That is the procedure; it's a Cabinet Paper accepting or rejecting the recommendations in the PAC report. Once that occurs then it should be brought by the Minister or the Premier as the Government's official response to the Public Accounts Committee's recommendation.

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Financial Secretary.

I now invite other members to pose questions, but before I do, there is an urgent matter that I forgot to mention when we started: I want to acknowledge the

presence of Mr. Seymour, the Member for Bodden Town East.

He was the Minister for Health during the period when this report was prepared and so has a very direct conflict in the hearing of this report, so he will not be questioning the witness here today. He is going to sit through the hearing, but will not participate. I just want everyone watching and listening to know and understand that such is the case.

I'm going to move on now to address an issue/question an area regarding the strategic plan for health care. I invite the Member for West Bay Central to lead off with the questioning.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good morning.

I will start by referring to recommendation number 1. The OAG reported that the Ministry of Health had issued its first National Health Policy for the Cayman Islands for 2012-2017 but found that the Government failed to take reasonable action to implement the strategy.

Mrs. Pouchie, I know that you just set out explanations in relation to another area—I think it was the report—but to go on further, the recommendation stated that the government should update the policy, including developing the operational plan necessary for its implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation plan required to track progress and results.

I actually had a look at the policy and two strategic directions that jumped out at me were:

***“7. Develop a robust health information system with multi agency linkages to improve the quality and coverage of health relevant information to be used for decision making; and
8. Promote increased research for the production dissemination and utilisation of health relevant information, knowledge and scientific evidence—again—for decision making.”***

My first question to you Mrs. Pouchie is, can you could elaborate? I am guessing that many of the explanations you provided to the Chairman will be very similar, but is there anything else that you could enlighten us on, as to why there may have been a delay with implementing the strategic part of the plan for health care?

I mean, if there is nothing additional you do not have to go back through that lengthy explanation; I will just go on to the next question.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Yeah, thank you. Mr. Chairman, through you, as I said before, unfortunately it's a little bit difficult for me to say why it was not implemented at that point, or even up to 2018 when it was said that it would be. I am not able to add anything further as to

the reason why that has not happened. As I said, I have spoken mainly from what has transpired since my acting time in 2020 and what that focus has been for me in this role, but I cannot speak to what prevented it at that point.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you.

I guess going back to the directions that I just read out—seven and eight—leads to my next question. Looking at the chronology, I don't think anybody would have ever imagined that we would be facing a global pandemic right now; so, failure to have those directions solidified into a policy where we have a strategy to help with decision making, do you see that as a risk for us, as a country, to not really have a strategy for health care right now?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, the various councils' legislative framework that is in place ensures that the quality of health care is held to that high standard. Where the policy not being implemented, really impedes strategic progress, in that regard and what you might envision the healthcare system to be for the country.

In terms of risk to what is being provided now, I think those measures are in place, in terms of looking at practitioners and so forth. However, in terms of the direction of where you may want to improve health care and see it going in the future will be where that plan becoming operational would be more helpful. In that respect.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Last question.

To elaborate, I guess where I was going with the question is really more dealing with the data that we need as leaders to make the right decision now in terms of keeping our people and our country safe.

To my knowledge, I know we have the councils and the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), but I am referring to the information that would be collated for decision making subject to a plan being in place. Do you see failure to have that mechanism in place as a risk, in terms of the decision making that is currently in place?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, so in terms of risk, I think it just means that we have to do that much more in the absence of the plan and having to draw on a lot more resources at that point to make sure that we have all the necessary data that we need to be able to make the relevant decisions; whereas I think a plan would have that—how that happens—in a more streamlined manner.

In terms of the guidance that we receive for national level decision making, the CMO, for example, would provide a lot. We have relationships with Public Health England and other entities like the Caribbean

Public Health Agency (CARPHA) and Pan American Health Organisation (PAHO), so there are those resources to draw on.

I think what has been lacking for some time, from a Cayman perspective, is to have a database of national data; and we are limited too, in terms of whether we have outbreaks and so forth, to actually have the data, but even in spite of that, just making sure that we know what our numbers are and what they mean from our perspective. That is where some of the thinking currently is, in terms of adding at the more senior policy level. For example, in terms of epidemiology—to have national epidemiologists that would help in that regard.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mrs. Pouchie.

I am glad that this came out and the listening public can now have a better understanding because as you said, failure to have a streamlined process and the lack of the national health care data does make decision making a bit more challenging.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Through you to Mrs. Pouchie, what are the Ministry's plans to develop a healthcare strategy and the operational plan to support its implementation?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: The current plan is nearing the end of the time that it was really designed for, so it's being able to go back and look at it now in the context of whether it is still relevant to what we have—I think 2017 was our date for the national policy that we currently have—and being able to now look forward to say, *'Okay, we are ending that time; now we need to get in gear as to renewing and updating the plan.'* That has to happen. That is ongoing work that still needs to update.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Chief Officer, can the Chief Officer give us an undertaking or some timeline as to when the updating of this plan will occur?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, once we have in place the resources that we are currently recruiting for, then it is bringing together the relevant stakeholders to review that plan and update it as necessary. *I'm looking to say that within the next six months we should be able to get back into that frame of having the relevant groups and being able to look at the plan and see how we go forward,*

Bearing in mind that some of our regional or international stakeholders are still in pandemic mood as well, so it is difficult to look at other aspects of health care, because of the sheer magnitude of what you are dealing with, you have to re-prioritise. Not saying that we are not looking at it completely and just all COVID; unfortunately, we cannot just do that, but the pandemic does dictate how much focus or priority you can give to it at the current time.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you, Mr. Chairman to the Chief Officer, you mentioned that the Ministry will shortly be recruiting another Deputy Chief Officer and some strategic officers, et cetera. Do you have the budget in place to recruit them now or do you have to wait until January, based on the 2022-23 budget?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, yes, we do have the resources in place to be able to do that. We recently sent out our advert for the additional Deputy Chief Officer.

The Chairman: Let's take that a little bit further, what is your staff complement in the Ministry?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Currently we have 12 persons for the core Ministry.

The Chairman: Okay. That has not changed in a number of years; I can speak to that.

How many positions are you actually trying to recruit and fill at this time? It looked at me like about three or four.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Yes. We currently have five on stream. The other national ones that I spoke of are in progress; they are not recruitment ready yet—we are just getting some of the job descriptions and so forth,—but we are looking at 10 persons, at least, to be able to bring the Ministry up to where it needs to be, sir.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Are there any other questions on this area? If there are none, we will move on to question the witness on performance management and reporting. The Member for East End is going to lead off questioning on that.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Through you to Mrs. Pouchie, from the Auditor General's Report of 2017, they made some recommendations and recommendation number 7 of that report said that **"the Government should put in place a performance management and reporting framework for the Cayman Islands health system to**

inform decision making and provide accountability to the Parliament and the public.” This is in support of what my colleague for West Bay Central made a note of earlier.

The Public Accounts Committee of March 2018, further said that the Medical Officer of Health should collect relevant health data from the private sector, as well as the HSA in future and should publicly report on both sets of data on a regular basis to, again, help inform public policy and decision-making. In January of this year, the Ministry said that the Chief Medical Officer intended to develop and roll out a National Health Care Standards Programme and provide annual reports on the health care system to be Tabled in Parliament.

