



PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



OFFICIAL FINANCE COMMITTEE HANSARD REPORT

Requests to Finance Committee for
Appropriation Changes sought under
Section 12 of the Public Management and Finance
Act (2020 Revision)

For the Financial Year ending 31st December, 2021

[For consideration by Finance Committee on 1 September 2021]

**OFFICIAL VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT
STANDING FINANCE COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY
1 SEPTEMBER, 2021
9.08 A.M.**

**REQUESTS TO FINANCE COMMITTEE FOR APPROPRIATION CHANGES
SOUGHT UNDER SECTION 12 OF THE PUBLIC MANAGEMENT AND
FINANCE ACT (2020 REVISION)**

Verbatim transcript of the Standing Finance Committee meeting held Wednesday, 1st September 2021, at 9.08 a.m. in the Chamber of the House of Parliament; George Town, Grand Cayman.

Present: Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, MP, *Chairman*
Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP
Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MP
Hon. Bernie A. Bush, MP
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, MP
Hon. André M. Ebanks, MP
Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, MP
Hon. Johany S. "Jay" Ebanks, MP
Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, JP, MP
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, JP, MP
Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, MP
Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP
Mr. Joseph X. Hew, MP
Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MP
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP
Mr. David Wight, JP, MP
Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP

Witnesses: Mr. Kenneth Jefferson, Financial Secretary/Chief Officer
Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General
Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority
Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer, Ministry of Border Control and Labour
Mr. Mark Ray, Director, Department of Education Services
Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education
Ms. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness

Absent: Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell, JP, MP

Finance Committee Clerk: Mrs. Zena Merren-Chin

[EDITORIAL NOTE: Undertakings and Output Groups are reported in [blue text](#) for ease of reference]

The Chairman: Good morning everyone. I would like to call the Committee to order.

As is customary, let me start with a prayer. I will ask the Honourable Minister for Investment to lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Minister of Financial Services and Commerce and Investment, Innovation

and Social Development, Elected Member for West Bay South: Thank you, oh Lord, for gathering us here today to deliberate on financial matters for this country. Let us do so, dear Lord, with strength, with confidence, with collaboration, all in the best interests of taking the country and the people of the Cayman Islands forward to the best of our abilities. We humbly pray, Amen.

The Chairman: Please be seated.

Good morning Honourable Members of the Committee. We have a quorum, so the Committee can commence its meeting.

As Members will be aware, the quorum of Finance Committee is 10 Members, excluding me as the Chairperson; 10 Members is a simple majority of our total 19 Members in Parliament.

The purpose of this meeting, Members, is to consider the items shown on the hard copy material that has been distributed to all honourable Members. At this point I want to apologise to all Members of the House, for just getting the Schedule this morning. There were still many last minute changes being made last night as a result of yesterday's Cabinet meeting, so I do apologise to the Opposition and all Members of this Committee for just receiving the Schedule.

The Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town North: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate all of the circumstances leading up to today's meeting and the delays, but respectfully, I ask that we get a little bit more time to discuss these items as this morning is the first that we have seen them. The Leader just had an opportunity to peruse them and we would like a few minutes just to go through it as a group.

The Chairman: What I said to the Leader this morning: we do recognise that there are some particulars, like the COVID expenses, which will require more time but for those that we pretty much already have an agreement on, we can just go through; like those that were done in agreement with yourselves. We can push the ones that you need more time with to the end and have a longer break during lunchtime, so at least we can get some business completed and then have a longer break for the more difficult items that require more time. So, if you want, we can probably break for five minutes right now.

I can have a discussion with the Leader, see which ones he wants to push back until after lunch, and we have a longer lunch break. That would give you more time for the ones you have a bigger issue with, but I think the ones that we agree with would be pretty straightforward.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town East: Mr. Chairman, good morning to you sir, and to the rest of colleagues.

We did have the discussion. I did ask that we considered delaying the start this morning because we haven't seen anything that's before [us] here. I've leafed through it and there are a number of things I think would be noncontroversial, but I mean we've had no discussions, not even a cursory look at this stuff. I was thinking that we need a little bit more than five

minutes to really look at this and see where it is we think we'd like to go and what is important for us to investigate and to really question.

I just feel that we are not serving the public in the right way by coming here cold to look at numbers, so I really am pleading, sir, for a little bit more time for us to look at this before we delve into it. I sent you a message earlier today asking if we could delay it or even postpone it.

[At] my first blush, it's looking like somewhere between \$50 million to \$60 million worth of additional expenditure; and I have only just seen the breakdown for the most significant appropriation that we are seeking here of some \$28 million for COVID related stuff.

I'm struggling for us to be able to really do justice here today sir, so I am just pleading for some more time.

The Chairman: I completely understand, Mr. Leader and that's the reason I said to you that one item alone is roughly half the appropriations that we are looking at today. Hence my reason for saying we could get the easier ones out, which I would be happy to go through with you right now. Thereafter, we could take a two to three hour break for lunch and that will give you the opportunity to look at the other ones that require more time.

I mean we also have other public servants here—and I do understand your situation—for items that are straightforward, that I think we have already agreed on. I think we can get those out of the way and we can take a much longer lunch break to give you sufficient time to look at those. I would be prepared to push back the one for COVID. There are some larger ones but the smaller ones, I think we can just get out of the way now, so at least we can release the public servants who are here to answer those questions.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chair, if I hear correctly, you're insisting then that we move forward as we are right now?

The Chairman: Well for the smaller ones. If you can tell me which ones you need more time with, we can push those to the back of the agenda and take a longer break as soon as we are finished with the simple ones and we would deal with the complicated ones after.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Give me a few minutes.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, Elected Member for West Bay West: In the meantime Mr. Chairman, on a procedural matter and probably more accepted news, this is to advise all Members that a bell system has been installed in the Parliament. The purpose of which is to inform Members and where necessary, civil servant attendants, that a meeting is scheduled to commence within the next five minutes, and there will be a two-

minute warning also. The bells will be utilised for House sittings and committee meetings, hopefully starting today. The Speaker or the Chairman will instruct the Sergeant-at-Arms to ring the bells. When I say "Speaker" or "Chairman", I mean you today, if the House was in session it would be the Speaker; at which time all Members are expected to be in their seats in the Chamber within two minutes so the Presiding Officer can commence the committee meetings.

The bells are situated in the north corridor on the back exterior of the building and the front exterior of the building, and they certainly can be heard here. I was hoping to have a test as we sit but I don't know if they were ready for that; however they tested it and you can hear within the Chamber and certainly on the outside.

I just wanted to alert Members to that.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you Member for West Bay West.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: I am going to beg you for 30 minutes, sir. We'll go into the small committee room.

The Chairman: Okay, we will recommence at 10 a.m. and give you sufficient time.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: That will be good sir, and I thank you for your indulgence. Thank you, sir.

The Chairman: Finance Committee is suspended until 10 a.m.

Committee suspended at 9.16 a.m.

Committee resumed at 10.04 a.m.

The Chairman: Good morning Members. Finance Committee is resumed. Please be seated.

Morning Members and once again thank you for your understanding and cooperation thus far. The purpose of this meeting of the Finance Committee is to consider the items shown on the hard copy material that has been distributed to all Members. The Committee's approval for this supplementary expenditure is being sought under section 12 of the Public Management and Finance Act, and the Honourable Members will recall such a procedure was done in July 2021 when this Committee last met. I request Members' usual cooperation in asking their questions promptly and not making any long introductory remarks or long preambles before stating their questions.

Members, using the first item on the Schedule before the Committee as an example, when it comes to taking a vote on an item on the Finance

Committee's Schedule, I shall ask Members' positions by posing the question, *all those in favour of supplementary expenditure with respect to OE5 Constituency Allowance for an amount of \$270,000 being approved pursuant to section 12 of the Public Management and Finance Act (PMFA), please say Aye; those against No.*

With that said, in the interest of time, and recognising that we have many public servants out there who have been waiting, we will start with the very first item on the Schedule which is OE5 - Constituency Allowance in the amount of \$270,000; are there any questions? Okay, there being no questions I will ask—

OE 5 - Constituency Allowance and OE 130 - Administrative and Advisor Support

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chair, we have no questions on OE5 and OE130 so you can go ahead and put those to the vote.

The Chairman: Okay, no problem; thank you very much Mr. Leader. All those in favour of OE5 - Constituency Allowance being increased in the amount by \$270,000, and OE 130 - Administrative and Advisor Support to Members of Parliament for the amount of \$609,012, please say Aye; those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: OE 5 and OE 130 passed.

ITI 2 - Social Development and Support

The Chairman: Next item, colleagues, is on page 4 starting with the Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development and the amount is ITI 2 - Social Development and Support being increased by \$140,000. Are there any questions?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Yes, Mr. Leader.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes, sir. The reason given here is, recruitment of temporary staff to facilitate the disbursement of funds to those residents and businesses that were impacted by Tropical Storm (TS) Grace. Can we get an idea of how many staff and what exactly they will be doing?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Thank you for the question.

Through you, Mr. Chair: we anticipate there will be three temporary staff and they will be assisting in expanding the existing housing repair programme team which assesses on a two criteria basis: the financial assessment of the actual applicant and a house assessment—an inspection of the repairs that are required.

With the existing team (a staff complement of two), there were already about 90 cases, pre-[TS] Grace. With homes needing repairs on an expedited basis due to [TS] Grace, we thought it prudent to expand the team temporarily, to the end of the year, to increase the ability to process applications and assess homes.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Am I correct he said it would be three additional staff?

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair: yes.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Through you sir: \$140,000; we are in September, literally four months left for the year. Is it intended to continue with the programme beyond December 31st?

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair: possibly.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: If I might ask for further supplement: are these people to be recruited or have they already been identified or recruited?

Hon. André M. Ebanks: One has already been recruited and the other two are in the process of being recruited.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, Elected Member for Bodden Town East: Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town East.

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

I would like to ask the honourable Minister: will the three additional staff that he is taking on be doing the assessments or will a team be hired outside of these five staff to do the assessments?

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair: they will be doing the assessments.

The Chairman: Any other questions? No other questions? All those in favour of ITI 2 - Social Development Support being increased by \$140,000, please say Aye; those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: ITI 2 passed.

TP 60 - Housing Assistance

The Chairman: Moving on to TP 60 - Housing Assistance to be increased in the amount of \$3 million. Are there any questions?

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you Mr. Chairman, through you to the Minister: it looks like this \$3 million is certainly to help people with damages to homes as a result of Tropical Storm Grace. I guess I am trying to understand what the programme will actually be. Is it exclusive to Tropical Storm Grace damage?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair: the programme will be supplementary funding to the existing Housing Repair Programme.

As I mentioned in the prior question, there are individuals who have been waiting for over 18 months for housing repair service. Unfortunately, [TS] Grace has accelerated their need for repairs; they've gotten exponentially worse. In addition to that, there were home owners who could not afford the repairs, who weren't on the list, that were damaged as a result of Tropical Storm Grace, so I think it's incumbent upon the Government to assist as much as we can as a result of Tropical Storm Grace.

Now, what I would say is that, it is a bit of a difficult situation, because I think what we would have to try to achieve, is to dry-in folks because we are still in the middle of hurricane season; so we would have to be quite prudent with the repairs to ensure that we don't have a set of repairs and then another storm, God-forbid, comes by and knocks over the repairs that we have already done.

We have to take a prudent and cautious approach to try to dry-in folks. Some of the repairs range from roofing to electrical to flooring. All things that are urgent as we speak.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Thank you Mr. Chair. I want to ask the Honourable Minister: will there be a cap as to how much would be attributed to each home?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair: under the existing programme, the cap is \$25,000 but as it is a transfer payment there are cases—and this has happened since this programme has been existence, for many years—where the Minister has a discretion to waive that \$25,000 if it's an extremely urgent case; which I would anticipate in this case, because since the programme didn't run in 2020 and for the first part of 2021, many of the cases have gotten more and more urgent.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town East.

