

# TWENTY- SECOND

REPORT  
FROM

THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION  
AND APPROPRIATIONS  
COMMITTEE

EXAMINATION  
OF

The Ministry of Digital Transformation on Sub – Head 04  
Current Transfers and Subsidies, Sub – Head 09  
Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and  
Infrastructure Development Fund for the Financial Year  
2024

## Public Administration and Appropriations Committee

The Public Administration and Appropriations Committee (PAAC) is established by Standing Order 102 and 92 of the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively. The Committee is mandated to consider and report to Parliament on:

*the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies to ensure that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval;*

*the budgetary expenditure of Government agencies as it occurs and keeps Parliament informed of how the budget allocation is being implemented; and*

*the administration of Government agencies to determine hindrances to their efficiency and to make recommendations to the Government for improvement of public administration.*

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Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoe, MP	Vice-Chairman
Dr. Sharda Patasar	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy, MP	Member
Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member
Mr. Symon de Nobriga, MP	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Mr. Laurence Hislop	Member
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian, MP	Member
Mr. Hassel Bacchus	Member

### Committee Staff

The current staff members serving the Committee are:

Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Darien Buckmire	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Research Specialist
Ms. Anesha James	Administrative Support
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### Publication

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### Contact Information

All correspondence should be addressed to:

The Secretary  
Public Administration and Appropriations Committee  
Office of the Parliament  
Parliamentary Complex  
Cabildo Building  
St. Vincent Street, Port of Spain  
Republic of Trinidad and Tobago  
Tel: (868) 624-7275 Ext 2125  
Email: [paac@ttparliament.org](mailto:paac@ttparliament.org)

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# Members of the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee



Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George, MP  
**Chairman**



Dr. Lackram Bodoe, MP  
**Vice-Chairman**



Mr. Wade Mark  
**Member**



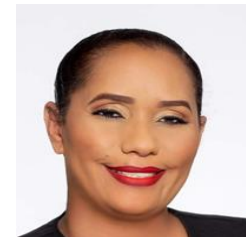
Dr. Sharda Patasar  
**Member**



Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy,  
MP  
**Member**



Mr. Hassel Bacchus  
**Member**



Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian, MP  
**Member**



Mr. Symon de Nobriga, MP  
**Member**



Mr. Randall Mitchell  
**Member**



Mr. Laurence Hislop  
**Member**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report of the Public Administrations and Appropriations Committee (PAAC) for the Twelfth Parliament contains the details of the Ministry of Digital Transformation on Sub – Head 04 Current Transfers and Subsidies, Sub – Head 09 Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund for the Financial Year 2024.

The Committee in undertaking this examination employed two (2) mechanisms:

- i. Written Submissions; and
- ii. Public Hearing.

The Committee requested written submissions from the Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT) and thereafter focused on a review and analysis of the written submissions. Subsequently, the Committee conducted a Public Hearing with the MDT on February 21, 2024. The approach adopted by the Committee took into account:

- i. Issues identified in the submissions received;
- ii. Ministerial Responses; and
- iii. Reports in the media.

The Committee made recommendations related to the issues identified. Observations and recommendations are presented in **Chapter 3**.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## THE COMMITTEE

The PAAC of the Twelfth Republican Parliament was established by the revised Standing Orders to:

- examine the current public expenditure, thereby capturing the full budget cycle by providing Parliamentary oversight of the implementation of the budget; and
- conduct a real-time examination of the expenditure of Ministries and Departments.

### **Change in Membership**

In the Twelfth Parliament the Members of the Committee were appointed by resolutions of the House of Representatives and the Senate at sittings held on Friday November 9, 2020 and Tuesday November 17, 2020 respectively.

- Senator Clarence Rambharat's seat in the Senate was declared vacant on March 16, 2022 as such he ceased to be a Member of the Committee.
- Senator Yokymma Bethelmy's seat in the Senate was declared vacant on March 16, 2022 as such she ceased to be a Member of the Committee.
- By resolution of the House of Representatives at a sitting held on June 13, 2022, Mr. Symon de Nobriga, MP was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie, MP.
- By resolution of the Senate at a sitting held on June 14, 2022, Senator Laurence Hislop was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Senator Yokymma Bethelmy and Senator Randall Mitchell in lieu of Senator Clarence Rambharat.
- By resolution of the Senate at a sitting held on October 24, 2023, Senator Dr. Sharda Patasar was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Senator Amrita Deonarine.