What is very concerning, is that the CMO has now tendered his resignation. Based on that, can you give us an update on when the collection of national data from HSA and private sector will commence?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, in terms of your last point regarding the clinical standards data, I knew that it had commenced. There was an initial meeting just before we went into the whole COVID situation; the CMO actually had a group of stakeholders already in talks on how we were going to roll out national clinical standards. We have not yet moved that forward, but it is necessary. We see it as a priority area so that there are guidelines around that; so that we have better understanding of what is happening in practice, in the healthcare industry as well. That will go forward, and it is something that we would still put forward with a new CMO.

In terms of other performance reporting: we do get necessary information when we ask for it. The Medical Officer of Health would be more in tune in that regard, in terms of getting data from other providers and so forth—that is the position that would deal with that.

In terms of what we do when making other decisions and other policies, from what I have seen, it is merely drawing on your other partners. Even if Cayman has very limited data, having your other partners to be able to supplement and give you some more guidance, in terms of, *‘well, this is the data that you have or these are the KPIs that we would be expecting.’* Like I said, Cayman is blessed and cursed almost, in terms of not having all of the bad data out there. Our numbers are low in other aspects, but it also inhibits how much data we have from a local population, so you are relying more on data from elsewhere.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you, Mrs. Pouchie.

Through you again, Mr. Chair, we know, as has been said a couple of times now, that data gives us information we need to make decisions in the

Parliament and provide accountability to the public. Therefore, can you update on the plans to develop a National Health Care Standards Programme and the Annual Report from the Chief Medical Officer, whoever that person may be?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Okay. Mr. Chairman through you, in terms of his response to his resignation, I think you may have heard as well that the CMO is still working on that report on what he will put forth he has seen during his time here—what needs to drive the standards that he is seeing. That will be forthcoming but yes, it is absolutely critical that we have that kind of information to be able to meet the relevant decision-making that needs to happen.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: So can we get an undertaking from you that we will get that report before the CMO leaves this jurisdiction?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Yes, sir. Absolutely. We will expect that that would be forthcoming.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: I thank you, Mrs. Pouchie.

The Chairman: If there are no further questions on this topic, we will move on to the next one—health statistics. Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you Mr. Chair to the Chief Officer, the Office of the Auditor General reported in 2017 that **“the Cayman Islands appeared to perform well in many categories of health outcomes, but limitations of available information may obscure some important differences. Health statistics used reflect averages for all Cayman residents and do not take account of the high population of non-Caymanian expatriate residents that only live in the Cayman Islands during the healthiest years of their life.”** Using averages risk distorting the apparent performance of the health system and may obscure differences in outcomes.

As members of this Committee have indicated, this is important for the government to know when planning and establishing policies for health care needs in the longer term. The OAG’s recommendation 9 states that **“the government should ensure that health statistics used for purposes of planning, management and accountability distinguish between Caymanian and non-Caymanian populations”**. We note that the government did not accept this recommendation so my first question to you is: Why did the government not accept it?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, unfortunately, it's difficult for me to say why that wasn't accepted at that point. I really can't elaborate too much in terms of the decision that was made, given that I was not privy to that part of it. However, in terms of knowing what our population numbers are, Caymanian or non-Caymanian, I'm not sure that that would be anything that would be adverse. I think that would be helpful in terms of policy making; however, as I said, I don't know all the intricacies of why that was not accepted at that point, so I can't really speak in that regard.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Chief Officer.

Through you, Mr. Chair to the Chief Officer, can you state the advantages and disadvantages to analysing and monitoring information on health outcomes for Caymanians and non-Caymanians?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, in monitoring outcomes, it helps to make better decisions, drive policies to know where we are lacking or what we need to strengthen or, if we are already measuring certain outcomes and those are favourable—where we want to see them—then it would be now diverting resources onto to something else. If we know what those are, then surely that has to help to drive better decision-making.

I can see that in the absence of that it's more theoretical, but you would want to know that you are being very realistic for your population needs so that your people are getting the help that they need.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Chief Officer.

My question to you is: Do you think that this current Government would accept this recommendation to include non-Caymanians as well?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you.

I certainly cannot speak on behalf of the Government but [it is certainly something that I can take forward and have some discussion, primarily with our Minister](#) and, beyond that, her with her colleagues.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through Mr. Chairman to the Chief Officer, thank you for that.

I think it would be good information to collate for future reports, to determine Caymanians versus non-Caymanians, in terms of the health issues that they experience. I think that would be a good thing to take that forward through your Minister.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Chief Officer, I do have one question in this area of data.

I remember—it's quite a few years now—there was a draft of a Bill for a National Cancer Registry that would have made it a requirement for doctors and those in healthcare to report the incidence of cancer in the country. I do know that we have a cancer registry at the moment but it is purely voluntary. It's really difficult to make any informed decisions about the prevalence of cancer if it is purely voluntary because you don't know what you're missing.

Are there any plans by the Ministry to try and push to bring that legislation back to the forefront?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, I haven't had any discussions with my current Minister in that regard, but [it's definitely something that I can put forth, to have the discussions to see if the Government has any views on moving that forward again.](#)

The Chairman: Thank you very much for that commitment. I mean, I think the whole thing just really goes to the heart of this collection of really reliable healthcare statistics for the country. Are there any other questions on this area?

If not, we will move on and ask questions now on the CayHealth Programme. I believe the Member for George Town South is going to lead off the questioning here.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Through you to the Chief Officer, in 2017, the OAG reported that the CayHealth Programme was a good example of chronic disease management; it was focused on the medically indigent population—at that time over 1200 patients—and the OAG recommended (in recommendation number 8) that the government should evaluate the design and performance of the CayHealth Programme and, as appropriate, extend it to cover a wider population.

The original response stated that an evaluation would be completed by the end of March 2017. In June 2018, an update stated that the CayHealth Programme would be extended to members of the Cayman Islands Civil Service Association and HSA staff. However, in January 2021, the Ministry stated that the plan to roll out to civil servants had not been implemented.

First of all, can you explain to this Committee, and the listening audience, what the CayHealth programme is about? I'm not really sure, so if you could tell us who and what does that cover, what the benefits of that are, I think we can start from there.

Thank you.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you, my understanding of the CayHealth Programme was to be able to pair your primary doctors with, for example a patient, and that would be tracking that patient's

primary health issues, et cetera; being able to provide that support and having that initial interaction with your patients, being able to know their situation and helping not to get to chronic illnesses and so forth. It was giving that better health outcome in an ongoing basis before you get to the real serious issues, and ensuring that persons were getting the necessary care to prevent that—that is my understanding of what the programme aimed to do.

In terms of how it is at this point and why it was not rolled out to civil servants, et cetera, I am sorry I cannot speak to that; I would have to take that away and try to understand that a bit better.

I know that the HSA had talks about re-energising the programme, almost like 'CayHealth 2.0', having other suggestions on how that might be rolled out and be more feasible, but I do not have those details—I have not seen that completed proposal as yet.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Chief Officer.

Through you Mr. Chairman, can I have an undertaking from you that this will be discussed, in terms of the extension and plans to further the CayHealth Programme and to extend that onto the civil servants and HSA?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: [Mr. Chairman through you: Yes, I will take it further.](#)

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, through you to the Chief Officer: Does the HSA currently have a mechanism for tracking these diseases for all residents or is it just for the indigent; and is it up to date?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, HSA would obviously have the statistics for those patients that their doctors tend to. They would have information on that. They would.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Through you Mr. Chair, just one follow up question in relation to the CayHealth programme.