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

I think the honourable Opposition Leader started to go into this, but I have not heard the answer in terms of process and procedure.

I heard you talk about the number of persons—some 90—that were on the list before that were not attended to, and a few additional. It seems additional applications came in since the 90. In my district, which was one of the worst-hit by [TS] Grace, how do I direct persons to benefit from this programme which is so needed? I have many names and a long list of people who are coming every day to try to get dried-in.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair; excellent question.

Let me probably take a step back and describe how the programme existed pre [TS] Grace and what we intend to do to expedite things because of [TS] Grace.

Pre [TS] Grace, homeowners who couldn't afford the repairs would apply to NAU (Needs Assessment Unit), be assessed from a financial perspective, get on to the list and then the housing repair team would go out and do the inspections, have the assessments, create a baseline estimate and then the Housing Repair Committee Board would take that baseline from the civil servant, put it out to bid to three contractors and then the board would then decide which bid deserves the award.

Now that we are in a crisis due to [TS] Grace, what the housing team has created—which I plan to share after Finance Committee with all Members, the government Members have it and I plan to provide it to you today—is an MP Office, very simplified, checklist. Your constituency office staff can put in the name, date of birth and pertinent details; the house and—kind of tick in very broad fashion whether it's a roof damage, whether it's plumbing.

It has the email address of the housing repair team that you would submit it to get the persons on the list. The housing repair team, once the folks are on the list, would then go assess the homes.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: My last question on this: I heard what you said, what happened pre [TS] Grace in terms of persons having to go to NAU and the three bids and so forth because of the situation they were in—and we are in the middle and probably September is the worst month for hurricanes or tropical storms—are we still going to go that route, in terms of the three bids on every one of these? I suspect that there will be a lot in each constituency for us to go around and try to get three bids from each of the 19 constituencies might be a bit much, with the market already exhausted in terms of finding persons to do so.

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister for Social Development

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair, it is a good question, but at the same time, since we are managing public funds, we are going to have to still find the same measurement; some sort of mechanism for the committee to judge the bids by; otherwise, you could end up in a situation where you've started something with a good and genuine purpose, but then can open it up to potential abuse.

The Housing Repair Committee is acutely aware of the situation and how fast they will need to move and to widen the scope. Initially, pre Grace, the contractors that were usually in the pool are small to medium contractors but in this case, because of [TS] Grace, we might have to expand the pool to address your question.

The Chairman: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you sir.

To the Minister: Will there be some sort of means test for those who are seeking assistance?

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister of Social Development.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair. Yes, that already exists under the current programme.

The Chairman: The Honourable Leader.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: I know I've had several requests because I know I've got several constituents who have had damage to

roofs, particularly, as a result of trees falling on them, et cetera.

In fact, one lady contacted me because she is a single mom, filed a claim on the insurance but she can't meet the deductible. I mean, is that something Government would consider, in terms of its assistance to people? Otherwise this lady is stuck; unless money can be raised some other way to help her.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Social Development.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair: Yes, the Housing Repair Committee team and I sat down to go through various scenarios and we anticipated that one, so on the form that you receive, there will be a question that asks whether you have home owner's insurance, and if you don't, the extent of the damage would then have to be brought to the committee to say whether this person can afford a deductible and it wouldn't be worth it.

In addition to that, we are in preliminary discussions with the R3 Foundation, whether we can expand the programme. If this supplementary appropriation is approved, allot a portion of the programme to R3 and have their donors match it to increase the fund and the talent pool that might be able to assist with housing repairs.

The Chairman: The Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To the Minister: One of the issues we faced in my constituency in the past is that quite often the property's ownership is not in the name of the occupant. It could be children, grandchildren or sisters and brothers of the owner on the property, but not the person who is the occupant and they have been denied assistance because of our policy on this matter. It's just something for consideration on some of the most vulnerable. They are some of the most vulnerable that have been, in some instances, abandoned by their families.

I note that you made mention of a portion of this funding going to R3 Foundation. I understand and I have been working with Ms. Tara Neilson of Ark on the CASA programme, which R3 also promised to match whatever she can raise. Have you been in discussions with the CASA programme and Ark?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Social Development.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair.

On the first point on the criteria of home ownership: that is a long standing issue that the Housing Repair Committee has grappled with. I used to grapple with it when I was the Deputy Chief Officer and the

good thing about the programme being run out of the transfer payment is that the Minister has discretion.

Another good thing about the programme is that the board is made up of members of the community so, in the situation that the honourable Member described: in any of your constituencies, everyone in the neighbourhood knows that that is Nana's house. She just happened to transfer it a few years ago to her daughter for various reasons, but she has no other place to go. It would be unconscionable not to proceed with the repairs because you know who lives in that home. That requirement of ownership is really there to prevent potential abuse or fraud, but once you can establish a clear family link and that's where the person is going to live, I have seen that discretion exercised many times by former Ministers who used to run the programme.

In relation to the second question, I haven't gone as far as talking to Ark directly yet, because I wanted to discuss it further with R3 as a board. I did have a conversation with the Chair of R3 and he did mention the CASA programme as a possibility, as a way we could structure the arrangement, but I prefer to talk to the board first and have a wide range of options before I go directly to a particular programme.

The Chairman: The Member for Bodden Town East.

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

That was very helpful, Minister, because you also have programmes like ADRA (Adventist Development and Relief Agency), which is the Adventist group that repairs homes for free.

What I want to nail down, because I am still a little concerned... I understand that the bids process has to take place. I am trying to understand if the Housing Development Trust has any involvement with the Housing Repair Committee and if they would consider getting a pool of contractors, whether that is a pool of 20 or whatever, that you could have on hand, and could send out to these different places and different areas. I don't know if you have all that kind of logistics yet.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Social Development.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair.

The Housing Trust is separate because this programme is geared towards actual homeowners who can't afford the homes, as opposed to government-run housing; but to the Member's point, that doesn't mean that I have not been in discussions with Minister Ebanks, to my left, about trying to expand the pool of contractors to get the work done faster.

The Chairman: Are there any other questions?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Minister of Tourism and Transport, Elected Member for George Town Central: Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Just a matter of clarity. The Elected Member for George Town North highlighted a problem that I share, in my constituency, of persons who are not the sole owner of the property, but have family connections.

I know he made it by way of comment, but I would like to find out if he was in support of such a policy decision to assist persons living on land that is not necessarily in their name, but have a family connection. Would there be Opposition support for that kind of policy position?

The Chairman: The Member George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, thank you.

I think the Minister satisfied my query in the sense that yes, if there is a situation that calls for the Minister to make his discretionary decision and the community or persons on the board have identified that this is in fact a real case, then absolutely.

The Chairman: Thank you all.

Okay, I think we have definitely exhausted TP 60 – Housing Assistance.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, can I—

The Chairman: Sure, Honourable Minister for Social Development.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Beg your indulgence for one closing comment?

I think this is a massive opportunity for the entire Government and for this honourable House to assist and get our arms around what, I believe, is an urgent housing situation in this country.

In relation to the Member's question about getting other contractors involved, and also in relation to working with non-profit organisations, I think we have all seen recent news about how urgent housing is; Tropical Storm Grace in my opinion, as I mentioned earlier, just exacerbated it, so I think this is a great opportunity for us to try to get our arms around the situation sooner rather than later.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you very much Honourable Minister of Social Development.

I will now go to the vote. All those in favour of TP 60 – Housing Assistance being increased by \$3 million, please say Aye; those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 60 passed.

TP 80 - Support for Business Initiative

The Chairman: We will turn to page 5 on the Schedule, Honourable Members; TP 80 - Support for Business Initiative being increased by \$4 million.

Are there any questions?

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes sir, through you to the Minister: Can we get a description of what these business initiatives are?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister Social Development.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair.

This is an extension of the TP 96 that we are about to correct in the next item, that was borne about and discussed in the prior Finance Committee meeting to assist those impacted by border closure who have tourism related businesses.

As Members may recall in the prior Finance Committee, this was a concept brought to Caucus from land and sea tour operators who made a pretty compelling case that, while prior stipends assisted them personally, they didn't have stipends to assist the business itself, so this was to assist with funding to maintain business assets and prepare them for reopening.

At the time, there was some discussion of whether more funds should be allocated to the programme, but we have taken a cautious approach because it was a new concept that had not been done previously—an innovation—so we took time within the Ministry to develop a policy programme, a framework around it, that has been drafted in consultation with land and sea tour operators which, I am pleased to report, should be available for application hopefully by next Monday, the 6th of September.

With that, as we were entering into consultations and was alluded to in the prior Finance Committee, there might be other subsectors who also need assistance with maintaining their assets before the borders reopen, so we thought perhaps it was prudent to extend a further \$2 million to have another tranche.

The Chairman: The Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you; Mr. Chairman to the Minister.

I think I understand that there is a programme for the association that you work with, but you are expanding it to include other sectors that may continue to be negatively impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

I just want to highlight as well that you have others—one person in particular and I won't call their name because I haven't gotten permission—in the community who have not been able to access any assistance. One particular pioneer in tourism who owns a bed and breakfast; she has not been able to access any help and that is her only income because she's neither an employer nor the type of business that we have been able to provide assistance for in the past.

I just want to make sure, if I understood you correctly, that there will be opportunities whether through the Small Business Development Centre or otherwise, to assist those who have not been eligible for NAU and also not eligible for the stipend because they're not an employee. They were refused on both applications. I just want to ensure that that there will be opportunities for [people] in those situations to access assistance.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair. I am very grateful for the Member's question because that is exactly what is envisioned.

I suspected that we would identify folks in exactly that situation; we were in consultation—we had a public meeting in West Bay, maybe two weeks ago—and that issue arose in the public meeting. It did not give the Ministry staff pause that this would be necessary, and so with the support of Caucus and Cabinet, this additional funding is to try to fill that gap.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Will these be administered through the Centre for Small Business Development?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair, yes; that will explain the next item on the Order Paper.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Chair thank you very much. Will this extend to Sargassum clean-up on properties?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair; I don't think we had that particular item in contemplation.

This is specifically through the Centre for Small Businesses with the exact situation that the Member for George Town North described in relation to keeping the assets of the business afloat or ready for opening, because certain persons are not employees. I don't think we contemplated that.

The Chairman: Any other questions? Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes, thank you, sir.

To the Minister: You mentioned some of this is also for Tropical Storm Grace relief. Have there been many businesses affected in a negative way by Tropical Storm Grace, and maybe what industry segments are suffering, particularly.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair. I spoke to the Financial Secretary earlier; that was an amendment in the description. I have not mentioned that in my remarks this morning, but I think you're referring to the description in the item. That, to my mind, should be deleted. This was not in connection to Tropical Storm Grace.

I think that might be a drafting error that came across from the Housing Assistance. In relation to this, this is only what I described in terms of border closure. It does not have a connection to Tropical Storm Grace.

The Chairman: Just note: The Ministry of Finance, after speaking to the honourable Minister, did actually adjust the Schedule to reflect the non-Tropical [Storm] Grace items, but I know you guys already had a previous Schedule but we did have an amended Schedule if you want it, which actually excludes [it].

I don't know if Members want the revised but I know Members would have made notes on the copies that were previously given but just in case, we did make the amendments to it.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: I would only suggest we could get it in the course of time. That's fine.

The Chairman: Thank you. Mr. Leader. Any questions with regard to TP 80 - Support for Business Initiative for \$4 million?