### **Chairman & Vice-Chairman**

By virtue of S.O. 109(6) and 99(6) of the House of Representatives and the Senate respectively, the Chairman of the Committee is the Speaker and at its First Meeting held on November 25, 2020, Dr. Lackram Bodoie was elected as the Vice-Chairman.

### **Quorum**

Additionally, in order to exercise the powers granted to it by the House, the Committee was required by the Standing Orders to have a quorum. A quorum of three (3) Members, inclusive of the Chairman or Vice-Chairman, with representatives from both Houses, was agreed to by the Committee at its First Meeting.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### Determination of the Committee's Work Programme

At an in-camera meeting of the Committee held on Wednesday, November 8, 2023, the Committee agreed to conduct an examination into the Ministry of Digital Transformation On Sub – Head 04 Current Transfers and Subsidies, Sub – Head 09 Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund for the Financial Year 2024.

### Review of Documents

The Committee deliberated on the following, namely:

- i. Written Submissions;
- ii. Budget Documents; and
- iii. Media Reports.

### The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines steps to be taken by the Committee when conducting an inquiry into an entity or issue. The following steps outline the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC for its Ministry of Digital Transformation On Sub – Head 04 Current Transfers and Subsidies, Sub – Head 09 Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund for the Financial Year 2024.

- i. Identification of the entity to be examined: MDT;
- ii. Preparation of Inquiry Proposal;
- iii. Request for written responses were sent to the MDT on **December 18, 2023**. Responses were received on **January 12, 2024**.
- iv. Preparation of an Issues Paper which identified and summarised matters of concern in the responses provided;
- v. Based on the recommendations and the issues identified, the Committee agreed to have a Public Hearing. The relevant witnesses were invited to attend and provide evidence on **February 21, 2024**;
- vi. Following the Public Hearing, a request for further details was sent to the MDT on **March 04, 2024**, MDT's response was received on **March 18, 2024**;



- vii. Report on the Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry;
- viii. Request for Ministerial Responses.
- ix. Review responses; and
- x. Engage in follow-up.

## ISSUES, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Status of the National Information and Communication Technology (iGovTT)

The iGovTT is a state-owned enterprise responsible for providing innovative and impactful ICT solutions to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public sector services<sup>1</sup>. Under the Theme III: *Improving Productivity through quality*,<sup>2</sup> the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GoRTT) stated that a key component embedded in the infrastructure landscape is ICT infrastructure, which must be continuously upgraded and enhanced to keep in stride with the country's growth and development path. In a written submission dated January 12, 2024, the Committee was advised that there was a Master Services Agreement between the MDT and iGovTT, which was executed on March 8, 2023. This agreement entrusted the iGovTT with the critical responsibility of providing major enhanced/expanded ICT solutions to the GORTT, which include but is not limited to the procurement, monitoring, management and development of essential digitalization projects prior to completion, and hand-over of all post completion monitoring, management and maintenance of all systems thereafter.

#### a. Shortfall in Requested Subvention

Officials from iGovTT indicated that the subvention received for fiscal year 2023/2024 to cover operational expenditure was in the sum of \$24Mn which was a shortfall from the sum requested. During the public hearing held on February 21, 2024, officials further stated that the company hoped this shortfall would be supplemented at the Mid-Year Review for fiscal 2024 as, the reduction in the requested allocation posed a genuine risk to the company's ability to deliver on its digital mandate and execute its strategic initiatives. Some of the strategic initiatives include supporting the development and implementation of digitization projects across GoRTT, and provision of value-added Information and Communications Technology (ICT) support services to various Governmental Ministries, Departments, and Agencies. (MDAs).

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<sup>1</sup> iGovTT website. Accessed on August 12, 2024: <https://www.igovtt.tt/>

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Planning website, Vision 2030. Accessed on September 16, 2024: <https://www.planning.gov.tt/sites/default/files/Vision%202030-%20The%20National%20Development%20Strategy%20of%20Trinidad%20and%20Tobago%202016-2030.pdf>

At the public hearing, the Committee questioned the impact of the shortfall on the operational expenses of the Company. Officials indicated that of the \$24Mn subvention received, \$22Mn would be attributed to salaries and, \$2Mn would be spent on operating expenditure. However, given the suite of projects, that iGovTT was tasked to undertake both for the MDT and the public sector, the shortfall poses a challenge. Additional information received on March 18, 2024 noted that iGovTT had been receiving subvention significantly less than the amounts requested, as illustrated in the table below.