I noticed that when it was rolled out for the pilot programme back in 2010, the reports showed that there were positive outcomes, especially with patients who had diabetes or high blood pressure, those conditions tend to get under control a bit more.

I know this was before your time but I am just wondering—I know the Member for George Town South just asked a few questions about it but—if you have any indication at all why it was not continued? Was it a cost factor? Do you know anything at all?

I am just trying to understand why the government would not have continued the programme

when we were seeing positive results, especially with our most vulnerable, which at that time was only 1200 but I am quite sure that the numbers have significantly increased.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, I think that the programme still continues but in a very limited capacity in that, for example, the HSA still tracks those patients that they have been monitoring and that they have paired with those primary providers on their end.

Why it did not progress and develop into a bigger scale is the information that I don't know, but I know, from discussions that I have had previously, that it was anticipated that tracking those patients would help deter those serious illnesses, if you're having that ongoing care.

I would need to investigate further with them and have further discussions as to why it did not roll out or expand beyond what was initially anticipated.

The Chairman: Are there any other questions?

[Pause]

The Chairman: Let us turn now to the next segment. That is the legislative framework and for that I will invite the Member for West Bay Central to lead off the questioning.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you Mr. Chair, through you, in relation to recommendation number 2—the government should proceed with a law review for the systematic updating of the health system legislative framework.

Mrs. Pouchie, can you advise us in relation to the Pharmacy Act? I know that this is as old as I am, 1979 is the last time that was looked at, and then the nursing profession did not seem to have any type of regulation by way of primary legislation or regulations. Are there any plans to proceed with a law review for the systematic updating of that framework?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you, my understanding is that there was a draft Pharmacy Bill available, I think, for a couple of years now; however, I understand there were some issues in the draft and it had not progressed beyond that.

Beyond that point, we put that same draft Bill before the current Pharmacy Council, mindful that it is made up of different members at this point, to review what was previously drafted so that we are not exactly starting from scratch; they can then give their feedback on some of the recommendations and provisions in that draft legislation, so that it can move forward. It is

currently with the Pharmacy Council for review and feedback to the Minister.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: So that is ongoing then?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Yes.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Perfect, thank you.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: In terms of the other part of your question—legislative review—we have had initial discussions with the various councils, as well as the Health Regulatory Department looking for recommendations and feedback, in terms of where they see gaps in current legislation that may need to be strengthened. We have asked for feedback and have ongoing discussions in that regard.

The Health Practice Law is one of those areas that we are looking to do a review on. We have not commenced the stakeholder group on it as yet, but there is a tentative October date to bring together the relevant stakeholders so, review of the Public Health Law is ongoing as well.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you very much.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, Elected Member for George Town South: Through you Mr. Chairman, can the Chief Officer give some kind of timeline as to when these Laws or Bills will be brought to Parliament? I know what you indicated—the Health Practice Act, the Pharmacy Act and the Public Health Act—really need updating, so we need these to be brought to Parliament as a matter of urgency.

I don't think we can delay them much longer. As a matter of fact, when I was a Councillor in the Ministry of Education one of my constituents approached me about an issue with the Public Health Act—regulating beauty salons, et cetera. I would venture and hazard to say that it has been about 15 years or so that she has been trying to get some regulation with the beauty salons. It has not occurred because I think we are waiting on the Public Health Act to be updated.

Please, I beg you to endeavour to have this brought to Parliament as a matter of urgency.

Thank you.

The Chairman: I want to reinforce the plea, Mrs. Pouchie. I think particularly on something like the Pharmacy Act that is well-nigh on 40 years since it was implemented in 1979 and has not been updated.

I know that one existed and as you said, that is with the council looking for further review from them.

The urgency is very real; I guess I am just putting in my own plea and encouragement to see if we can get some of these things to Parliament for consideration.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Yes, sir, thank you Mr. Chairman; I will certainly take that forward.

Like I said, we will be going through the feedback that we requested from the Council, and the current legislative draft review of the Public Health Act, with our Minister. The Government can decide at that point what they accept and bring forth to Parliament, sir.

The Chairman: Member for East End.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I, too, would like to stress the urgency of getting that review done, but I also want to ensure that all relevant legislation that pertains to health care and the Health Care Act are reviewed as well. It must be an all-encompassing review, to ensure that we touch all the areas that need updating.

The Chairman: If there are no other questions, let's turn our attention now to health insurance. I call on the member for Savannah to lead off that questioning.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

As a result of its first Hearing on this report, the Public Accounts Committee recommended that the Ministry of Health should, in consultation with the Health Insurance Commission, review relevant legislation to enable private sector coverage into retirement.

In June 2018, the Ministry stated that it had engaged a consultant to conduct a feasibility study and determine the premium for standard health insurance contracts for persons aged 65 and over. In January 2021, the Ministry stated that the study was completed and a draft report had been prepared in mid-2019.

Could the Chief Officer now say if there is an update on the outcome of the consultant's feasibility—where is that to date?

As we know, health insurance is an extremely major concern for everyone right now, so I would appreciate if you could give us an update.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, my understanding is that the prior consultation done in that regard did not produce feasible results in terms of an affordable premium for the vulnerable group that was in question at the time—retired persons over 60. My understanding is that it was not a feasible, affordable premium at that point and it had not progressed.

That is one of the issues that I have had discussions on with the Department of Health

Regulatory and the Health Insurance Commission; how we can look back at that study and what recommendations we might have to be able to drive it forward. Being mindful that one of the priority areas expressed by the current Government is the affordability of national health insurance, that is a priority area that is being progressed.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Chief Officer.

My other question is on plans to change the requirements for private healthcare insurance to extend coverage beyond retirement age. Can you give us an update on that?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: That would be discussed, Mr. Chairman, in conjunction with that report, to see what the Government would be able to put in place to ensure that that population group has coverage because it's not always that persons are unable to afford, sometimes there is no access. We are trying to understand where that is; if it is possible that access can be provided, that it is done. That is part of the review.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: I thank you very much. This is a major concern in our Cayman Islands and I look forward to seeing some updates.

Thank you.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Through you Mr. Chair, I want to reiterate my colleague for Savannah's point.

We all have had representation from our constituents on the matter of health insurance coverage for people once they reach retirement age, this is critical. We must find a solution to afford our people who have gone into retirement the health coverage that they need, and if we cannot find something well, then, we as a Government must then direct that a solution be found.

The Chairman: We now turn to inspection and registration and again, the Member for Savannah will kick off the questioning there.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The Auditor General's 2017 report found that some practitioners and facilities were not registered and that some facilities had not been inspected as required by the law, which exposed patients to risks. The Auditor General's report recommended that "[...] **the government should review policies and practices for the registration of practitioners and inspection of health care facilities** and that it **should take steps to ensure that all qualified practitioners are appropriately registered and regulated and that all facilities at which healthcare services are provided by qualified practitioners are**

appropriately inspected and certified. The original management response stated that the review of policies and practices would be completed by the end of July 2017.

In June 2018, the Minister provided a further update but it was not clear if it had taken any action and no updated timescale was provided for implementation.

Can the Chief Officers say if there is an upgrade on registration of healthcare practitioners and inspection of health care facilities to date?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you: this is part of the ongoing Health Practice Law Review.

The recommendation in respect of strengthening to make sure that there are no loopholes is being undertaken by the Department of Health Regulatory.