If not, I will actually take a vote. All those in favour of TP 80 - Support for Business Initiative being increased by \$4 million, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 80 passed.

TP 96 - Micro and Small Business Grants

The Chairman: Moving on to the next item on page 5, TP 96 - Micro and Small Business Grants being reduced by \$2 million. Are there any questions?

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Through you to the Minister: I take it then, with the reduction from what was approved back in July, that there are no further grants now being contemplated to micro and small businesses? That programme is now at an end?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for the question. This goes to the prior item and the question raised by the Member for George Town North.

In the prior Finance Committee, this amount was awarded to TP 96, which is administered by the Department of Commerce, but we would want the programme to be administered by the Centre for Business Development so we have reduced TP 96, but added it back to TP 80 so it is all housed and administered under one government agency, rather than two.

The Chairman: All right. Any other questions? If not, I will take the vote. All those in favour of TP 96 - Micro and Small Business Grants being reduced by \$2 million, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 96 passed.

The Chairman: Moving on to the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development—well, page 6 has a long description; sorry, Members. OE 140 COVID-19 Response and Recovery for an amount of \$28,477,315 million. Are there any questions?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, this is the appropriation I would like you to push back to the end of the Committee [meeting]; we need further time to analyse this.

The Chairman: That is fine; we will skip that one, Members. I am in agreement with that.

DAL 1 - Advice and Support to the Minister for District Administration and Land

The Chairman: With that said, we move to page 7 on the Schedule for Ministry of District Administration and Lands.

First item is DAL 1 - Advice and Support to the Minister for District Administration and Land in the amount of \$246,584. Are there any questions? *[Pause]*

Seeing that there are no questions, I will go to the vote. All those in favour of DAL 1 - Advice and Support to the Minister of District Administration and Land in the amount of \$246,584, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: DAL 1 passed.

DAL 2 - Government Services in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman

The Chairman: Moving on to page 7 of the Schedule, DAL 2 - Government Services in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman in the amount of \$500,000. Are there any questions?

Honourable Member for George Town North?

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, we just want to confirm this... I know we moved away from it in Grand Cayman, but Government still houses persons in Cayman Brac. Are these some of the homes that we have traditionally used, and are now in need of repair? I remember discussions about one particular home as well, but I just want to confirm that that is, in fact, what it is.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for District Administration and Lands.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, Minister of Education and District Administration and Lands, Elected Member for Cayman Brac East: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair there are a number of homes on Cayman Brac that are owned by the Crown and they have a myriad of utilisation. Some have been used to house the Cuban immigrants that come in, until they are able to be transferred to Grand Cayman; some are used for visiting public and civil servants from Grand Cayman, for example, agriculture or sometimes other departments that may need to stay longer than what we would desire for them to be in a hotel because of the cost prohibiting factors.

Some of them are used if there are domestic issues, because we do not have a women's housing facility like we have in Grand Cayman. Unfortunately, what has happened for the past several years [is that] maintenance was not done, often [times] because of not having either sufficient manpower or monies to do it; so this is an incremental approach, Mr. Chair and honourable Members, to try to bring them up to speed.

We are anticipating, based on what we saw happening in Cuba, with the street protests, that there will be an uptick of the desire for them to come back through Cayman Islands on their way to the United States or wherever their final destination is.

I can say, having visited the eight or nine properties, that they are in a deplorable state and we would be in trouble with the Human Rights Commission for putting persons in such facilities. This would assist perhaps with the first two or three; some cosmetic, some much more substantial.

The Chairman: Are there any other questions?

All those in favour of DAL 2 - Government Services in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman being increased by \$500,000, please say Aye. Those against No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: DAL 2 passed.

TP 101 - Sister Islands Community Programmes

The Chairman: Honourable Members the next item is on page 8, TP 101 - Sister Islands Community Programmes - \$25,000. Are there any questions?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: You can take the vote sir.

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Leader.

All those in favour of TP 101 - Sister Islands Community Programmes - \$25,000, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 101 passed.

EA 4 - Land Purchase

The Chairman: Moving on to page 8, EA 4 - Land Purchase being increased by \$2 million. Are there any questions?

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chair; through you to the Minister.

Could I ask if there is a list of properties that have been identified for purchase with this \$2 million?

[Pause]

The Chairman: The Minister for District Administration and Lands.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, this is a continuation of the policy to acquire the very important beach property and access, so there is not a completed list yet.

Basically, what the Ministry does: if Members and/or Departments bring it to our attention that there is a particular piece of beach property that you would like to buy in your constituency, then we go and get three evaluations and take it through the process, up to the Cabinet and purchase it. There are some in mind, but because we have not closed negotiations, if the Member doesn't mind, we could speak with him off air so that it would not affect commercial sensitivity and the price of those that we are trying to get would not change.

Certainly there is some room, should this be passed here today by Honourable Members, if Members have not yet submitted—I know some of you have—to submit it to Mr. Wilbur (Welcome), my Acting Chief Officer who sits behind me, so that we can commence the process of getting evaluations and see whether the proprietors wish to dispose of the property for the interests of the public good.

The Chairman: The Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to take this opportunity to ask if there have been any updates or further developments on the fish market.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for District Administration and Lands.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As far as involvement of the Land Ministry is concerned, there is no further movement since the last government was in control of it. We are told that they were supposed to file their claim for adverse possession and the Ministry still awaits that filing.

The Chairman: The Honourable Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and I thank the Minister for the response.

I do know that there were plans afoot when we demitted Office, for the construction of an alternate site on the cove. Have we made any progress on that? I think it was through the George Town Revitalisation Programme.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for District Administration and Lands.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, that one is about my pay scale. I am not involved in that aspect of the project. I am not sure whether any other Ministry is, but it is not under the Land Ministry.

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Through you, Mr. Chair.

With respect to the statement made by the Elected Member for George Town North, as the Representative for George Town Central which the Red Spot Fishers Market falls within, I've had numerous conversations with the persons who used the location for decades now and they are not mindful or have the appetite for moving.

As the Elected Member for George Town North well knows, what was proposed is not something that the users of the location are in support of. He is also aware of many discussions—because he was the Minister at the time—with the landowner. I am willing, from a Tourism perspective and the Representative for George Town Central, to sit down with the landowner to find a resolve that is amenable to all parties including the whole country.

The location is a historical site in many persons' eyes, and I don't think they want any changes in that respect, so, if the Elected Member for George Town North would love to assist in that process, to sit down with the landowner, then I would welcome it so that we can find a solution for all the good people of this country.

The Chairman: Any other questions? If not I will take the vote. All those in favour of EA 4 - Land Purchase being increased by \$2 million, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EA 4 passed.

EA 55 - Cayman Brac and Little Cayman Roads

The Chairman: Members, moving on to EA 55 Cayman Brac and Little Cayman Roads being increased by \$500,000, are there any questions?

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair might I invite the Chair to make an amendment to the description which appears to be a scrivener's error. It should read *to fund the construction and repair of roads on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman*; and, under the reasons it should read, *to extend the road network*.

The Chairman: I am fine with that change. [Do] Members have an objection to that change as outlined by the Honourable Minister for District Administration and Lands?

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Also, I can add Mr. Chair, with your kind indulgence, that the reason for this request is that the funds are practically depleted around the election period.

We need to get this extra money in order to keep the new responsibility and the men employed until December, because there's road work still to be done.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Through you to the Minister, in the reason *to give access to landlocked parcels*—are these government properties that we are seeking to get access to or is this for private properties?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for District Administration and Lands.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you to the Honourable Leader.

Mr. Chair, that's why in the beginning I invited the Committee to make the amendment. It is obviously a scrivener's error, not quite sure the genesis of it, but basically, the description should say to construct roads in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman; and the reason is to extend the roadwork—and those are public roadworks for public use.

For example, one of them is for continuing the Major Donald Road, which goes up to the lighthouse. We don't have money every year, so each year we are putting a certain amount of money so we'll do a half mile or a mile one year; that is one of them that we are going to be doing. The same thing in Little Cayman, we do a half mile or a mile on the north side and the south side, so these funds are to keep the road crew employed on these public roads.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: So just to confirm: the reference to landlocked parcels should come out.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Be deleted. That's correct, sir.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Any questions with regard to EA 55 - Cayman Brac and Little Cayman Roads, \$500,000?

If not I will take the vote. All those in favour of EA 55 Cayman Brac and Little Cayman Roads, \$500,000, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EA 55 passed.

EA 95 - Cemetery Vaults Cayman Brac

The Chairman: Honourable colleagues, moving to EA 95 - Cemetery Vaults Cayman Brac being increased by \$25,000—are there any questions?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: You can put it to the vote, sir.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. All those in favour of EA 95 - Cemetery Vaults Cayman Brac being increased by \$25,000 please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EA 95 passed.

EGA 1 - Policy Advice, Governance and Ministerial Support Services

The Chairman: That concludes the section for the ministry of District Administration and Lands. I will now turn to the Ministry of Education.

Starting on page 10, EGA 1 - Policy Advice, Governance and Ministerial Support Services being increased by \$200,200. Are there any questions?

Honourable Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, Elected Member for George Town South: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To the Minister: The reason for this appropriation—increase in funding to facilitate the use of cloth masks in schools to help prevent the spread of

COVID-19—is this suggesting that our students may have to wear masks once the borders open in October; whether it's mandatory that they wear masks to school?

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chair, that decision has not been made. This has been ongoing from even before the elections, but we are just coming for the funding now because we didn't have it at that time. Basically, students are still required to wear it on the school buses. Obviously, once we open up, as the Honourable Premier indicated in the most recent press conference, the science will be looked at; the condition of where we are with COVID worldwide, as well as locally, will have to be considered and then a decision will be taken that time.

This is basically the Ministry pre-empting and being ready in the event that any such decision has to be made but in the meanwhile, it is a continuation of them wearing it on the school bus to the various government schools.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Are there any other questions?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: I guess just for my own edification: you said that presently, students traveling on the bus must be masked. Has Government provided masks to students up to this point?

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thanks to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Through you Mr. Chair: it's a hybrid situation. Some parents do send their children with it, but we also have masks available that the bus wardens can dispense on the bus and at the schools as well, because we ordered some before.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Some of them though are disposable, I might add; so we're trying to move on to the cloth masks now.

The Chairman: Do you have any more questions, Honourable Leader of the Opposition? Thank you very much.

I will now put it to the vote. All those in favour of EGA 1 - Policy Advice, Governance and Ministerial Support Services being increased by \$200,200, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EGA 1

NGS 91 - Public School Meals Programme

The Chairman: Honourable Members, the next item is NGS 91 - Public School Meals Programme, in the amount of \$3,100,996. Are there any questions?

[Pause]

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Minister.

Clearly, this is the new programme that we understood would be coming forward and funding sought for, but can the Minister describe to us how these meals are to be provided within the school—what will be the policy; who will be providing the meals, will they be contracted out or will the Ministry be hiring staff to cook meals at the schools?

Just further clarity on what this programme is about and how it will be run.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thanks to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Chair, the Government thought it prudent at this particular juncture to move forward with this new programme of providing free meals to our students. It's anticipated, purely based on financial restraints, and their constraints that for the initial programme we would be providing breakfast, snack and lunch to all our public school students.

In addition, there's a nutritionist that will overview the meals to ensure that our children are getting healthy meals, because a healthy nation saves a lot of money with overseas tertiary medical expenses and even local expenses, in the years to come.

We also had to include the Lighthouse School, Mr. Chair; the secondary element of it because it's a K through 12, and it was going to be difficult to differentiate between the primary school students and tell the high school [students] at Lighthouse that they couldn't get. That is the exception currently; the only high school students who will be getting free meals will be at the Lighthouse School.