FISCAL YEAR	iGOVTT		SHORTFALL	% Shortfall
	SUBVENTION REQUESTED	SUBVENTION RECEIVED		
2017	76,926,112	31,100,000	( 45,826,112)	60%
2018	35,000,000	21,000,000	( 14,000,000)	40%
2019	34,052,793	24,000,000	( 10,052,793)	30%
2020	35,205,118	24,000,000	( 11,205,118)	32%
2021	35,495,174	24,000,000	( 11,495,174)	32%
2022	35,211,122	24,000,000	( 11,211,122)	32%
2023	41,393,090	24,000,000	( 17,393,090)	42%
2024	69,857,782	24,000,000	( 45,857,782)	66%

The company explained that this has been the trend from fiscal to 2017 through fiscal 2024, with a marked shortfall increase in fiscal 2024 of 24% over fiscal 2023. This was despite the increasing activity and requirement to fulfil critical projects necessary to meet the MDT’s strategic initiatives. Additionally, due to declining allocations, the Board of Directors imposed a hiring freeze from the period 2017 to 2022. To mitigate the effects of the shortfalls and ensure operating activities were not stymied, the iGovTT’s management adopted fiscally responsible measures, reduced its operating budget as well as reduced its operating cash reserves. In that regard, the Committee was informed that the iGovTT’s operating cash reserves reduced to a \$3.48 million as at January 2024, highlighting a severe financial crisis for the remainder of fiscal 2024 and onwards.

***Recommendations:***

- ***Given the GoRTT's thrust towards the digitalization of the public service and iGovTT's role in this objective, the MDT should provide an update to Parliament by March 17, 2025 on:***
  - ***the critical projects that***
    - ***were not commenced; and***
    - ***remained incomplete due to the reduction in allocations spanning fiscals 2017 to 2024; and***
  - ***the representations the MDT has made to the Ministry of Finance on iGovTT's behalf given that the shortfalls have stymied iGovTT's ability to:***
    - ***support the development and implementation of digitization projects across the public sector; as well as***
    - ***provide value-added ICT support services to various Governmental MDAs.***
- ***The Ministry of Finance should provide an update to Parliament by March 17, 2025 on:***
  - ***the measures iGovTT can take to better prepare and represent itself during the annual budgetary preparation process given its public sector digitization mandate; and***
  - ***the mechanisms that should be implemented to assist the iGovTT with mitigating the budgetary challenges it faces given the company's shortfall in subvention received and what was requested.***

**b. iGovTT's Organisational Structure**

In 2011, Cabinet approved iGovTT's organisational structure, which made provisions for a total staff complement of one hundred and seventy-five (175) employees. These employees were distributed over twelve (12) Units as seen in the table below:

- Core
- Support
- Consulting
- Corporate Communications
- Delivery
- Finance and Administration
- Operations
- Human Resources and Administration
- Security and Assurance
- Internal Audit
- TTconnect
- Corporate Secretary and Legal
- Shared Services
- Telecommunications and Competition Development

Given the ongoing Digital Transformation initiatives and projects, iGovTT's organisational structure was evolving to accommodate the need for essential resources to support the Company's mandate, in areas of Software Development and Cybersecurity with consideration of both Security Assurance and Operations, whilst maintaining the approved staff count of one hundred and seventy-five (175) employees. At the time of the public hearing, the company was operating with one hundred and thirty-nine (139) employees. Officials indicated that there was need to increase the positions to the Cabinet approved amount in order to support the MDT. The company stated that it was expected to have another twenty-one (21) positions filled; however, this was affected by the shortfall in the subvention received. Additionally, the company began the establishment of units such as a Security and Assurance Unit, Software Development Unit and additional staff would be required.