I also know that the Department is strengthening their review and verification of persons who expressed an interest to perform in that sector; and to be able to do the relevant checks, so they are looking to streamline that but it has been identified in terms of the ongoing Health Practice Law Review.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: I thank you Chief Officer.

Could you also give us the reasons for the delays in updating the policies and practices?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, that is ongoing. I'm not exactly sure what the delays were previously, but it is something that we have highlighted as a priority.

The Chairman: Chief, how do we get a situation in this country where you have persons and facilities not registered? I mean, the legislation certainly exists but, according to this report, those are some of the findings. I am trying to process that.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, in terms of not being registered, it may be more a matter of enforcement. Everybody who sets up a business and wants to act in a health profession and offer those services has to be registered.

In terms of which persons are not [registered] and are still allowed to operate, it would need a bit more investigation to understand what those are. I think the person best placed so that we could ascertain that would definitely be the Director of the Department of Health Regulatory, but in terms of persons who are registered and performing services, those inspections do occur and if someone is illegal, then there is an arm, within their remit, able to deal with that.

The Chairman: Thank you, but my real concern is around healthcare professionals who are not registered. The ongoing inspection is part of it but... how is it that they get to operate in this country and they are not licenced?

You mentioned it being on regulatory enforcement but... we do have a regulatory enforcement arm with the licensing requirements—everything that goes with it. I mean, healthcare is probably one of the most regulated professions in Cayman and yet we see that there are lapses here and that people are able to, let's just say, operate under the radar.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, if that is occurring—if that is the case—persons are to report it to the Department of Regulatory Services so that we can ensure that that is not happening.

I would want to look into it further and probably discuss a bit more with the Auditor General's Office, in terms of the observation and recommendation just to understand more clearly: Were there instances of persons operating who were not registered or maybe it had to do with different standards of registration? I'm not sure, so perhaps some clarity would help me there.

The Chairman: Auditor General.

Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General, Office of the Auditor General: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Chief Officer, if she has our 2017 report in front of her, paragraph 54 gives specific examples about the Counselling Centre and Haven Residential Centre. I seem to recall it has to do with where there were health practitioners operating in non-health facilities. I think there was an issue with the interplay between social care and health care.

Thank you.

The Chairman: You're referring to the original report?

[Inaudible]

The Chairman: Okay.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Thank you for the clarity.

As to not being registered, I don't know if there is confusion regarding the waiving of fees for persons who may be employed within those certain services.

Going back to the report, it speaks to "[...] **registration fees may be waived for practitioners who are government employees and the councils do not include practitioners on their registers unless fees are collected**". If you are saying that they are not in that list of persons, they would have to be qualified to even be deemed to be working in those

professions in the first place. If they are not on your registered list, we can understand if they are somewhere else, in terms of them not having paid those fees, but they certainly would not be able to provide those services if they were not qualified to do that in the first place.

I don't know if there is some confusion in terms of the registration aspect of payment of fees because I know that if you're working in another government department, for example, or for a government entity, the fees are waived for those persons—probably from the standpoint of Government paying itself. However, the persons who carry out those duties would have to meet the same requisite qualifications and experience as anyone else who would be a practitioner in the respective area.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to touch on recommendation number 5 and, as everybody else has said, the need for the update of the Health Practice Act and Regulations and its policies and procedures to be prioritised.

Looking at the Auditor General's 2017 report, in paragraph 56, one of the things that they highlighted is actually registered facilities. You look at places like the Pines, where they have registered practitioners providing health services, but they are not being inspected or certified even though it meets the definition of a health care facility under the Law.

The importance of highlighting this, is that our failure to address it then means that there may be a risk of the facility failing to provide the appropriate healthcare environment. When we go back to looking at protecting the elderly, protecting the most vulnerable, we want to make sure that we have these Acts, Regulations and policies in place, to ensure that places like the Golden Age Home, like the Pines, are being inspected on a regular basis.

[Pause]

The Chairman: The next area for us to examine is resources. I know it came up earlier and we explored that quite extensively, but I will recognise the Member for East End who will lead some further discussion and questions in this area.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Chief Officer, Mrs. Pouchie, I know that we discussed resources earlier; you also alluded that there were deficiencies in certain areas, and pretty much, at the management level.

Can you give us an update on any further staff requirements that you need to be effective in delivering these reports and do what is expected by everybody else from your Ministry? Can you give us a further

update on what additional staff you need that would form part of the 2022 and 2023 budget cycle?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, to that question sir, we have identified that we would need additional policy advisors. As I said, we strengthened up by one Deputy Chief Officer and we are adding another. That will help give us capacity.

We are looking at a communications person, a business manager for our risk area—Freedom of Information (FOI) rights, et cetera; we added a more senior HR manager to help us with some of the strategic issues. We have not had that in the past and it helps us to address succession planning and capacity.

We are looking at our resources—the ageing population of our unit and Departments and so forth—to ensure that we have continuity, and just to have that capacity. Otherwise, it's obviously very difficult to be forward-thinking—ahead of it. You want to be more proactive and, looking at that, have the necessary persons who are able and have the time to do the research and so forth. We are looking at our procedures in that regard.

Implementing more timelines for review of our legislation, to have actual timelines for review periods, not just when somebody highlights a deficiency. We have implemented more of an action tracker approach as well, stating why key areas may not have progressed; so that it is almost a statutory document for us, from our Ministry standpoint so that as we have changes in personnel or government, we know what those items are.

That ongoing list stays with the Ministry and not with a person so when that person leaves, whoever comes in will know:

- These are the things that we were working on;
- These are the things that did not proceed; and
- Here is why they did not proceed, et cetera.

Just having more resources in that regard. Using technology too; not saying that we have to have persons for everything, but being a bit more innovative so that we are more on top of what we need to do from a Ministry perspective.

As I said, we have identified that continuity is a huge gap so, trying to put mitigating measures in place so that we can go forth much better.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you Mrs. Pouchie, you touched on two things that I was going to ask you about: succession planning and the use of technology.

If we fast forward to September 2022, when we asked, “*Can you give us an update on recruitment?*”—can we get your assurance that you will do your best to fill the positions you need to work effectively in

delivering on the recommendations in the Auditor General's report?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, *absolutely, sir*. Recruitment is such a priority now, we just have to. We are stretched, so that is not even an option for us at this point, it's a need.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you. So just clarifying: We will be able to tick the box next to number 4 next year.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, *anything that is in my control, that I am able to deliver, absolutely sir; that is the undertaking*.

The Chairman: I think it would be remiss of me, Mrs. Pouchie, if I didn't touch a little bit on the CMO position, knowing that the incumbent has tendered his resignation. What are you thinking at this point?

I recognise it is still early days, but what do you think with regard to recruitment, the time it will take; will we end up having an acting position, et cetera? Just tell us what your thinking is at this time.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Obviously that is a priority for us, especially given that we are in a pandemic. We have seen how beneficial it is to have that CMO on site within the Cayman Islands, so that is a very critical post for us.

It is not something... I will just be a little bit informal here, I said to Dr. Lee, “*Are you absolutely sure? Is that your final answer?*” And he has to leave, so I want to thank our current CMO for all of his efforts to help us with the pandemic. Obviously, we still have to go forth and make sure that there is no gap in that level of policy, advice, et cetera. So that is being discussed at the very highest levels, because we understand the importance of that role to our overall national strategies.