It is the intention of the Government, funds being provided—and obviously if I had the funds I would do it now, but I don't; we are in the middle of COVID and we are trying to be as prudent as we can—it is anticipated that come January, with the successful passing of the next two-year budget, that the secondary

public schools will come online for the free meals as well.

Our research has shown that there are a number of things, and time does not permit [me] to go into all of it, but we found that there are social, psychological, physical and behavioural issues when a number of our children are coming without the meals, and proper meals, so that is part of the reason/justification behind it.

Some schools have Home School Associations or Parent Teachers Association that cater and provide the meal through the lease and other properties on site; as far as I am aware, that will continue. There will also be some that are contracted, for example on Cayman Brac, none of our schools have canteens, unlike the case in Grand Cayman and because we are looking to build a new high school on the Brac, hopefully sooner than later, it didn't make sense to go and find monies now to put in canteens there, so obviously they will have to be contracted out. We believe, and I am sure you would concur, sir, that this is a step in the right direction.

There will be an incremental element with it because in doing this research, Mr. Chair, I came across one-time-use plastic containers, as opposed to having all these disposables even though I am very grateful to my colleague, the Minister responsible for Department of Environmental Health (DEH), and the Director there, who have now put in place management for the extra collection that would emanate from the provision of these free meals by a greater cross sector of the student population.

For the upcoming budget and at the risk of anticipating what it is going to mean there, I would like to have these containers included which will be not only one-time-use plastics, but they will also have the portions recommended to keep our children healthy so that hopefully, as they go along, they will be getting the right proportion of their protein, carbohydrates and sugars so that they will not end up with the obesity that many of us Caribbean people suffer from—because we have some good food in these Islands.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Through you sir, to the Honourable Minister.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: This \$3.1 million is just really designed to cover our primary school children from now through to the end of the year.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: That is correct, sir—and the Lighthouse School.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: And the Lighthouse School, yeah; and—if I could, sir?

The Chairman: Yes, sir.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: When is the programme slated to begin then? Is it going to start immediately?

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: It started on Tuesday.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Is there any estimate then, as to what this is likely to cost annually, because I recognise this is only a portion of our students.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: If I could beg your indulgence to refer to the Cabinet paper which contains that information.

[Pause]

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, the estimated cost to provide for our primary [schools] for this upcoming semester is \$2.9—round off to \$3 million.

If we did secondary schools it would have been \$3 million, and the Lighthouse School was \$140,580 so we took the decision that we were not in a position to do all of them, so you would not see a request for the just over \$3 million for the secondary school in this particular Finance Committee.

From January next year until December, the primary school would be \$7.7 million, secondary \$7.9 million, Lighthouse School \$366,300 being an estimated total of just over \$16 million.

Mr. Chair, so that I can put that in some perspective, as I heard someone say on the radio a few days ago: *it's difficult to justify to a developing and well-developed community that we can provide three rounded meals to our inmates at Northward, but we have difficulty providing meals to our school children.*

The Chairman: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much sir, to the Minister.

What's the total student complement within our school system these days?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, I am reliably informed that approximately 5,200 students enter our system and that would be three meals a day which includes a snack.

I can say that so far—and obviously, it's the first two weeks so you expect there will be some kinks and some ironing out that would have to go through—some children are still bringing from home and so, as we go through the semester we will see how that uptake is.

Obviously there are those who will say that some can afford and you should do the means test and I think that we saw the disaster that happened with that when children were assisted with NAU; some payments were late and so the children had to go and wait until everybody else got served and you were kind of cultivating—the social engineering would probably get a “D” if we had to mark it.

I think that if we are going to move, and we are moving towards world-class education which I am happy that all Members on both sides of the House apparently support, if we can attack the educational journey from a holistic perspective, then the balance of probability for success increases.

At the end of the day, when we get our next independent Office of Education Standards (OES) inspections, we would hope that it would have been narrowed down so that the fingers can no longer be pointed to us as a government saying, you know, that the resources were not there—whether it was Human Resources (HR) or otherwise; the finger can actually point to where it should have been pointing a long time ago and that is to the parents, who have the awesome responsibility of mentoring and leading and nurturing their children. Obviously government fills those gaps, and this is one of the gap fillers that we are doing.

During COVID, as we had the opportunity and privilege to visit more homes and get more personal contact with our parents, we found that there is a colossal need out there within our society; it is not as rosy as when we drive around on the front streets. The affluence has not yet penetrated all through the various stratification of our society, and I believe it would be a gross mistake for us not to take care and put in that investment.

Yes, it is a lot, but Cayman has done very well even in COVID—thank God for those who steered and engineered, and were fiscally prudent to ensure we had money for the rainy day that we are now traversing.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for George Town South.

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

A question to the Minister, in terms of how the students order their food. Do they pre-order or do they just order each day? Will there be waste as

a result, because if you have two choices per day, do you prepare...

Let's say Red Bay has 420 students and they have two choices; if they don't pre-order, do you then prepare two meals for 420 students even though they will only be partaking of one meal per day? Just trying to get clarity on that in terms of the waste factor involved.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I am going to invite the newly-appointed Director of Educational Services who deals with the operational aspect—we set the wider policy and they have been tasked to implement it. I would ask for a bit of charitable equity on his behalf because it only started Tuesday and there's a way to go yet; but, I am sure he, like us, comes from the background principle where you waste not, want not.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

Before answering the Honourable Member for George Town South's question, can you state your name and title for the record? Thank you.

Mr. Mark Ray, Director, Department of Education Services: Yes, sir. Good morning, Mark Ray, Director, Department of Education Services.

Through you, Mr. Chair: we are working to have the pre-order system incorporated within our student information system so that we can track the impact all the way through to the ultimate student outcomes; our student information system will help us with that. For the first two weeks, we are operating on a manual tracking basis because we had limited time to get everything sorted, but we are working very closely with our schools [and] our canteen services.

Some of the schools have already started with the pre-ordering service and we are working with others to get that up and running as quickly as possible because we do recognise the potential for wastage, but we anticipate that within the next two weeks we will be in a position to have everyone doing the pre-orders.

The Chairman: The Honourable Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you sir, through you Mr. Chairman.

One quick question: I suspect that is taken into consideration by the nutritionists, in terms of kids having allergies?

The Chairman: Director.

Mr. Mark Ray, Director, Department of Education Services: Through you, Mr. Chair; yes, ma'am, we are looking at allergies.

As the Minister mentioned, we are also looking at the nutrition content. We have a food standards document that all vendors have to comply with and we have regular inspections and walk-throughs with the nutritionists as well as actual information sessions for parents, and the canteen providers, in terms of the type of food that should be served, the nutritional value, the aesthetics, and obviously, the taste of the meals so we can make sure our children are engaged visually and they have good meals to eat.

The Chairman: The Honourable Member for George Town South.

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

The Minister for Tourism can attest to this, and maybe the Member for George Town West as well. Early in our last term, the Minister and I—and I think MP Wight—visited John Gray [High School] and actually went and did a testing of their cafeteria and their salad bar was the best ever; I could have eaten the salad there every day.

I don't know if that still continues but I have to give them kudos. That was excellent and to me, it was very healthy—and that's not a question; that is just a statement.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Chair and thanks to the Honourable Member for her positive observation. They say the proof is in the pudding so that will go on the record.

Well, John Gray is a very good school, they got a good report, but I can say that we can only expect for that to vastly improve with the coming online of the new John Gray High School. Although it has only been partially open, Members who have visited—which quite a few Members in here have—will see that it is a world-class canteen that is in there; it is comparable to any high school anywhere in the world.

We are very excited that that was one of the transitional projects between governments that is continuing for the best interest of our students.

The Chairman: The Honourable Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to publicly applaud the Honourable Minister for this school meal initiative. All 19 Elected Members have been called in the past to assist

schools. I think it is admirable and it can only help with the growth of this nation.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: I would just like to graciously receive the positive remarks from the other side.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

The Chairman: Are there any another questions? If not, I will take the vote. All those in favour of NGS 91 - Public Schools Meals Programme, \$3,100,996, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: NGS 91 passed.

TP 30 - Local and Overseas Scholarships and Bursaries

The Chairman: Continuing on to page 11 Honourable Members, TP 30 - Local and Overseas Scholarships and Bursaries being increased by \$8,071,226. Are there any questions?

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes sir, thank you.

This reflects almost a doubling of the appropriation for Scholarships and Bursaries. I am trying to understand:

- How much relates to the increase in the scholarship amounts that I think has been implemented; and
- The increase in number of new scholarship applications.

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you Mr. Chair and thanks to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

I should say up front that about 50 or 60 per cent of this is for prepayment of next year's spring term; this happens so that the students have a smooth transition. Children go back at varying times depending on whether it is America, Canada or the UK, but many of them in the first week of January. Obviously our budget would not be approved until later into the year so, in order to negate the possibility that they lose classes or they lose preference to the best professors in the school, the policy was

taken from some years ago that we pre-pay for the spring of the next term.

Another part of this almost appearance of doubling, is that the last time we were budgeting, I believe I am correct in saying that we requested \$15 million and got \$10 million. Basically, 50 per cent is to top-up what actually needed to be budgeted; so in reality, we are just looking for a top up of the 50 per cent. Sir, so that Members are able to disseminate information to the various constituencies, there are a number of categories; obviously there is one for the Cayman Scholar, under which the top boy and girl can receive a maximum of \$100,000 per annum. That's built into it.

Secondly, there was an increase from \$20,000 for the Basic Education Scholarship to \$25,000 per annum, and because we are trying to encourage more Caymanians to get into education, if they take up that discipline, they can get \$35,000.

We also have the Post-graduate students who are pursuing their Masters and their PhD, they were originally receiving \$25,000, Mr. Chair. Subject to this getting full approval, that will now increase from \$25,000 to \$35,000 per year.

We also had the situation with the A-level programmes. For many years now our Government schools have not been providing A-levels so our students have to go to either Catholic School or Prep School. Those prices have increased this year; I believe Prep School is like \$14,000 plus and Catholic School is in the region of \$13,000 plus and we were only doing the first year. This will now allow our students—which I never fully understood the logic—but this will now allow our students if it receives safe passage, to get a full scholarship to complete their A-levels at either Prep School or Catholic School.

The utopia, and our ultimate goal Mr. Chair, is for our public schools to revisit the possibility of providing the A-levels back in the school. Obviously there would have to be a comprehensive study because there would be a cost element, but I am even more pressed to expedite that for the sole reason that we have experienced, during the advent of COVID, that the Prep School and the Catholic School—and rightfully so, because charity starts at home—fill their quotas with their own children first, so we found ourselves in the unenviable position where our public school students had capacity difficulties in getting a space at the Catholic and Prep School which isn't what we want to see happening.

Hopefully, as COVID improves we hope, God's willing, that we won't see that problem occurring, but I have once again tasked the Education Council through a ministerial directive as provided for in the Education Law 2016, to look at that possibility. What is it going to cost—the pros and cons; whether it's cheaper to continue funding, maybe find a way to sit down with [Cayman] Prep [& High School] and [St. Ignatius] Catholic [School] to see

how they can increase their capacity or whatever is the best solution, so that Members will be on alert as to where we are going with the A-level Programme.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. Through you sir, to the Minister.

Thank you for the explanation and I don't remember if you said it but with regard to the A-level programmes, when students leave public school and go into the private schools for A-levels, is it the default position that government pays for that, or is it done by application or Needs Assessment?