***Recommendation:***

- ***The MDT should liaise with the iGovTT to address its human resource capacity challenges to ensure the fulfillment of its mandate and submit an update to Parliament by March 17, 2025.***

**c. Considerations to charge fees**

iGovTT earns a minimal income through a variety of sources. A portion of its income was derived from consulting and implementation services, such as:

- i. Business and Technical Advisories;

- ii. Software Development;
- iii. Project Management; and
- iv. Procurement.

These sources of income generated an average annual income of \$2.3M over the last three (3) years. However, a significant portion of services provided to the GoRTT and citizens was free but delivered through its subvention. In an attempt to monetise its services, iGovTT indicated that a thorough value chain analysis on its existing services that were currently provided at no charge to the consumer was undertaken to determine a base unit charge per service. Services analysed included:

- GovNeTT,
- the management and administration of enterprise license agreements,
- ttconnect,
- employTT, and
- eAppointment.

The company indicated that the analysis will be presented through the MDT to the wider Government and relevant line Ministries for consideration and approval. The company indicated that support from the Cabinet and acceptance by the Government would be necessary for implementation. Subsequent information received stated that for new solutions, services, and platforms that could be offered government-wide, iGovTT would develop a business model, a Total Cost of Ownership (TCO) analysis, and a sustainability plan for growth over the next five (5) years.

***Recommendations:***

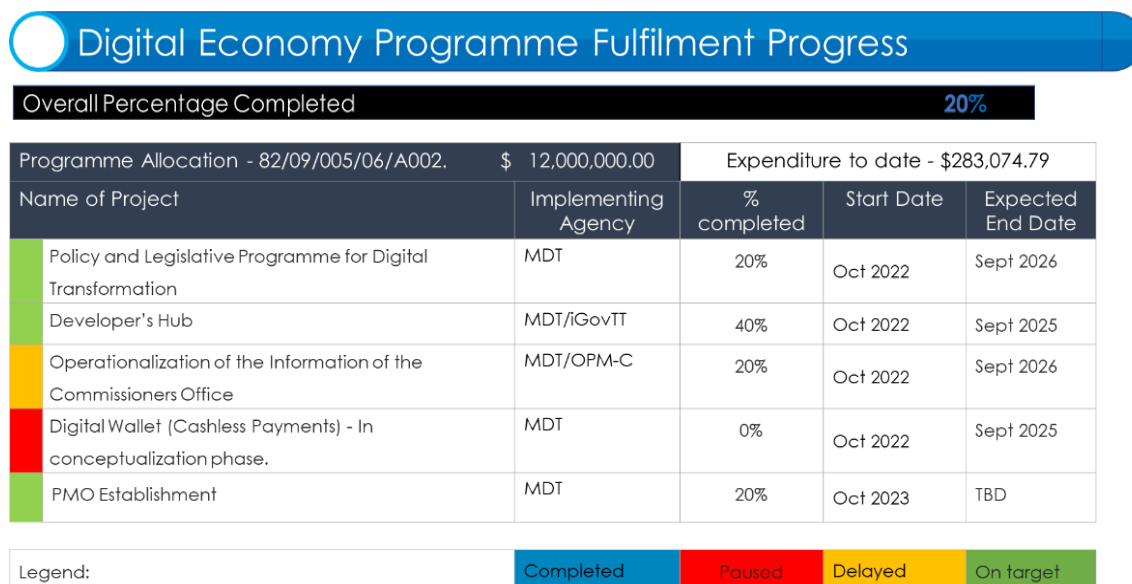
- ***iGovTT should indicate the timeline for the submission of the results of the Value Chain Analysis and a status on the receipt of approval to Parliament by March 17, 2025; and***
- ***iGovTT should submit a copy of the pricing of its services to Parliament by March 17, 2025.***

**2. Projects to achieve the Ministry's Strategic initiatives**

The mandate of "A new way to address the end-to-end consumption and delivery of goods and services to customers using appropriate digital technology." was adopted by MDT. MDT developed the following three (3) undermentioned pillars:

- i. **Digital Society** - ICT for all and the implementation of programmes that address:
  - Access – affordable internet access (internet is the fourth utility);
  - Digital Literacy – ability to use ICTs safely; and
  - Digital Inclusion – ensuring affordable access to rural communities, Persons with Disabilities (PwDs).
- ii. **Digital Economy** – Building globally competitive businesses - Ensures economic development, lower cost of operations, improved business linkages, ease of doing business, and increase in GDP contribution of the ICT sector towards a diversified economy i.e.
  - An enabling and environmentally-friendly ICT environment/digital ecosystem;
  - Digitalisation of business/industry (Cloud Services);
  - ICT Sector development; and
  - Enabling Legislation.
- iii. **Digital Government** – Creating better government services and more efficient government as follows:
  - Convenient, easy to use, secure transacting with GoRTT;
  - More cost efficient, robust and integrated GoRTT operations;
  - Reduce fraud and increase effectiveness of GoRTT programmes;
  - Services On-line;
  - Rationalised Delivery Channels; and
  - National eID and Interoperability.

Following the Committee’s request for an update on the fulfilment of these initiatives, the MDT provided the following updates:



## Digital Society Programme Progress

Overall Percentage Completed

20%

Programme Allocation: 701/82/09/005/06/A001 \$ 50,000,000.00		Expenditure to date - \$6,978,100.00		
Name of Project	Implementing Agency	% completed	Start Date	Expected End Date
e-ID Programme	MDT/iGovTT/UNDP	20%	May 2023	Sept 2026
Interoperability Programme	MDT/iGovTT/UNDP	20%	May 2023	Sept 2026
Cybersecurity	MDT/iGovTT/IDB	20%	Oct 2022	Sept 2026
Government Cloud and Data Centre	MDT/iGovTT	20%	Oct 2022	Sept 2025
Integrated Service Centre	MDT/iGovTT	20%	Oct 2022	Sept 2026
Open Data	MDT/MPA	50%	Oct 2022	Sept 2026
Government Digital Eco System Pilot	MDT/iGovTT	10%	Sept 2023	Sept 2024

Legend:

Completed

Paused

Delayed

On target

## Digital Government Programme Fulfillment

Overall Percentage Completed

30%

Programme Allocation: 701/82/09/005/06/A001 \$ 50,000,000.00		Expenditure to date - \$6,978,100.00		
Name of Project	Implementing Agency	% completed	Start Date	Expected End Date
e-ID Programme	MDT/iGovTT/UNDP	20%	May 2023	Sept 2026
Interoperability Programme	MDT/iGovTT/UNDP	20%	May 2023	Sept 2026
Cybersecurity	MDT/iGovTT/IDB	20%	Oct 2022	Sept 2026
Government Cloud and Data Centre	MDT/iGovTT	20%	Oct 2022	Sept 2025
Integrated Service Centre	MDT/iGovTT	20%	Oct 2022	Sept 2026
Open Data	MDT/MPA	50%	Oct 2022	Sept 2026
Government Digital Eco System Pilot	MDT/iGovTT	10%	Sept 2023	Sept 2024

Legend:

Completed

Paused

Delayed

On target



***Observations:***

- *The Committee notes the progress made in the fulfillment of the Digital Society, Digital Economy and Digital Government strategic initiatives.*

***Recommendations:***

- *The MDT should submit a status update to Parliament by March 17, 2025 on the:*
  - *projects that were expected to be completed by September 2024;*
  - *projects stated in the table above that are expected to be completed in 2025;*
  - *completed conceptualisation phase of the Digital Wallet Project; and*
  - *challenges that caused the delay of projects and the lessons learnt from these challenges.*

**3. Access Centres**

ICT Access Centres, branded AccessTT, provide underserved or ICT-excluded communities with a world of opportunities through access to ICT devices and the internet. Since October 2022, twelve (12) centres access have been operationalised throughout the country, with a further six (6) on the way. The 12 current were located in:

- |                |                 |
|----------------|-----------------|
| ▪ Belmont      | ▪ Maraval       |
| ▪ Caiman       | ▪ Penal         |
| ▪ Cumana       | ▪ Todds Road    |
| ▪ Belle Vue    | ▪ Marac         |
| ▪ Carenage     | ▪ Lisas Gardens |
| ▪ Diego Martin | ▪ Guayaguayare. |

The Committee was informed that the Ministry hoped to operationalise sixty-two (62) more access centres by the end of fiscal 2024 (**See Appendix I**). The following areas would be targeted:

- Arima;
- Cascade;
- Chaguanas;
- Maitaigual; and
- Tacarigua.