We do not anticipate that we are going to be in a gap area in that regard—that we will be able to have someone come in and have that hand-over time, almost transition time with the current CMO. We are looking to have that filled pretty shortly, more on a temporary basis because of our time constraints but again, looking at how we move forward in terms of filling the post forthright.

We are also looking, as I said, at strengthening our more senior leadership in the public health area, so that we also have that level of capacity to draw on. We currently have a Medical Officer of Health and we are looking at adding resources at that top level, in terms of national epidemiology—having persons at that level available to help us—so yes, it is a priority area for us

and we have been having the discussions at the very senior level to have that gap filled.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Can you just confirm for me: the CMO's office resides within your Ministry; am I correct?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Yes, sir. The CMO and the Medical Officer of Health are Ministry employees. Those functions are carried on behalf of the Ministry, given the national nature of the positions.

The Chairman: Thank you for the clarity. Any other questions?

The Member for East End.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Through you Mr. Chair, are you looking to recruit the new CMO from any specific areas? Is it going to be regionally, the UK, the USA—or even Cayman...even be better, Mrs. Pouchie.

Any thoughts of where you will be looking to recruit? Preferably we find a well-qualified Caymanian to fill that post first but if not, where are you looking?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, it will be the formal recruitment process where persons who are qualified and have the suitable experience are able to submit their applications once we get to that. In terms of technical advice we are still supported heavily by Public Health England, so we do have that resource as a gap measure until we have another CMO in place.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you, Mrs. Pouchie.

The Chairman: Let's turn now to Caymanian doctors. I turn to the Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Chief Officer, in 2018 the PAC recommended that the Ministry of Health should develop a policy to develop Caymanian doctors to board-level certification, and provide a grant to the HSA to fund these staff developments through proper training.

I note that in June 2018, the government confirmed that the Ministry of Education, where I sat as councillor, had made \$500,000 available to fund scholarships to assist Caymanian doctors to pursue post-graduate studies to board-level certification. However, in January 2021, the Ministry stated that it would "check if a policy had been prepared on the development of Caymanian doctors."

The PAC recommended in April 2019 that the Ministry of Health should consider Canada as an option for Caymanian doctors to obtain specialty-board certification. We note that the Ministry has not

responded to this recommendation, so my question to the Chief Officer is: Can you provide us with an update on the development of a policy for Caymanian doctors?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you, in terms of medical internships and training for our Caymanians who are pursuing medicine, Dr. Jefferson, the Medical Director at the HSA, is the person who leads that for us—identifying suitably qualified and interested Caymanians in certain positions or pursuing certain disciplines. Helping to guide them in achieving what they need to be able to practise, et cetera, at the end of it. From a policy standpoint, Dr. Jefferson is the lead point person who advises candidates.

In addition to what was provided to the Ministry of Education to fund interested Caymanians, the Ministry funds a medical internship programme through the HSA, headed by Dr. Jefferson. Where I think we may be able to improve, is to have it better documented so we are able to guide people from the onset, so that when persons are pursuing or interested in the medical area they know exactly what the requirements are, and what they need to do.

In the past, persons pursued a certain career and then at the end of it, realised that maybe they were not yet suitable—they had more things to do when they thought that they were ready to practice, and so forth—so it's really getting that guidance.

I know that for the scholarship that is done through the Ministry of Education, they liaise with Dr. Jefferson to ensure that even persons who are being afforded the scholarship get that kind of technical professional advice. I think that is an area that can be strengthened, where persons do have that knowledge upfront and that ongoing guidance. They are linked, then, to our Medical Director, who is able to provide them with that necessary career guidance so that they know that at the end of their time, they are able to assume the positions that they aspire to.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you Chief Officer. My next question then is: is it Dr. Jefferson who will drive or develop this policy? Is it him that will actually be responsible for developing this?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Like I said, Mr. Chairman, obviously the Ministry will need to ensure that it is readily available for every person wanting to pursue that, but Dr. Jefferson as the Medical Director of the HSA, is our point person, in that regard. So he will help in terms of having recommendations and so forth. Yes, in terms of driving that.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: So the policy...

Can we get some commitment that a policy will be established before long?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, *I will make the commitment to have that discussion in terms of the actual written policy.*

As I said, there are certain guidelines, but I think it needs to be more open/transparent, so persons know exactly what we are looking for at that level, and so that students are well aware. I am not aware of a written policy; there is some guidance that the HSA—like I said Dr. Jefferson—will look for, in terms of those persons, but to have a developed policy so that it is much clearer and transparent *is the undertaking that we will look to institute very shortly.*

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Chief Officer.

Through you Mr. Chairman, the funds that are allocated for these medical scholarships are \$500,000 per annum. Can you advise or confirm to this Committee, and the wider public, if those funds are utilised on an annual basis?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you, Yes. I would need to get an update from the Ministry of Education to see the uptake in that aspect.

The Chairman: Can I just ask if you could supply that update to the Committee, please? Thank you.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: *Yes, sir.*

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Through you Mr. Chairman, I have one more question: Back in the day the PAC, I think it was the Member for North Side at the time, Mr. Ezzard Miller, really had concerns that Canada was not included for Caymanian doctors to be certified. Can you give some idea of whether Canada would be one of the countries where Caymanian doctors can obtain board certification?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, that will certainly be part of the discussion and the development of policy—to also be able to say why certain jurisdictions would not be recommended versus others. So that would be a part of it, yes.

The Chairman: If I could take that a little bit further, my understanding is that, since we are not a primary licensing jurisdiction, we rely on the licensing of doctors by other countries and there is a specific list of countries which we accept.

My understanding—correct me if I'm wrong—is that right now, that is limited to seven countries. Is Canada amongst that list?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: I do believe so, Mr. Chairman.

I think that list is quite dated, though. It seems that these seven jurisdictions were the inception, what we started with; however, I have not seen anything to say why it should remain seven jurisdictions, or why additional countries have not been added or considered.

Obviously, there is certain research that goes into that, to be able to add, but the seven countries were adopted some time ago and we have actually had discussions as well with the Health Practice Commission, just to understand what might be involved, in terms of getting more research/review done on that, to see what countries can be added.

The Chairman: I thank you for that. At this point, I am certainly not advocating specifically for the expansion of the list, I just want to understand.

Technically then, there should not be any real impediments for a Caymanian who wants to go to Canada or any of the other six jurisdictions to take their medical training and get qualified. Is that a fair statement?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: In terms of Caymanians studying, I think it is more about the curriculum that is offered and what the programme is, not so much the country if we are looking at students who are going on scholarships and so forth, in line with what the Member just said.

In terms of licensing a practitioner who already meets certain requirements in terms of residency and years of practice and so forth, that's where the seven countries then come into play; it's now looking at *is that list still relevant for us, or do we need to look at other jurisdictions.*

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Mr. Chairman, through you, going back to the PAC recommendation in 2018: then, Government confirmed, via the Ministry of Education, that they made \$500,000 available to fund the scholarships. Then in January this year, the Ministry stated that it would check up as it had been preparing on the development of Caymanian doctors. I find it a little bit troubling that two years passed, and we are still checking to see if there was a policy developed.

Can you elaborate on why do you think that was not done in that two year period?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you, I am saying that I have not seen a written policy. Like I said, obviously there is guidance that is considered by the medical director; the medical director being someone who gives information then to the Scholarship

Secretariat for persons who are looking to pursue areas of medicine and looking at scholarships there.