What's the process?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, I am reliably informed that students apply and they must be taking a minimum of three A-level subjects.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Red Bay.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin, Elected Member for Red Bay: Good morning, Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

Mr. Chairman I simply wish to thank the Minister of Education for continuing to make it easier, or more affordable, for our students to be able to go to university.

I am particularly grateful that she moved expeditiously on the increase in the allowance, particularly for graduate students, for I know that amount of \$25,000 was not adequate. I had a number of conversations with her about it, and I am delighted that, with approval of the Cabinet, she was able to get that done in time for this school year.

Also, I am still a very strong advocate for the government schools to resume the A-level programme which was scrapped I think, the term before I became Education Minister, which would have been somewhere around 2000. I always thought that it was a terrible idea; I understood what the thinking was at the time, which was that by not having the A-level programme the system would encourage more students to go to UCCL, because the objective then was to build the population there.

However, I think it's been one of the really bad decisions that were taken and we have now had, for many years, capacity issues with the private schools being able to take the students from the government school system on board; but, aside from that, I just think that we are missing a really good opportunity for our students who have gone through the government school system, and done well up to

GCSE, to attain good A-level results at a government school.

We have this stigma, which continues, that the private schools are better than the government schools and I think one of the ways to change that impression is for us to get the A-level programme back in the government schools and see students in those schools continuing to perform well at advanced level exams, so thank you, Minister.

The Chairman: The Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Only to say Mr. Chair, that the Government fully concurs with the Honourable Member for Red Bay that A-Levels should be reintroduced in the school.

Once the new Council has an opportunity to look at the findings of the previous Council and make any variations that they deem fit to that policy, we will seek to see what the costing is, what the pros and cons are and bring it through Caucus, Cabinet and then back to Finance Committee; because I fully concur that if we are to indeed continue the journey in pursuit of world-class education, that is presently a missing component which needs to be filled as a matter of urgency.

The Chairman: Are there any other questions for TP 30 - Local and Overseas Scholarships and Bursaries?

If not, I will put it to the vote. All those in favour of TP 30 - Local and Overseas Scholarships and Bursaries being increased by \$8,071,226, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 30 passed.

TP 51 - Other Educational and Training Assistance

The Chairman: Continuing on page 11, TP 51 - Other Educational and Training Assistance being increased by \$111,623. Are there any questions? *[Pause]*

Seeing that there are no questions, I will take it to the vote. All those in favour of TP 51 - Other Educational and Training Assistance being increased by \$111,623, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 51 passed.

TP 93 - Private and Public School Grants

The Chairman: Continuing on page 11, TP 93 - Private and Public School Grants being increased by \$1 million. Are there any questions?

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes sir, thank you. Through you to the Minister.

Could we have an explanation as to who will receive these grants and what the criteria will be for them to receive it?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you Mr. Chair and thanks to the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Chair, the recipients of this grant, should it see safe passage, would be all registered private schools as opposed to private schools registered with the Private School Association. I will call upon my able Chief Officer to explain the criteria for it, but it was a grant that was in place before—over the years, it went from \$2 million to \$1 million and then down to much less.

There have been a number of representations from the private schools that they are experiencing a level of financial difficulty; coupled with the fact of some of them receiving weak performance grading from the OES, we thought that it was best to lend a helping hand to them to try to bring them up to speed. Hence the reason you see it reappearing as a grant to our private schools.

The third issue Mr. Chair, is that since the public schools have seen progressive positive trajectory in the performance of the school, albeit with the behaviour and the grades, this year's registration we have seen a transition from the private schools into our public schools which is a good, perhaps unintended consequence, but it also put that added capacity strain on our system. This assistance to our private schools will enable them to keep their doors open, especially some of those smaller schools that are struggling.

It also gives us that added capacity until the Ministry, albeit in a wider perspective the Government, has an opportunity to see what the needs are, for example in the Eastern district, which we all know is one of the fastest growing districts, as well as in the George Town/West Bay peninsula. Whether there is need at this time for another private primary school, because we do have some primary schools that are at the 500 range capacity and from an educational perspective, that is not a mark that we want to go beyond, because it has diminishing returns

once you pass that 500 number and we have to go three and four streams within our school.

We believe that we are okay with the capacity for most of our high schools. I know that John Gray and Clifton Hunter had minor capacity issues like with Grades 7 and 8, but the Ministry and Department of Education Services (DES) have worked to try to iron those out. There're some capacity issues with the nursery and day-care at Cayman Brac, and we have been working long nights and weekends to see how we can remedy that.

This is not an end-all fix, but it is an enabler fix—if I can make that distinction—to ensure that there's a smooth transition without interruption of both private and public schools, which lends into the whole concept of not leaving any child behind. I will ask the learned Chief Officer to respond thereto.

The Chairman: Good morning Chief Officer, before responding, just state your name and title for the record, thank you.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Good morning, Cetonya Cacho, Chief Officer, Ministry of Education.

Mr. Chair through you: The grant will be used in a number of ways, the Minister alluded to some of those. Currently we have three "Good" performing schools in the public school system, as rated by the Office of Education Standards, which are Layman Scott High School, John Gray High School, and the Lighthouse School and we are working towards getting those schools that are 'Satisfactory' to 'Good'.

There are five weak private schools that need quite a bit of assistance to raise standards because 50 per cent of their population are Caymanian children, so we would have some of those funds go towards school improvement exercises, remedies, professional development, resources, et cetera. We are also increasing the expectation from private schools from the Ministry in terms of the data that we collect from them and services provided.

This is especially the case around students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and disabilities so, understanding from private schools how many students they accept with SEN and disabilities and the accommodations they provide or should be providing. As you know, our government schools accept all students—any student, regardless of any additional need that they have—and this is quite an expensive thing for us to do, but we want to make sure that our students who are in private schools are also receiving those services.

We also have a number of private schools that are rated "Good" through the Office of Education Standards, who have enrolment practices that focus on academic attainment and we strongly believe that those schools, that have those enrolment

criteria, should be rated “Excellent”; so if you are only accepting students who are performing at an academically high level, your school should be rated as “Excellent”, rather than “Good”. Those are some of the focus areas.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Red Bay.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Mr. Chairman, just a question.

The description says that it is private and public school grants. I wonder what grants are being made available to the public schools—or is that a mistake?

Hon. Juliana Y. O’Connor-Connolly: No, Mr. Chair; but thanks for raising it, because it gives us the opportunity to mention that.

That is actually the TP, so inclusive into that TP is this new \$1 million but there is also \$250,000 that is made available for the public schools for specific projects; basically, if the public school wants to do a particular science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) project, they could access that \$250,000 grant from the Ministry, sir.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Bodden Town East.

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

I thought I should ask the Honourable Minister—I know it used to happen but the funding went down; now that it is increasing, I want to know—if it is mandated that scholarships are provided to public school students to attend the private schools?

The Chairman: Chief Officer.

Ms. Cetonya Cacho, Acting Chief Officer, Ministry of Education: Yes, in two ways. For example, we have the Jewel Entry Programme where students finish their exams early, at the end of year 11. If they have grades from A to C, 1 to 3, including Math and English, they can access their post-secondary education a year earlier than their peers and receive scholarships to attend: the A-level programme at UCCI that our Minister spoke about earlier, International Baccalaureate Programme, CAPE (Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Exam) programme, and other similar programmes.

We also have funding for students whose additional educational needs cannot be met in the government school programme. Those students receive services. We also have a panel in place which includes educational psychologists and sometimes, depending on the need, representatives from the Cayman Islands Health Services Authority (HSA), Department of Children and Family Services

(DCFS), et cetera. They determine where placement for that child would be, outside of government school, where his or her needs can be met, and then the government pays for that as well.

The Chairman: Any other questions? If not I will take the vote on TP 93 - Private and Public School Grants being increased by \$1 million. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 93 passed.

Hon. Juliana Y. O’Connor-Connolly: Mr. Chair, before you move on permit me to thank the Ministry staff from both District Administration and Lands (DAL) and Education. I also want to particularly thank my Parliamentary Secretary, Ms. Katherine Ebanks, for her work, but especially, as related to the private school grants and the interest that she displayed thereto.

PAH 4 - Public Parks and Cemeteries Maintenance and Management

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Honourable colleagues, moving on to page 12 of the Schedule, I will start with outputs for the Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure. I will take the first item, PAH 4 - Public Parks and Cemeteries Maintenance and Management being increased by \$500,000. Are there any questions?

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman the description says this is to assist with the NiCE Programme. Can we get an indication from the Minister as to when they are planning to start this programme?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure, Elected Member for North Side: Mr. Chair, through you: We are looking to start the NiCE Programme in the first part of the winter season.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Any other questions? *[Pause]*

Honourable Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Can the Honourable Minister state when in the winter season? Can you give a specific date?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Planning.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair through you: It would be in December, like it has been throughout the rest of the years.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes, sir.

I thought this might have been funding to continue to help with the clean-up efforts following the tropical storms we have had. Just curious to know if the resources that we have working, particularly with Public Works and other government entities, is going to be able to handle the remaining work to be done.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Planning.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, to answer the Opposition Leader's question, we will be looking for that funding to carry into the next item—PAH 25.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: I thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to ask the Honourable Minister with regard to the new cemetery in Bodden Town—I guess Pease Bay area. The description is to maintain and manage cemeteries and I just had an embarrassing situation on Saturday.

I wonder, what is the maintenance frequency of these cemeteries. Can the Minister say if some of these funds will be used to improve the surface in some of these cemeteries—this new Bodden Town cemetery, in particular?

Some of them are quite rocky and there is some flooding; persons had to be careful that they did not fall in the water. It also seems like it needs some fill for persons just to be able to attend burials at this new cemetery. That really needs to be looked at.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Planning.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair through you, this funding was directly for the NiCE Programme but, to give peace of mind to my colleague for Bodden Town East, [I will actually look into that to see how we can assist.](#)

The Chairman: Honourable Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Honourable Minister: there is also an issue with the root structure at the Prospect Cemetery. I have not been there subsequent to the tropical storm, but I know when you attend funerals...

It needs to be addressed; that cemetery needs some fill or something as well.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Planning.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair. I have taken note of it and [I will have my colleagues go and take a look at it today and see what we can do.](#)

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Any other questions? Seeing that there are no other questions, I will ask: All those in favour of PAH 4 - Public Parks and Cemeteries Maintenance and Management being increased by \$500,000, please say Aye. Those again, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: PAH 4 passed.

PAH 25 - Post-disaster Recovery Works

The Chairman: Continuing on page 12, Honourable Members. PAH 25 - Post-disaster Recovery Works, \$500,000. Are there any questions?

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes, sir.

Through you to the Minister, sir. To "alleviate and mitigate flooding"—what areas are you specifically seeking to do this work in, at this time?

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair.

The National Roads Authority (NRA) has identified several areas throughout the whole island that actually need drains; almost 80 new drains need to be put in island-wide.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Red Bay.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Mr. Chairman, my only question would be, is that enough money, bearing in mind that this is just the end of August. We still have September, October, November to navigate potential bad weather. I won't even call any other names like storms or anything like that—bad weather.

Is \$500,000 enough, realistically, would be my only question.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Planning.
Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, through you. These numbers were really based off the last storm that we had but as the Member alluded to, we don't know what is actually coming down the pipeline.

There is always somehow to increase that funding if we need to or, if we feel so, we can do it here right now.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the Minister's response in terms of the 80 additional drains. I know that there was a problem in terms of the depth of the drains so I don't know if they're just going straight to the 100 or the new depth—I think it was 80-something before.

I want to get some kind of indication if two of the worst flooding places that have been known to Public Works and NRA, Cumber Avenue and the Belford area (which is almost like a fish bowl); are these two areas—and not that these are the only areas in Bodden Town that have flooding, because we have others but these are the worst, in my opinion and from some persons at NRA—recipients of some of these new drains, and is any other storm water management assessment being done for these areas?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Planning.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, through you.