The MDT explained that ICT Access Centres will allow citizens to access the internet, Government e-services and receive free training. These Access Centres will bring accessibility to persons who may not have access to a device or connectivity. MDT utilises this initiative as one of its methods of outreach to citizens in rural areas persons with disabilities and citizens without access to internet. The Ministry indicated that there were some challenges with the operationalisation of these access centres such as:

- i. Procurement - Delays in the procurement process which would facilitate the purchase of Furniture, Fixtures and Equipment (FF&E) for the various Access Centres.
- ii. Vendor - Vendors selected through the procurement process were having issues with forex and shipping times causing delays in outfitting of Access Centres.
- iii. Communications – Slow/No-response from Partner MDAs, which caused incomplete reporting on project activities and delay in decisions, which would affect the schedule and cost of the project.

The Ministry indicated that despite of these challenges the project was still on schedule to be completed by September 2026.

***Recommendations:***

- ***The MDT should submit a status update to Parliament by March 17, 2025 on the operationalisation of the sixty-two (62) access centres across the country.***
- ***The MDT should provide a status update on the procurement activities regarding the purchase of Furniture, Fittings and Fixtures and submit to Parliament by March 17, 2025.***
- ***The MDT should meet with its partner MDAs to communicate and address their slow/non-response to reporting on project activities to ensure timely decision-making and effective project management. The MDT should submit an update on this meeting identifying the plans to resolve these challenges to the Parliament by March 17, 2025.***

#### **4. Staffing Constraints in the Internal Audit Unit (IAU)**

Inadequate staffing of Internal Audit Units has been identified as a pervasive issue across the Public Service despite it being a crucial oversight mechanism. The role of Internal Audit is to provide independent assurance that an organisation's risk management, governance and internal control

processes were operating effectively. The State Enterprises Performance Monitoring Manual states *“Every State Enterprise is required to appoint an Audit Committee. It shall be composed of a minimum of two (2) non-executive directors and other independent Company professionals. The Minister of Finance may appoint other independent professionals to the Committee.”*<sup>3</sup> The Committee enquired into the review of internal policies and procedures regarding project expenditures. However, officials from the Ministry indicated that its IAU does not have adequate resources to carry out this function efficiently, as vacancies in the IAU were yet to be filled by the Service Commissions Department (SCD). The unit was operating with one (1) officer, the Auditor II who was carrying out the duties of all of the. The three (3) established positions of Auditor I, Auditor Assistant and Clerk Typist were vacant. Due to these staffing constraints, the Ministry was unable to conduct audits of its projects and programmes.

Additionally, the Ministry explained that its technical human resource capacity and the number of Access Centres being launched/opened were swiftly increasing. The IAU was responsible for conducting an audit of all the Ministry’s assets as well as auditing its internal records. Officials from the Ministry stated that if the issue of lack of staffing was not addressed in a timely manner, the sole officer will be unable to perform all the duties required by the Ministry and there may be a delay in conducting audits and the submission of required reports. Additionally, the Ministry may be unable to meet required reporting deadlines given by the Auditor General and other stakeholders.

The Committee questioned the steps being taken to resolve the staffing constraints in the interim. Officials from the MDT indicated that since the creation of the MDT, the Ministry has approached the SCD via memorandum, emails and telephone requesting the filling of the vacant offices. The Ministry has also requested officers to act in the offices until the SCD can fill the offices. To date, the SCD has appointed one (1) Auditor I who has not assumed duty due to non-acceptance of the appointment. The Ministry further stated that it may have to consider approaching the Ministry of Public Administration, Public Management Consulting Division (PMCD) and Cabinet to create contract positions in the Audit field to perform audit duties if the SCD is unable to fill the positions.