I can't say that there are no guidelines; I am saying in terms of a written policy I have not yet been able to see that. [It is] something that we would need to ensure is developed—a written policy.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you Mrs. Pouchie.

Through you again, Mr. Chair, can you give us an idea of how many Caymanians are currently studying in the medical field and how many have actually returned and are now practising doctors, either at the HSA or elsewhere?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, I'm sorry, I don't have that information in front of me, [but it is something I can add when I provide the update on the uptake of the scholarships—the persons who we have currently practising.](#)

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you, Mrs. Pouchie.

The Chairman: Are there any other questions in this area? We turn now, then, to cost of health care and I turn questioning over to the member for Savannah.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In 2019 the PAC recommended that the Minister should consider ways to reduce cost of health care, such as removal of duty from drugs and medical supplies, as well as reducing HSA's mark up on the cost of drugs. We note that the Ministry has not responded to the PAC recommendation.

Can the Chief Officer say if there are plans to remove duty from drugs and medical supplies?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, I don't have much information on this one. I don't even know if that recommendation was accepted, [so I can undertake to have further discussions and update on what is the status of that recommendation.](#)

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Through you, Mr. Chairman, I would just like to ask the Chief Officer if there are any plans for any upgrades at the HSA, specifically for the entrance of the hospital, as well as room accommodations.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you, I know the Honourable Minister has expressed her desire for upgrades and to take a look at the whole operational aspect of the HSA, even just in terms of the aesthetics of the area—how we can make the HSA more inviting to our users.

I know there have been discussions in that regard and also in terms of capacity, what is needed in terms of beds, et cetera. There are ongoing discussions with the Honourable Minister and the HSA.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Through you Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you very much for that, Mrs. Pouchie.

Now that I have an opportunity, I just want to draw everyone's attention to the health clinics in all the districts. I want to send a big shout out to all those who have made some really, really good upgrades to the clinics. Especially dealing with my mom at the Bodden Town clinic, I found this to be an extremely helpful place to go to now. Because of COVID, we are now directed more to the clinics and I just want to send a big shout out to the Ministry, as well as to the clinics, in regards to what they are doing to make the lives of our elderly and our children a bit more comfortable.

It is an easy drive from Savannah to Bodden Town and once you are there you are greeted, made comfortable, and you are seen by a doctor, and the nurses take extremely good care.

I think with what is happening now within our Islands as far as COVID, perhaps people should consider visiting the district clinics a bit more. I know for a fact that the Bodden Town clinic has gone way above and beyond in making sure that all their patients are well taken care of, and I want to really thank them for that.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Thank you for that Ma'am, on behalf of the HSA and the staff who really strive to go above and beyond on a daily basis there. I am sure they appreciate that.

Thank you.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Through you Mr. Chair, Ms. Nellie, I want to thank you for your appearance today as well, but I have a question outside of what my colleague asked earlier, in terms of the plans to remove duty from drugs and medical supplies.

Are there any plans being considered by the Ministry to help reduce health care costs in this country?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman through you, obviously the Ministry grapples with the cost of healthcare in many aspects; looking at it in terms of having to fund and to also ensure, not just that the government has adequate funding, but that our persons and our local citizens also have access to affordable health care.

We have a few studies that were done previously, those at the retirement age was one of them. We also need to be looking at our indigent

population that is very steady; even if it is not increasing by leaps and bounds, it is steadily increasing and those costs are accumulating quite highly. That's always an ongoing concern because we want to make sure that healthcare is managed in such a way that we are not drained at the higher end of it.

We are also looking at the wellness aspect, which we have not even been able to actually touch on yet from the Ministry's standpoint. Our Minister has added wellness as a part of her Portfolio and that will really help to drive some of it. Initially, we will have the critical care, ill persons on that indigent list, for example right now, who we must do our duty to provide the best healthcare that we can, but also mindful that the Government has limited resources as well.

Looking at ways to reduce that as best as possible without compromising access or care. However, from the wellness aspect, looking at what demographics, what age groups, what categories of persons can we now tap into, to be able to help [them so] that we do not get to the extreme where you need really critical care, which is very expensive. So the wellness aspect is still to come, to be able to help mitigate some of those costs in the long run.

Looking always at other ways in which you can drive down those costs and other ways to be able to service our population. Something that is in the thinking stage but not something that we actually explored yet, looking with our other stakeholders across the government, in terms of what can we do to drive those costs down. Working with CINICO critically as being that insurer for us as well; looking at whether outsourcing certain things is an option for us. We are looking really holistically at what we can do, in terms of costs, and not just accepting that this is a population that will always be in that kind of cost scenario. Those are things to come.

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: I thank you Mrs. Pouchie.

You mentioned wellness, which plays a big part in helping reduce health care costs, I agree with that, but this is a big issue for the people of the country and we need to try and figure out a way; whether it's through messaging on wellness or finding some other ways of reducing healthcare costs, but we must get to that point in order to make it affordable for our people.

The Chairman: Financial Secretary.

Mr. Kenneth Jefferson, Financial Secretary/Chief Officer, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to elaborate, and I think it will probably be for the benefit of the listening public as opposed necessarily to the Committee members, because I suspect the Committee members already know this.

With respect to what we have just been discussing about the duty removal on drugs, with the objective or the hope in mind of making those cheaper to the public, I just want to say that many, many years ago the procedure for changing the import duty rates for any item being imported involved actually changing the rates specified in a Law; so the method was to bring an amending Bill to the Parliament to change the percentage import duty rates that were specified in the law.

A few years ago that procedure was changed, in that the Cabinet can now make changes to import duty rates in the Government Administration Building, as opposed to having to formulate an amending Bill and bring it to the Parliament, which that process could take months. So the procedure is a lot quicker now, once the Cabinet (the Government of the day) makes a decision that it wishes to proceed with a change to the existing import duty rates. That is a much faster procedure now and it can happen within a quicker timeframe once the Government of the day wishes to make a change.

The Chairman: Thank you FS, I hope you don't mind me putting you on the spot, but if I remember correctly, a review of the Customs Tariff Bill or Law was started some time ago. I do remember hearing it but, do you know if that has been completed or if there has been any movement there, sir?

Mr. Kenneth Jefferson, Financial Secretary/Chief Officer, Ministry of Finance and Economic Development: Mr. Chairman, you put me on the spot as well.

I don't recall that, but what I do know is that obviously the Cabinet, in the past, has made periodic changes to various items in the Customs Tariff Law. Changes have been made to educational supplies, et cetera. I will have to check about a wholesale review of the Customs and Tariff Law, to see if there is an ongoing general review of it, but I know that, as and when something that requires a change is pressing, it would be taken to Cabinet, dealing with that particular aspect, as opposed to waiting for a general review.

[I will ask if a general review of the Law is being undertaken](#), I do not recall right now.

The Chairman: That is fine, sir, I do appreciate that. I recognise that you are not a witness before us, so if you told me 'no', I would have said '*okay, I will talk to you after*', but thank you very much for that clarity.

The Member for Savannah.

Ms. Heather D. Bodden: Thank you Mr. Chairman, I have no further questions for Chief Officer Pouchie, but I would just like to say a big thank you for your honest and candid responses today. Thank you for being here; we really appreciate your presence.

The Chairman: Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just a quick question on the reduction of health care for our elderly and indigents: Can you give some indication of whether a capitated model would work?