I have to applaud the NRA team and board members; they have taken a drive throughout the whole island. To let the Member for Bodden Town East know, Cumber [Ave.] and Belford were actually in that drive when they went out to locate the areas that should have drains.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Chair, I just want to publicly thank the Minister for that undertaking.

These persons have suffered for many, many, years. I drove through there right after the Tropical Storm (what I call a hurricane) and it was quite embarrassing for me to see as a country, that we allow these persons to suffer so long. Not just this Government but previous governments, have tried to solve this problem and we have not been able to resolve it, especially in Cumber Avenue.

They have tried, you know; NRA has really tried some Band-Aid approaches, which have helped for a couple years and then it starts up again, but I really appreciate the efforts that you have taken

and commitment to try to assist these residents in Cumber Avenue and Belford with their flooding problems.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Are there any other questions?
The Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

I just want to thank the Honourable Minister and his new Chairman of NRA, Mr. Alric Lindsay, who have been doing a fantabulous job recently.

I have had the experience of going around with him in my constituency, and I see that there is a drastic change with respect to the approach for dealing with roads and flooding.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: The Honourable Member of West Bay West.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: I want to put on record my appreciation for the amount of work that has been done for the oncoming storm and for the clean up afterwards. I had cause to have NRA come out on Sunday and they were ready, willing, and able. They came out and tried to alleviate some flooding which are more long-term floods because, I repeat, the more people build walls around their yards, they get flooded out and those walls cause the water to go somewhere. Sometimes it remains there, and sometimes it goes into other people's property and floods them out.

That is happening and it is probably something that Planning is going to have to look at for the long term, but I certainly want to add my appreciation and ask a question. Where are we at now with the clean-up? Will these funds go toward those places that are not completely cleaned-up—to assist in completing those areas?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Planning.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Through you, Mr. Chair: I have just been reliably informed that maybe we should look at increasing that \$500,000 by an additional \$200,000 to carry us through the rest of the year.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the increase because I know the work is there, but my question is: Are we going to be able to continue the clean-up for those areas that have not been completed while we are still cleaning, because of the huge number of trees that have been damaged in areas. Whether you're going to get some funding from this to complete that work, is what I am trying to determine.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Through you Mr. Chair to the Honourable Speaker of the House; that is actually correct, sir.

This funding is for NRA to assist and get more people out there to actually pick up that debris that is left alongside the roads. I actually took a drive in West Bay and I realised that there are areas there that still desperately need cleaning up. That is why we are asking for this additional funding; to help not only there but in the Prospect, Red Bay and Savannah areas as well.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: I appreciate that, Mr. Chairman but what I am trying to determine is: we have a crew and I know that there is something to do with the NiCE programme. Where are we when we end the funding? This week ours will end on Thursday.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair through you: when his funding is finished in the West Bay area the NRA will take over from there to finish the bulk waste clean-up that is left in that location.

The Chairman: The Honourable Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you Mr. Chair. Can you give us a moment to converse with the Minister, please?
[Pause]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, do you mind if we put off the vote for the post-disaster recovery works until after lunch, sir? That we can speak with all the colleagues?

The Chairman: No; I am going to take the vote now.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Okay.

The Chairman: All those in favour of PAH 25 - Post Disaster Recovery Works in the amount of \$500,000, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: PAH 25 passed.

TP 105 - Assistance to Farmers due to Tropical Storm Grace

The Chairman: Moving on to TP 105 - Assistance to Farmers due to Tropical Storm Grace, \$3 million. Are there any questions?

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Through you to the Minister: Can we get an explanation as to what the programme is, how this assistance will be handled, who will be eligible for it; those sorts of things.

What is the programme, in terms of assistance to farmers?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, through you.

Based on the assessment carried out to date, most of the significant impact was to the crop farmers, in particular those who produce banana and fruit trees.

To date we have at least 145 farmers who were impacted by the Tropical Storm; at least 119 of those are actually crop farmers and about 25 of them are large banana and plantain farm producers, so we will allocate this funding to the farmers to help them meet their immediate income gap, according to assessment that is needed; based on the level of damage to their farms, and the size of their farms, what the grant will actually be for.

There's a criteria that they have to go through; whether you are actually a commercial farmer to more of a backyard farmer to further assist them and, depending on the size of the grant that you actually get, it is not a one-time grant.

Basically, it is more a monthly stipend grant to get you through past the hurricane season, but also enough to be able to carry you across where it can actually help pay your farm helpers and assist where your losses or damages were through these months.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much to the Minister.

Then, based on your response, it would appear that casual farmers would also be able to benefit from this, not just the licensed farmers.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Sorry, can you repeat that question, sir?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes. Maybe I should frame it in the way of a question. Would what we describe as backyard farmers still be able to benefit from this program, or is it limited to licensed farmers?

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: This grant is more for the licensed farmers and commercial farmers. Those who have lost from their income.

The Chairman: Oh, sorry. Honourable Member for Red Bay.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Mr. Chairman, I just want to make a few observations and, before I do, to say what a tremendous job the Department of Agriculture is still doing in helping farmers through this very difficult time.

They don't have enough human resources to really do the job that is called for, but they are going beyond to help. I have one of the bigger crop farms I would say, certainly in the Eastern districts—I have more than 1,200 fruit trees—and they came and helped for a whole day. They brought six men, we had already started the process, and they worked like absolute slaves—that's the only thing I can say—to help.

They have been focusing on the commercial farms, trying to give each farmer at least a half day of assistance—and guidance—in how to try to save trees. We cut down too many trees in the aftermath of these storms over and over again. I had more than 300 trees down and I only lost four that I could not save. Hence, it can be done, but it's not cheap and it requires a lot of labour so, whatever we can vote, in terms of additional funding to the Department of Agriculture to allow them to help farmers survive, I am more than happy to support.

The thing is, those who have plantain and banana... there's really not much you can do there besides cut them down, and they take nine months before they bear, so people who rely on that as an income are going to need assistance. I am very lucky because I don't rely on the farm as my source of income, but for many farmers that is their principal source of income, so let us understand that.

I see a lot of criticism about giving money to farmers—on social media, in particular—by people, I am sure, who don't even know the extent of farming that takes place here; and it is very difficult to make a living from farming anywhere in the world these days, but in Cayman it is increasingly difficult, so I am very grateful to see this initiative, and whatever else that can be done to help farmers, then I think we should do so.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Chair.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Bodden Town East.

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

I wanted to applaud the effort in terms of assisting the farmers, but I wanted to throw a question in and I hope that the Minister is willing to answer.

In terms of assistant farming, does the Ministry have any appetite in terms of purchasing additional lands to concentrate on expanding the number

of farmers we have here so we can sustain ourselves?

The Chairman: Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair through you, to answer the question from the Member for Bodden Town East: we are looking for farmland and this Government is committed to looking for a lot more farmland than we can find. If any one of them actually knows of farmland that is available, please do not hesitate to call us.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Bodden Town East.

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour: Mr. Chair, thank you.

I want to thank the Minister for his Ministry's effort in seeking additional farmland; likewise I would also support getting 200 more acres of land for affordable housing.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for West Bay West.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Thank you very much Mr. Chairman,

I have to ask this because I am not in Caucus, so you will understand that I need to know; but just to say that Government owns quite a few acres in East End. I don't know how many. Now, we took some of that to make the mental health residence, but there is still a lot of land left there.

Hopefully the Minister will check into it, because it seems there has been a reluctance, and I don't know why, to utilise the land and that is basically what it is—farmland. Hopefully the Government or Cabinet, whoever is going to do so, will look into it to see what can be done.

The Chairman: Minister of Planning and Agriculture.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, through you: yes, we do have a significant portion of land in the Eastern district that could be used for farming [but] something that I have come across is that not every farmer wants to go to the eastern side of the island to farm, especially if he lives in West Bay.

I would ask the Speaker of the House if he would help me try to find some property in the West Bay area so we could do some farming in his area, because—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Many of his West Bay colleagues have also asked me about farmland in that area—if they could purchase any.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Cayman Brac East.

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly: Just a quick comment and a request, Mr. Chair.

I know that when we did the teachers' salary review, the next step that I was planning when I had [responsibility for] the Ministry of Agriculture was to look at the review of the salaries for the Agriculture Department, because as we did our full review we found that it was one of the departments that was undervalued by the community. We can see, certainly by the advent and the passing of [TS] Grace and Ida, that they were—in my respectful view—just warm-up exercises for other things that can be coming down the pipeline if not this year [in] other years, based on global warming and all the other scientific evidence.

Perhaps I might invite the Honourable Minister to look at that department when things settle down and we get through this COVID uninvited guest that we have upon our shores; because, as the Honourable Member across the floor said, not just during storm times but other times, our agriculture department—especially their extension officers and other auxiliary officers—really go beyond the call of duty to help our farmers and, if we are to move towards national food security, we have to invest in our people.

The Chairman: Any other questions? Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Through you, if my memory serves me well the Minister referred to this assistance being not only direct payments, but also through helping farmers with replenishment of their stock by way of importation of trees or what have you. Could he expand on that, if that is the case?

Also, I know that on the government's Strategic Policy Statement our intentions were to try to plant more fruit trees across the island. Could he say whether or not there would be any intentions of importing any extra trees not only this year, but potentially in the future, for that plan to take fruition.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister for Agriculture.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, through you.

The Agriculture Department imports trees on a yearly basis all the time; right now the Department is looking into importing more mango, pear, and whatever other kind of plants or trees that they need. I know that they are actually looking at that right now

as we speak, how to get a container here to assist the farmers as quickly as possible, sir.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Red Bay.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, going back to the appeal for information by the Minister of Agriculture about land that may be available for farming. I said *sotto voce* that the problem in districts like West Bay and even Bodden Town, Savannah and George Town, is that the land has now become so valuable that it is very difficult to persuade people to use the land for farming; I mean, the best farmland in these Islands was actually in Savannah, Lower Valley, George Town and West Bay.

I am old enough to remember when cows used to be grazed where the courthouse is now, so George Town had some very fertile land, but the land value is just too high now. I think the only way to avoid that situation continuing, is if Government purchases land at whatever the going rate is now and reserve it for agricultural purposes. Otherwise, as the population continues to grow and the value of the property continues to increase across these Islands, we are going to wind up with no land available for farming. I see it coming very, very, clearly.

I mean, down in the area where I farm, which was my great grandfather's property—an area called Great Beach, halfway between East End and North Side—that land used to be almost worthless because it was so difficult to access; but now we have paved roads in there and the value of the land has gone up significantly. Of course when you own it you feel good about that, but the reality is that the more the value increases... I doubt my sons are going to carry on farming. They are already teasing me about putting condominiums there.

This is the reality of the Cayman that we have now, so unless Government actually goes out and makes a policy that is going to acquire 1,000 acres of land, or whatever it is, and reserve it for farming purposes, eventually farming as we know it in Grand Cayman—leave Cayman Brac aside for the time being—is just not going to be viable at all.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Red Bay.

I'll move to the vote. All those in favour of TP 105 - Assistance to Farmers due to Tropical Storm Grace, \$3 million, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 105 passed.

The Chairman: That concludes the appropriations for the Minister—

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Chair, I would quickly love to thank everybody for their support. I want to thank everyone that has participated in the disaster recovery, especially from the agriculture team; those who actually went out and those who were actually tracking the storm throughout the nights for us.

I want to thank the men and women at the Public Works Department, Planning Department, Agriculture [Department], NRA, the private sector and all of those who actually went out to assist with everything to help make our lives easier. I just want to say thank you to all of them.