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<sup>3</sup> State Enterprises Performance Monitoring Manual. Pgs. 11. Para 2.2.6.3

### ***Recommendations:***

- ***MDT should prioritise the filling of the Auditor I, Auditor Assistant and Clerk Typist positions to ensure an effective and efficient audit function and submit an update to Parliament by March 17, 2025.***
- ***In light of the challenges due to the vacancies in the IAU, the MDT should approach the PMCD to create contract positions to ensure the fulfillment of the audit function are met and submit an update to Parliament by March 17, 2025***

### **5. Establishment of a Cybersecurity Unit**

Cyber security<sup>4</sup> is the methods and processes to protect from or reduce the risk of cyber-attacks. At a Cybercrime and Cyber Security Sensitization Workshop in January 2023<sup>5</sup>, the Minister of National Security revealed that there were two hundred and five (205) successful cyber-attacks reported to the TT Cyber Security Incident Response Team at the Ministry of National Security in the previous three (3) years. Fifty-two (52) of these attacks occurred in 2023. The Committee raised the issue of Cyber Security with the MDT given that under its Digital Government initiative there was a project, “Cyber security Unit and Strategy”. The Committee noted that as at February 21, 2024, no money was spent on this project. Officials indicated that the project was in the planning phase with the Inter-American Development Bank.

Regarding the lack of expenditure on the project, it was explained that a payment of \$5Mn was disbursed to iGovTT for the initial procurement of Reactive Incident Management services, which remained unutilised during the fiscal year 2022-2023. The plan was to utilise the unspent \$5Mn from that period to commence the contract with the chosen vendor, and any remaining balance would subsequently be allocated to the project upon determination. Given the shortfall in the allocation under the Infrastructure Development Fund (IDF) and the high priority of this initiative, the IDB was currently collaborating with the MDT for the execution of this project.

Additionally, the MDT was in the process of establishing a Cyber Security Unit and has been undertaking activities relative to cyber security awareness and developing a campaign to educate

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<sup>4</sup> National Cyber Security Centre website, *What is cyber security?* Accessed on September 17, 2024: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/about-ncsc/what-is-cyber-security>

<sup>5</sup> The Trinidad and Tobago Newsday, *Hinds: 205 cyber-attacks in Trinidad and Tobago in 5 years.* Accessed on August 22, 2024: <https://newsday.co.tt/2024/01/26/hinds-205-cyber-attacks-in-trinidad-and-tobago-in-5-years/#:~:text=THERE%20WERE%20MORE%20than%20200,and%20cyber%20security%20sensitisation%20workshop.>

citizens with regard to cyber security hygiene and posture. A recruitment of a Deputy National Chief Digital Officer whose role is cybersecurity and other critical personnel to staff this Unit was ongoing.

***Recommendations:***

- ***The MDT should provide an update to Parliament by March 17, 2025 on:***
  - ***the commencement of the Cyber Security Unit and Strategy Project in collaboration with the IDB;***
  - ***the campaign to educate citizens with regard to cyber security hygiene and posture; and***
  - ***the recruitment of personnel for the Cyber Security Unit.***

## **6. Opportunity for Bulk Purchasing**

The term Bulk purchasing was referenced as an approach used given the delays in the delivery of furniture and fixtures purchased to outfit Access Centres. The Committee was informed that the MDT plays an advisory role to MDAs. Therefore, the Ministry was questioned whether MDAs benefit from bulk purchasing as well in relation to their own digitization process. The MDT indicated that this approach had arisen in the past regarding the purchasing of computers to achieve cost savings, however it was not at the time being explored. The MDT indicated that such an approach has to be a policy decision.

***Recommendations:***

- ***The MDT should draft a procurement policy proposing the Ministry's role in undertaking the bulk procurement of purchases for all MDAs in relation to the digitization of its operations and services and submit to Cabinet for approval and provide an update to Parliament by March 17, 2025.***

## CONCLUSION

The MDT has adopted a new way to address the end-to-end consumption and delivery of goods and services to customers, using appropriate digital technology. From the Committee's deliberations the MDT has been working towards the digitalisation of the public service however, a number of issues has hindered its progress.

During the Fourth Session of the Twelfth Parliament, the PAAC conducted an examination into the Ministry of Digital Transformation On Sub – Head 04 Current Transfers and Subsidies, Sub – Head 09 Development Programme – Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure Development Fund for the Financial Year 2024. Several issues such as Status of the National Information and Communication Technology (iGovTT), Projects to achieve the Ministry's Strategic initiatives, Access Centres, Staffing Constraints in the Internal Audit Unit (IAU) and the establishment of a Cybersecurity Unit were highlighted and recommendations proposed to address these issues.

The Committee is of the view that the adoption of its proposed recommendations will assist the MDT in some of the challenges experienced and improve operational efficiency. Moreover, the Committee intends to monitor the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations proposed in this Report.