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you, I would not want to say 'yes/no' without having really looked at that a little closer first, but any way that we are able to have a better handle on our costs and not having those fluctuating, escalating and so forth. From that perspective, in theory, you can see that as being something that would be desired, but in terms of the best model for us, and whether that would work for our situation, we certainly have to look into that a bit further before being able to say that definitively.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Chief Officer.

The Chairman: Are there any other questions for the witness? I see Members shaking their heads.

The Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Chair, if there are no more questions, or while people are thinking whether they want to have a last one, I just wanted to say a few words as the former [Minister of Health] and thank, and once again congratulate, the new Chief Officer in this role. I wish her well, she was strong then and will only become better.

It was just the two of us during the pandemic, and it was always that we had the largest Ministry, but somewhat the smallest complement of staff to assist with no deputies; yet we were able to successfully pull off dealing with something in the world, not just in Cayman—a pandemic.

On top of that, we were able to furnish the former government—2017 to 2021—with the most tangible projects, including:

- New garbage trucks, something that had been desired to get us back on track and you see that's pretty much on track now;
- Mental Health Facility;
- The ISWMS—Waste Management Project (capping and remediating the landfill);
- Expanding our culture programmes and taking the largest ever contingent of Caymanians to CARIFESTA in Trinidad;
- Expanding our Marine Parks; and
- Building homes and buying over 35 acres of land for affordable homes, just to name a few.

I wish Chief Officer Pouchie well, especially knowing her background, coming from a big five company before joining the civil service. I know that she

will definitely be an asset and some of these things that had not been achieved thus far, she will be able to achieve when she gets the support and the staffing complement, because she has always been a driver from that CFO role in leaving her there.

I want to also thank and make mention of Dr. Lee; we had good productive times together, especially during COVID and I pray whoever takes over will build on what has been left and make it better. It was definitely refreshing to have a full time CMO and not an acting one splitting duties and it came at just the perfect time, during COVID—thank God we had a full time CMO.

I also want to thank Dr. Williams for his Acting role over the years.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Thank you for those comments, Member.

Ladies and gentlemen of the Committee and the listening public, this concludes this Hearing of the Public Accounts Committee.

I want to thank all the members for your participation in asking questions. Thanks also to the Auditor General and the Financial Secretary for their interventions throughout the Hearing.

Last but not least, Chief Officer Pouchie, just to thank you as well for your presence here today, and answering all the questions quite candidly and forthright for us. I join with other members in congratulating you on the confirmation of your post. I do wish you every success, and I know that you will grow and mature into an excellent Chief Officer, so I do wish you well.

That concludes our proceedings for today. Thank you all for listening, and until we next meet.

Thank you.

The Committee adjourned sine die at 12:17pm



Parliament of the Cayman Islands

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Meeting held

Wednesday, 29th September 2021 at 1:15 pm

PAC Members Present:

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP – Chairman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP - Member
Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP - Member
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP - Member
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP – Member
Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, MP – Member

PAC Clerk: Mrs. Patricia Priestley

Attendees: Mrs. Sue Winspear - Auditor General
Ms. Angela Cullen - Deputy Auditor General (Performance Audit)

1. Meeting to Order

There being a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 1:15 pm.

2. Apologies

None.

3. Approval of PAC Minutes

- **Wednesday, 11th August 2021 (*Administrative Meeting*)**

The Chairman identified the word “publically” (middle of page 4) as a spelling error and asked for this to be amended to “publicly”.

On a motion moved by Mr. Isaac Rankine and seconded by Ms. Barbara Conolly, the Committee unanimously approved the Minutes as amended.

4. Matters arising from Minutes

- PAC witness hearing on Wednesday, 22nd September 2021

The agreed schedule for the appearance of witnesses was changed on the morning of Wednesday, 22nd September 2021 when Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness declined to attend at 10:00 am.

On short notice, Ms. Teresa Echenique agreed to appear before the Committee at 10:00 am instead of 2:00 pm, Wednesday, 22nd September 2021.

Mrs. Nellie Pouchie subsequently appeared before the Committee at 10:00 am on Wednesday, 29th September 2021.

- PAC Report on the Report of the OAG on Improving Financial Accountability and Transparency: Financial Management and Reporting - May 2021

Committee Members signed the PAC Report, approved for tabling at the next sitting of Parliament.

5. Approval of Auditor General's Invoice

OAG's Invoice No. 207545 dated 31 August 2021 in the amount of \$56,662.52 was considered and discussed, and unanimously approved on a motion moved by Mr. Dwayne Seymour and seconded by Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks. The Chairman acknowledged the Committee's approval by returning a signed copy of the invoice to the Auditor General.

6. Auditor General's Update

i. OAG report *HSA Out-patient Pharmacy Services (2021)*

The Auditor General advised the Committee that she anticipated this report to be completed within two to three weeks, depending upon the response time of the HSA.

ii. OAG Quarterly Report ending 30 September 2021

The Auditor General advised that she intended to present this Quarterly Report to the Committee in the next administrative meeting.

iii. OAG Budget Submission 2022 & 2023

The Auditor General presented the updated OAG Budget Submission 2022 & 2023 to the Committee. The Auditor General stated that the budgets requested in this detailed budget submission were now slightly lower than those that the Committee endorsed in its administrative meeting on 29th June 2021 when considering the OAG's SPS budget submission.

The Chairman advised the Committee that he had reviewed the updated Budget Submission and found it to be acceptable and proposed that the Committee endorse it.

On a motion moved by Ms. Barbara Conolly and seconded by Ms. Heather Bodden, the Committee unanimously agreed to accept and endorse the OAG's updated Budget Submission 2022 & 2023.

7. Consideration of Witness Sessions

- OAG report: *Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 (August 2021)*

The Committee unanimously agreed the following two additional recommendations be added to section 9 of the PAC Report:

- i. the Deputy Governor, having responsibility for the Portfolio of the Civil Service, be required to drive the implementation of all recommended changes; and
- ii. the Deputy Governor be held responsible for honouring Standing Order 77 sub-order 7, as provided for in section 10 of the PAC Report, which requires the laying of the Government Minute on the Table of the House within three months of the laying of the report of the Committee and of the report of the Auditor General to which it relates.

8. Any Other Business

- CPA UK virtual PAC Inquiry Workshop - 11th to 15th October 2021

The Chairman encouraged Members to register and attend this virtual inquiry workshop.

9. Scheduling of Next Meeting

The next meeting was confirmed for the following date:

- Wednesday, 3rd November 2021 (subsequently changed to Friday, 12th November 2021)
(Administrative Meeting)

10:00 am in the Large Committee Room.

10. Adjournment

There being no further business, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 1:50 pm.



Parliament of the Cayman Islands

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

MINUTES

Meeting held

Friday, 12th November 2021 at 10:00 am

PAC Members Present:

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP – Chairman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP - Member
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP - Member
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP – Member
Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, MP – Member

PAC Members Absent:

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP - Member

PAC Clerk: Mrs. Patricia Priestley

Attendees: Mrs. Sue Winspear - Auditor General
Ms. Angela Cullen - Deputy Auditor General (Performance Audit)

1. Meeting to Order

There being a quorum present, the Chair called the meeting to order at 10:12 am.

2. Apologies

Apologies received from Mr. Dwayne Seymour for his absence and from Ms. Heather Bodden for arriving late.