TP 73 - Other Health and Cultural Programme Assistance

The Chairman: Okay; thank you very much.

Colleagues, page 13 is the last page we will do before taking the lunch break, and that is for the Ministry of Health and Wellness. The first appropriation is TP 73 - Other Health and Cultural Programme Assistance, to be increased by \$750,000. Are there any questions?

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: A quick question through you to the Minister, sir. This Premium Assistance Programme, has that been expanded in any way since it was implemented?

The Chairman: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, Minister of Health and Wellness, Elected Member for Prospect: Mr. Chairman through you: it remains the same; we are just extending it to the end of the year.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: No further questions sir.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

All those in favour of TP 73 - Other Health and Cultural Programme Assistance \$750,000, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: TP 73 passed.

EI 53 - Minister of Health and Wellness

The Chairman: Continuing on page 13, EI 53 - Minister of Health and Wellness, \$1,330,026. Are there any questions?

Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, can we get an update from the Minister with regard to the status of the Solid Waste Management System Programme? At some point, we would also like an update on the long-term Residential Mental Health Facility—where that is at.

The Chairman: Honourable Minister of Health and Wellness.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: I will leave my able team to respond to that for me. I ask them to elaborate on the solid waste side—Chief Officer, Nellie Pouchie.

The Chairman: Welcome Chief Officer Pouchie and congratulations, I think this is your first time being confirmed as Chief Officer in Finance Committee. I will ask before you start your response, to please state your name and title for the record. Thank you.

Ms. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness: Thank you. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer of the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

To answer the question at hand sir, with respect to the Solid Waste Management System, as far as our Ministry is concerned, that is still in progress. We have not received anything contrary to that programme proceeding.

The Chairman: And the mental health? I think there was a second part of it which is the Mental Health Facility.

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

With respect to the Mental Health Facility, that also remains in progress and we have not received anything that states that we will have any significant delays. We are looking maybe at Q1 of 2022, due to time constraints that we had in terms of lockdown last year, and material shortages that we experienced earlier this year; other than that, that programme is still on track as well.

The Chairman: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. Through you to the Chief Officer.

I offer my congratulations to you. Well-deserved; I am very happy and proud of you and wish you much success.

To go back to the ISWMS: You say it's continuing; can you give the Committee any idea of where we are now, in terms of the whole procurement process of it? We have seen quite a bit of work there in terms of the capping and what-not, but can we get a little bit more information on when you are seeking to actually break ground on the actual installation of the Solid Waste to Energy Plant?

The Chairman: Chief Officer Pouchie.

Ms. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you: With respect to the current ISWMS programme, we are continuing with the capping and remediation of the George Town landfill. That's what you are seeing in progress now and it continues up until 2022.

We have to reach financial close to be able to have that contract finalised; as we have not yet reached financial close with respect to the main waste energy plant and that aspect of the programme, we do not have an actual break date yet.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy. M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you very much, sir; through you to the Chief Officer.

Does that mean the timeline for the commissioning and completion of this project is now slipping further into the future?

The Chairman: Chief Officer Pouchie.

Ms. Nellie Pouchie, Chief Officer, Ministry of Health and Wellness: Mr. Chairman, through you. The actual financial close date on that project is the end of September, so we have not reached that point yet.

Hon. Roy. M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you for the clarity.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Bodden Town East.

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

Mr. Chair, my intent is to publically congratulate Chief Officer Pouchie on her confirmation. Well deserved.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Any another questions? If not, I will take the vote: EI 53 - Ministry of Health and Wellness being increased by \$1,330,026. All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: EI 53 passed.

CIN 2 - Health Insurance for Civil Service Pensioners

The Chairman: Alright colleagues, moving on to page 14.

CIN 2 - Health Insurance for Civil Service Pensioners, being increased by \$1.8 million. Are there any questions? If not I will take the vote.

All those in favour of CIN 2 - Health Insurance for Civil Service Pensioners being increased by \$1,800,000, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: CIN 2 passed.

The Chairman: Colleagues, we will take the lunch break now to resume promptly at 1.30 p.m.

We only have one item left—OE 140 that deals with COVID related matters. We will try to conclude Finance Committee and get a report done today, so we can start helping our people tomorrow.

Thank you.

Committee suspended at 12.10 p.m.

Committee resumed at 1.30 p.m.

The Chairman: Finance Committee is resumed. Please be seated.

OE 140 - COVID-19 Response and Recovery

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Members. As I alluded to before the break, we only have one item outstanding, which may be found on page 6 of the Schedule—OE 140 - COVID-19 Response and Recovery in the amount of \$28,477,315. Are there any questions?

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was given a two-page summary of the makeup of this \$28 million. I don't really know where to start with it because there is so much here.

If we could, maybe, get an overview of what this all represents—is this money that has already been spent and we are seeking approval? What amount of it is for future appropriations?

I think that would be a good and helpful start for us.

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Leader of the Opposition.

As this is one of the votes that fall under my Ministry I will ask the Accountant General, who has the responsibility and oversight for this particular vote, to answer the questions.

Mr. Tibbetts, please give your full name and title for the record and answer the questions posed by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Thank you.

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General: Matthew Tibbetts, Account General.

Mr. Chairman, through you: the total expenditure up until July 23rd is \$10,572,000. That is broken down between:

Health Services Authority	\$6.8 million
Travel Cayman	\$3.8 million

The remaining \$17.9 million on page 2 of that document is to be incurred between July 24th and December 31st, 2021, giving us a total of \$28.5 million.

The Chairman: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes sir, I get the picture now.

Looking at the \$6.7 million for the HSA that has been incurred to the 23rd July, I start off by asking why it is just getting to us now. I mean, we were here in July and clearly the case is that this expenditure had already been incurred, so I am curious to know why it has taken this long to get it. Why didn't it come to us in July?

The Chairman: Accountant General.

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General: Mr. Chairman, through you: these expenditures have generously been funded by the Health Services Authority in the interim.

We have been receiving billings from the Health Services Authority; they have actually been footing the bill and paying Doctors Hospital for us on a monthly basis, but as of right now they are waiting. We are at a point now where it is quite large and they need the reimbursement. It is at a breaking point where we actually need to replenish those funds to the Health Services Authority.

The Chairman: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: The figure that jumps out to me is what seems to be a very substantial amount being paid to Doctors Hospital for PCR testing.

The Schedule shows roughly \$2.2 million up to 23rd July and a projected \$2.7 million up to the end of the year; that is about \$5 million for the year in terms of COVID testing being paid to Doctors Hospital. They seem to be undertaking a very substantial amount—performing a substantial number of tests. Is there any particular reason for this?

What I don't have is a picture as to how many tests are they performing, versus the HSA. I have figures here for Health City as well, but that does not even really figure into the total. I really want to understand what the driver here is.

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General: Mr. Chairman through you: thank you so much for the question.

I will ask the CEO for the Health Services Authority. She has significantly more insight into the breakdown of how many tests are being conducted by Doctors, Health City and the Health Services Authority as well as the costs, if you would like that information.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Okay, yes.

The Chairman: [Ms.] Lizette, welcome to Finance Committee. Before responding, state your full name and title for the record, please. Thank you.

Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority: Good afternoon. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer of the Health Services Authority.

Mr. Chairman, the PCR testing is currently carried out according to government policy. As you know, when the pandemic came about we were not prepared to be able to respond to the PCR demand and Doctors Hospital started testing, with regard to the demand. Currently, the distribution of the PCR workload is divided in such a way that Doctors Hospital does the PCR exit testing for those persons at the government isolation facility and HSA does those who are isolating at home.

In addition to that, Doctors Hospital screens individuals on the front line and, I believe, health care professionals as well.

The Chairman: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you. Through you, sir, to the CEO: Is there a fee that we pay them per test and what is it?

Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority: That's correct. Doctor's Hospital's fee is \$150 per test.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Per test. I know we use Health City as well; what are we paying them?

Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority: Health City is \$75 per test. Their equipment and their test is a little different than the PCR tests that HSA and Doctors Hospital do. Their tests are used for travellers; it is currently not used for exit testing.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes, thank you sir.

The \$4.5 million for staffing costs through to 23rd July—are these new employees of the HSA? Could you please explain how we get \$4.5 million in staffing costs?

Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority: Mr. Chairman through you.

The staffing costs are to do a wide range of duties. There are additional individuals who had to be brought on in order to do certain things for the PCR testing for example, admin duties in order to register persons for the vaccine.

In addition to that, register persons for the PCR testing but also, this is to pay for overtime duties as well—for those individuals who have their regular job, and are working after hours to do vaccination, PCR testing, contact tracing and other such duties.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Okay. Can you give me some flavour then, as to numbers of people doing this work?

Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority: To be honest, I would have to guess to give you a number, but suffice it to say that we have individuals who are working their regular jobs and then are going to the vaccination sites and doing other duties as well.

As you know, healthcare professionals are not that easy to recruit, so what we have had to do is use individuals who are currently working and pay them over-time.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Okay, so this would mostly be over-time, if I am following through with your explanations.

Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority: Through you Mr. Chairman: yes, sir.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Okay.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: The figure of just under \$2.7 million for PCR tests at Doctors' Hospital and \$220,000 for Health City... I don't know up to what date this reimbursement is, but July through to December, that's quite a hefty figure not having something to compare it to.

Are we anticipating an increase in testing or do we intend to continue to pay for everyone's test, whether they're traveling on leisure or for whatever reason they want to get the test? Are we anticipating covering all those costs?

Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority: Mr. Chairman through you.

Those projections are based on the current government policy but, obviously, if the policy was to change, that figure could significantly change as well.

I know the Chief Medical Officer, in consultation with the Medical Officer of Health, is looking at sourcing lateral flow kits, which are basically self-administered test kits. If that is the case, we project that there could be a reduction.

Obviously, with the borders reopening we anticipate a larger number of individuals needing to be tested and therefore, we have to look at other options but again, that's a policy decision and we will respond accordingly.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for Red Bay.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, on the page dealing with expenditure projected between July and December, item number four—"Episodic COVID testing"—is just over \$4 million. Can the Minister explain what that means?

The Chairman: CEO.

Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority: Mr. Chairman, through you: that would be the PCR testing currently required for travellers and persons who are exiting the

island—and that is for all the facilities, as well as the Health Services Authority.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Chair, I apologise.

I cannot follow along with the line of questioning without the document which the elected Member for Prospect is—

The Chairman: Actually, sorry we distributed them.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: It's the Government's document so...not my fault.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Elected Member for Prospect, you are 100 per cent right. Sorry sir—Red Bay.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Same dog puppy.
Mr. Chairman—sorry.

The Chairman: Sorry, Member for Red Bay.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Mr. Chairman, I don't see a comparative entry on the flip side, which deals with the expenditure to be reimbursed, I presume, from the beginning of the year until the 23rd of July.

I am trying to understand because it is a significant sum; it is over \$4 million and we've only got four months of the year left, so I am trying to understand how that relates to the expenditure up until the 23rd July.

Ms. Lizette Yearwood, Chief Executive Officer, Health Services Authority: Mr. Chairman, I will turn it back to the Accountant General.

The Chairman: Okay. Mr. Tibbetts.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Sorry to put you on the spot, ma'am.

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General: Mr. Chairman through you.

My apologies, the CEO is not familiar with the two-page document that we have distributed.

On the first page you will see an amount of \$4.6 million with regard to staffing costs, supplies, services, and episodic COVID testing. That number may appear to be small; however, we had funds brought forward from 2020 which helped to offset that.

