



PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



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STANDING PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

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

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

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PRESENT WERE:

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

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

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

Audit Office: Mrs. Sue Winspear, Auditor General

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

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

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

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

Ms. Melissa Smith, Deputy Director,
Needs Assessment Unit

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

PAC Clerk: Mrs. Patricia Priestley

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

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

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

[Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Chairman presiding]

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

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

PRAYER

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Let us pray.

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

Amen.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Madam Auditor General—

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

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

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

[Pause]

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

Auditor General.

**OFFICE OF THE
AUDITOR GENERAL**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Auditor General.

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

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

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Thank you, Mrs. Echenique.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Pause]

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

[Crosstalk]

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member for Savannah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I hope that helps answer some of the questions.

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

The Chairman: George Town South

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you.

The Chairman: The Member for George Town South.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Pause]

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

Member for East End.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town East.

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

I thank the Chief Officer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Yeah, please go ahead.

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

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

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

but has any progress been made with establishing that framework?

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Member for Savannah.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Do other members have questions?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Pause]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Thank you.

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

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

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

The Chairman: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Member from Savannah.

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

The Chairman: Member for Bodden Town East.

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Pause]

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

I thank you.

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

Proceedings suspended at 12: 48pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:15 pm

The Chairman: Good afternoon, everyone.

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

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

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

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

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

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

MINISTRY OF INVESTMENT INNOVATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

provision of comprehensive and sustainable social development services.

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

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

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

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

[Pause]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Pause]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Okay.

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

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

The Chairman: Sure.

[Pause]

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Can we hold you to that commitment?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Chair, if you could give one minute.

[Pause]

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

- Age;

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Questions from other members of the Committee?

Member for West Bay Central.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Member for George Town South.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Mr. Isaac D. Rankine: Thank you sir.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Pause]

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: The Member for George Town.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Chairman: I believe you are right with that.

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

Thank you.

ADJOURNMENT

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thank you and have a good evening everyone.

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