3. Approval of PAC Minutes

- **Wednesday, 22nd September 2021 (*Hearing*)**

On a motion moved by Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks and seconded by Ms. Barbara Conolly, the Committee unanimously approved the Minutes.

- **Wednesday, 29th September 2021 (*Hearing*)**

On a motion moved by Mr. Isaac Rankine and seconded by Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, the Committee unanimously approved the Minutes.

- **Wednesday, 29th September 2021 (*Administrative Meeting*)**

On a motion moved by Mr. Isaac Rankine and seconded by Ms. Barbara Conolly, the Committee unanimously approved the Minutes.

4. Matters arising from Minutes

- **PAC witness hearing on Wednesday, 29th September 2021**

The Committee reviewed and discussed the twelve undertakings given by the witness, Mrs. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness.

The Clerk advised the Committee that she had not heard from the witness since the hearing.

The Committee agreed that the witness should be contacted, by way of a letter from the Committee Clerk, and asked to fulfill the twelve undertakings given to the PAC.

The Clerk agreed to draft a letter to the witness on behalf of the Committee to be reviewed and approved by the Chairman before delivery.

5. Approval of Auditor General's Invoices

OAG invoice no. 207546 dated 30 September 2021 in the amount of \$101,425.02 and OAG invoice no. 207581 dated 30 October 2021 in the amount of \$60,337.52 were both considered and discussed by the Committee.

The Auditor General provided an explanation to the Committee on why the two invoices were of substantially different amounts.

The Committee unanimously approved the Auditor General's two invoices on a motion moved by Ms. Barbara Conolly and seconded by Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks. The Chairman acknowledged the Committee's approval by returning signed copies of the invoices to the Auditor General.

6. Auditor General's Update

- ***OAG Quarterly Report - 30 September 2021***

The Auditor General presented the *OAG Quarterly Report - 30 September 2021* and advised that the report covered the period 1st July 2021 to 30th September 2021.

On the financial audit side, the Auditor General informed the Committee that her office began the 2021 financial audit season with an event for audit staff to review strategy and approach to planning for undertaking 49 entity audits, as compared to 42 entity audits in 2020, due to the restructuring of core government entities after the April 2021 election.

The Auditor General advised that her office was unable to recruit locally, perhaps due to the pandemic, and has had to recruit from off island.

With respect to outstanding audits, the Auditor General referenced the following:

- i. The **Ministry of Health, Environment, Culture & Housing** has outstanding audits for 2016-2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020. With a new permanent CFO in place (Mr. Troy Claxton) the Auditor General believed that the Ministry is capable of getting caught up to date and suggested that the Committee include in its letter to CO Pouchie reference back to the previous PAC's hearing on Friday, 29th January 2021 in which the CO gave a commitment to the Committee to get the Ministry's audits up to date by June 2021.
- ii. The **Cayman Islands Airports Authority** has 2018, 2019 and 2020 audits outstanding.
- iii. One entity, **University College of the Cayman Islands**, was given a qualified audit, around revenue completeness, in its 2020 audit.
- iv. The **Cayman Turtle Centre** currently has no one on staff capable of preparing the financials so a consultant is being hired to complete the 2020 audit.

On the performance audit side, the Auditor General advised that her office had finished and published the HSA Pharmacy Report which was the next item on the agenda and her office's priorities for the next period included:

- i. a performance audit report on the **Regen Waste Management Contractual Arrangements** to review the value for money of the public private partnership contract for the new Regen waste management facility; and
- ii. a second **Follow up on past PAC recommendations report** to provide an update on Government's progress in implementing OAG and PAC recommendations covering a range of reports from 2017 to 2019.

The Chairman thanked the Auditor General for her comprehensive report and update.

7. Consideration of the OAG Report

- *HSA Outpatient Pharmacy Services (November 2021)*

The Deputy Auditor General presented the report to the Committee. She advised the Committee that after seven weeks of waiting, the OAG decided to publish the report without receiving a response from the Ministry of Health and Wellness; however, the responses received from the Health Services Authority were generally positive.

The objective of the audit was to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the HSA's outpatient pharmacy services. In particular to consider the legal framework and oversight arrangements; the availability, safety and quality of medicines, whilst delivering value for money; and the efficiency of delivery of dispensary services by the HSA Pharmacy.

The report comprised 3 chapters: (1) Strategic Direction and Governance; (2) Availability, Safety and Quality of Medicines; and (3) Performance of Outpatient Pharmacy Services.

The Deputy Auditor General advised the Committee that the performance audit found that as a result of the outdated Pharmacy Act (1979) there were significant gaps which create risks, for example, in the procurement and importation of medicines. Additionally, there is currently no registration of or code of standards for pharmacy technicians.

Discussion ensued.

The Auditor General recommended that the PAC hold a hearing on this report as soon as possible.

The Committee unanimously agreed to support the Auditor General's recommendation to hold a public hearing and agreed to request the attendance of the following persons as witnesses, on the following days:

Day 1: Wednesday, 12th January 2022

Cayman Islands Health Services Authority

Witness	Job Title
Ms. Lizzette Yearwood	Chief Executive Officer
Dr. Delroy Jefferson	Medical Director
Mr. Colin Medford	Chief Pharmacist
Mrs. Dawn Cummings	Chief Financial Officer

Day 2: Thursday, 13th January 2022

Ministry of Health and Wellness et al

Witness	Job Title
Ms. Nellie Pouchie	Chief Officer Ministry of Health and Wellness
Dr. Marla Barnes	Chair of the Pharmacy Council
<i>Final witness:</i> Mr. Franz Manderson	Deputy Governor and Head of the Civil Service

The Committee agreed that the Auditor General and Committee Clerk would arrange the schedule of witnesses.

The Committee further agreed that the Auditor General and her team would brief the Committee on this report a few days ahead of the hearing to allow Members time to prepare; accordingly, the Committee agreed to hold an Administrative Meeting on Monday, 10th January 2022 with the briefing to be included as an item on the Agenda.

The Chairman thanked the Deputy Auditor General for presenting this report.

8. Consideration of the PAC Report – discuss recommendations

- ***PAC Report on the Report of the OAG on Follow-up on past PAC recommendations 2021 - Report 1 (August 2021)***

The draft PAC report was reviewed, considered and discussed.

The Chairman drew Members' attention to paragraphs 9 and 10. The Committee unanimously agreed to minor amendments to paragraph 9 and a third recommendation being added to paragraph 10. The third recommendation would identify Chief Officer Pouchie's twelve undertakings to the Committee during the hearing on 29th September 2021, with the expectation that these undertakings be responded to in a timely manner. It was noted that none of these undertakings had been satisfied.

Ms. Barbara Conolly moved a motion that the Committee approve the PAC report as amended and table the amended PAC report together with the report of the OAG at the next sitting of Parliament. The motion was seconded by Ms. Heather Bodden and the Committee unanimously agreed the motion.

9. Any Other Business

- The Chairman set up a PAC WhatsApp group chat.

10. Scheduling of Next Meetings

The next meetings were confirmed for the following dates:

- **Monday, 10th January 2022** (*Administrative Meeting with pre-hearing briefing*)
10:00 am in the Large Committee Room.
- **Wednesday, 12th January 2021** (*Hearing*)
10:00 am in the Chamber.
- **Thursday, 13th January 2021** (*Hearing*)
10:00 am in the Chamber.

11. Adjournment

There being no further business, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 11:40 am.