This is the amount that is still to be reimbursed up until July 23rd, 2021, however, some of the funds from the previous year's budget have already been spent to cover the cost.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Mr. Chairman through you: is it possible for you to tell the Committee what the

overall cost of testing is likely to be for this calendar year?

[Pause]

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General: Mr. Chairman just to clarify: is it just the number for July to December that the Member would like, or for the full year?

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Mr. Chairman, what I am really trying to get at is, how does the budget for the next four months compare with the expenditure over the last eight months?

[Pause]

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: That is only one more month anyhow; yeah, that is to the 23rd of July. We are at the end August now, so it is one more month.

[Pause]

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General: Mr. Chairman, while I don't have the full amount of information for the 2021 year, I have March until July and the figure for episodic testing is \$2.5 million, so we would have January and February missing from that.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Okay, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: The Member for George Town Central.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Forgive me, I know we haven't had the luxury of hearing from the finance team yet about the whole listing, but there is one part I obviously must have missed—this maintenance for dogs. Can you tell me a little bit about that, please?

[Pause]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Under the Travel Cayman costing of \$3.8 million, I see that we have a 65 for maintenance of dogs; maybe I missed Travel Cayman's policy position for dog maintenance.

[Pause]

Mr. Matthew Tibbetts, Accountant General: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Minister for pointing that out.

I conferred with the Travel Cayman team and it seems like that may be a misclassification so,

apologies for that; [we will look into it and get back to you](#). Thank you for pointing that out.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: I hear my colleagues reminding me of that infamous song *'who let the dogs out woof, woof, woof'*, but back to the business of the people.

[Laughter]

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Yeah.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Chairman, I see that there is an allocation of \$1.011 million for basic salary, and I ask in relation to an area of responsibility that I have which is Cayman Airways.

I understand that there's a number of Cayman Airways staff who are assisting, rightfully so, with Travel Cayman—something to the tune of 13 staff members—and as the Minister for Cayman Airways, as we ramp up our efforts for reopening, those staff members' workload will have to get back to where it's going. We have been paying the cost for those members for some months now, which falls under my allocation. If it's going to be under Travel Cayman, basic salary should actually be a lot more, rather than it coming from my budget.

At the end of the day it's all the people's money and it would come out anyway; however, my point is, as we move forward to reopening, Cayman Airways will either have to hire some people or, is there any intention for those persons to go back to Cayman Airways, because I need my whole work complement for Cayman Airways to be efficient.

Mr. Matthew Tibbets, Accountant General: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Minister for the question. I am going to ask Chief Officer Howell to speak to that; as he is in charge of Travel Cayman, he can help with that explanation.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: Mr. Chairman, I don't mind listening to the evidence being given but I would say sir, that it is highly irregular for a Minister to be questioning another Minister in Finance Committee, because—

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Chairperson...

Hon. Alden McLaughlin: With the greatest of respect sir, you are the Chairman and you are the Minister of Finance and what is happening here now is an inquisition of your Ministry by your fellow Minister.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Chairman, you and I sat over there for four years and if the elected Member for Red Bay wants me to go get the Hansards

and the YouTube videos to show where he had Ministers asking questions, I am happy to do so.

Now, for the interest of the PACT Administration, where transparency is key, it is important that we do the public's business in public as we are doing now, so there's nothing wrong for us to have this conversation or for me to ask my colleague...

Maybe he operated differently with his administration, but that's why he's in the Opposition now.

The Chairman: Sorry guys, we are getting off track now.

That question is on the Floor. Chief Officer Howell, before answering, can you state your full name and title for the record, please? Thank you.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer, Ministry of Border Control and Labour: Thank you Mr. Chairman. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer for the Ministry of Border Control and Labour.

Mr. Chairman, through you: the budget through to July 23rd is \$1,011,000 and some change; that is the cost to date, less some of the staff members who were seconded from other agencies who are paying that salary. The projected cost going forward to year end is \$2.4 million and that includes the additional staff necessary to ramp up for the redeployment of the Cayman Airways staff back into Cayman Airways, and to keep up with the expected demands as we go forward with the reopening plans.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes sir, through you to the Chief Officer.

For clarity's sake, the Cayman Airways staff that have been working within Travel Time, central government is picking up their salaries and it's not being borne by Cayman Airways. Are we reimbursing? How is that working?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer, Ministry of Border Control and Labour: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Cayman Airways is actually footing the cost now for the staff members, I think there are 13 staff members that are doing the travel support aspect of Travel Cayman. We are in discussions with Cayman Airways about them returning gracefully to Cayman Airways, and we backfilling for them with additional staff within Travel Cayman as Cayman Airways' demand picks up and they require those staff members back.

So to answer the original question more specifically: the funding from July 24th through to the end of the year includes costs for funding those staff members whose costs are now being borne by Cayman Airways.

The Chairman: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you sir, to the Chief again.

With the Cayman Airways staff then transitioning back into their former roles, will that create a need for new hiring in Travel Cayman or are we able to source the staff internally within central government to do so?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer, Ministry of Border Control and Labour: Mr. Chairman, we have budgeted for worst case scenario and that is to hire additional staff members as has been our practice throughout the whole COVID response.

Where we can find available staff who are not fully employed in their day-to-day operations we utilize them, but as we get busy as a country, the necessity to hire additional staff members to keep up with the growing demand in travel, as we reopen, will cause some new hiring and that's reflected in the cost of personnel projected through the end of the year.

The Chairman: Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, my question relates to the item on the 24th July, 2021 to the 31st December, 2021 for the amount of \$367,125 for transportation—i.e. taxi.

What category of persons are we still providing free transport from the airport, and is this something that we intend to continue once the borders are open?

The Chairman: Chief Officer.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer, Ministry of Border Control and Labour: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

To answer the Member, all arriving persons are provided with secure transportation which the government currently covers those costs. We utilise buses for persons going to hotels to quarantine, and taxis for individuals going to homes.

The policy around what government pays in relation to these costs, including PCR testing, is being debated now in relation to, as we reopen and more persons are traveling for leisure is this a cost that Government ought to be bearing; so those recommendations will be considered going forward from the Programme Board into Caucus and Cabinet, but we budgeted for worst case scenario with the expectation that these costs won't be exceeded

because we would have some savings if we are successful in getting some policy changes around who pays for these expenses going forward.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you for that.

My next question has to do with the line item immediately below that—\$635,000 for decontamination. I suppose your response will be the same, that you're budgeting for worst case scenario but, hopefully, the funds won't be spent.

My second question is how many companies are carrying out this decontamination.

The Chairman: Chief Officer.

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer, Ministry of Border Control and Labour: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, there is only one company doing the decontamination of the vehicles that are used to transport persons coming in from the airport. That is something that the Programme Board is actively looking at and we are in discussions with Dr. Lee on what options we can have in relation to decontamination but, again, that's worst case budgeting; we absolutely don't expect to be carrying that level of cost going forward.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you.

I think a line item of that size is something that probably should go out to public tender. Notwithstanding that, the idea of having every taxi decontaminated once the borders begin to open, as there are further international flights being introduced this month already—or is it a month yet?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yeah. I cannot see how that would be feasible but, again, I will take your word that you're budgeting for worst case scenario.

The Chairman: Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: If I can just pick up from where he left off, right below that number.

Chief Officer, the \$300,000 in technology solutions. What sort of solutions are we procuring?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer, Ministry of Border Control and Labour: Mr. Chairman, the technology that we are utilising now for Travel Cayman, where persons apply for permission to travel has to be modified and adapted for future state, taking into consideration vaccination status and other things on an increased volume.

Most of that work is being done manually now which is unsustainable, so we have some funding in there for enhancing the technology so we can automate some of those things. Vaccine verification being the key one that we need to solve in the coming weeks.

The Chairman: Member George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Yeah, just going to the last item on the 24th July to the 31st December, 2021 for just over \$4 million for Quarantine Facility Operating Costs. Who are we still covering the cost of quarantine for?

Mr. Wesley Howell, Chief Officer, Ministry of Border Control and Labour: Mr. Chairman, we are covering the cost for essential travel—medical students, persons travelling for government work that is essential at this time.

Those costs were quite high during the summer because we expected lots of movement back and forth with students, particularly those going to the US because it also involved going to Jamaica for their student VISA applications, but we are actively moving to reduce our room stock now in relation to going forward, recognising that essential travel will start to taper off now that students' moving back and forth is tapering off.

Again, that funding is there but we don't expect to hit those numbers given that persons traveling for leisure; work-permit holders and others are paying their own way.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I thank you for that Chief Officer. As we move forward based on the Government's plans for reopening, you're not going to have that quarantine. I mean only those who are unvaccinated would require quarantining and we hope that those numbers are minimal so we should be down to a five-day quarantine now and in a few weeks we should be down to no quarantine.

Hopefully the Government can save a huge chunk of that because \$4.3 million is a lot of money.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Chairman, if I could put some context into the costing as per our reopening plan: persons will still be required to quarantine up until October 14th which is the fourth month of the second half, at least up until the 14th and there will

still be some people who will have to quarantine after that who may not be vaccinated, that will fall within the requirement as per the government's policy.

As the Chief Officer said, the majority of the bulk of this money was accumulated over the summer period—the peak period up until school started—hence, the reason it may look like a shorter period of time has taken up almost the same amount of time for a six-month period, but it's quite like our revenue for financial services, where there are peak months.

As September has started and school started back, most of those quarantining options will start to deplete, but the bulk of it was in the months of July and August, where students were traveling with family to get themselves off to school. There will always continue to be a steady supply, unfortunately, of Caymanians who have to go overseas for medical costs. The estimates would actually be appropriate, if you look at it from that perspective.

The Chairman: Honourable Member for George Town North.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank the Member for that detailed explanation but this figure of \$4.39 million is from the 24th July forward to 31st December, so it has nothing to do with summer travel, but I thank you for the explanation.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: I'm sorry, gentlemen. Is there a question somewhere in this?

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: No, no, I just thanked him but I do have a question or request.

I haven't heard today, Mr. Chairman, the expenditure to be reimbursed as at 23rd July 2021; so all of these expenses were from January 1st or just when money ran out?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: I suspected it. Okay, so it's just when money ran out. I would ask, if possible, I don't need it today but if we could possibly get the time periods on these amounts, I would really appreciate it.

The Chairman: I will definitely organise for each Member to be given a detailed breakdown month by month and actual versus forecasted until year end, so at least you can put some meat around this because you're right, these are large sums of money

and this is ultimately something that we all have to take very seriously. This is not a small amount of money.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, because it was very difficult to look at these figures that we are reimbursing to get an idea of what we're projecting; and, whilst I have complete faith in our Civil Service, I would still like to have it for my records.

The Chairman: I can assure you that we went through the same process, Honourable Member for George Town North, and one thing I made clear was, *it's one thing to get the money voted on; it's another thing to even get approval to spend it*; because part of the policy that we are looking at right now, is that everything related to OE 140 will be passing my desk from that standpoint.

We want to be looking at every single cost because it is a substantial amount of money and, of course, there was not an original budget for it, so there was no assumption used. That is something that we are looking at; many of the questions and observations made today are actually valid, and what we would expect from any person who is in charge of managing the people's money.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Any other questions?

[Pause]

The Chairman: Thank you very much. I'll now put it to the vote. All those in favour of OE 140 - COVID-19 Response and Recovery in the amount of \$28,477,315, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Chairman: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: OE 140 passed.

The Chairman: Honourable colleagues that concludes the agenda.

I ask Members to stick around until about 2.30 p.m.; we will convene in the large Committee Room to sign off the report of today's Finance Committee proceedings.

We are suspended until 2.30 p.m.

At 2.07 p.m. Finance Committee adjourned sine die.