This Committee respectfully submits this Report for the consideration of the Parliament.

Sgd.  
Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George  
**Chairman**

Sgd.  
Dr. Lackram Bodoie  
**Vice-Chairman**

Sgd.  
Dr. Sharda Patasar  
**Member**

Sgd.  
Mr. Hassel Bacchus  
**Member**

Sgd.  
Mr. Wade Mark  
**Member**

Sgd.  
Mr. Symon de Nobriga  
**Member**

Sgd.  
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy  
**Member**

Sgd.  
Mr. Randall Mitchell  
**Member**

Sgd.  
Mr. Laurence Hislop  
**Member**

# APPENDIX I

## Implementation of the Access Centre

### Programme for the year 2024



## Schedule for the Implementation of the Access Centre Programme for the year 2024 onward

	13 locations completed		Phase I		Phase II		Phase III		Phase IV
1	Guayaguayare	1	Arima (Proper)	1	Roxborough (THA) - TATT	1	Grand Riviere (Tourism??)	1	Plaisance Regional Complex
2	Cumana	2	Gonzales	2	Barataria Regional Complex	2	California (MYDNS)	2	St. John's
3	Marac	3	St. James (MYDNS)	3	Black Rock (THA)	3	Castara (THA)	3	Jerningham Junction (Central)
4	Penal	4	Navet	4	Pleasantville	4	Biche	4	Enterprise
5	Todd's Road (MDT)	5	Waterloo	5	Las Lomas #2	5	Los Bajos (MYDNS)	5	Spring Land (Gasparillo)
6	Carenage	6	Edinburgh 500	6	Mayaro (NALIS)	6	Laventille (MYDNS)	6	Samaroo Village
7	Belmont	7	Techier (Point Fortin)	7	Petit Valley	7	Malick (MYDNS)	7	Arima (Mt Pleasant)
8	Lisas Gardens	8	Diego Martin South	8	Plum Mitan	8	Maloney (YTEPP)	8	La Seiva
9	Maraval	9	Diego Martin Central	9	St. Helena (Matelot)	9	Quarry Village - TATT	9	Warrenville (Warren)
10	Belle Vue	10	Bon Air Gardens	10	St Joseph Rd (PoS)	10	Chatham	10	Talparo
11	Caiman (Maracas/St Joseph)	11	Malabar (Phase IV)	11	Upper Malabar	11	Shende Street (San Juan)	11	Robert Hill/Siparia
12	Tacarigua	12	San Fernando North	12	Valencia (YTEPP)	12	Roystonia (Couva)	12	Scarborough (THA)
13	Diego Martin North	13	Barrackpore	13	Parlatuvier (THA)	13	Chickland (Carapichaima)	13	Sisters' Road
		14	La Pastora	14	L'Anse Fourmi (THA)	14	Gran Couva	14	Wallerfield
		15	Harmony Hall (Gasparillo)	15	Indian Trail - TATT	15	Brasso Seco	15	Greenvale
		16	Surrey Village (Lopinot) -TATT	16	Tarodale (San Fernando)	16	Rambert, San Fernando	16	Oropune
		17	La Horquetta	17	Tarouba (Union)	17	Flanagin Town (Tabaquite)	17	Bonasse Village (Cedros) DEFER beyond 2024
		18	La Brea	18	Hindustan	18	Woodland, La Fortune	18	Brazil DEFER beyond 2024
		19	Arima (Market)	19	Bethesda (Plymouth) (THA)	19	Maracas	19	Basilon Street (MYDNS) DEFER beyond 2024
		20	Cascade			20	Paramin-(Rotary Club)	20	Bloody Bay (THA)

	13 locations completed		Phase I		Phase II		Phase III		Phase IV
		21	Maitagual			21	L'Anse Noire TATT	21	Moriah (THA)
						22	Guaico Tamana	22	Bon Air West
								23	Moruga (NESC Bldg)
								24	Boos Village (Rio Claro)

## **APPENDIX II**

### **The Inquiry Process**

## The Inquiry Process

1. The Inquiry Process outlines steps to be taken by the Committee when conducting an inquiry into an entity or issue. The following steps outlines the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC:
  - i. Identification of entity to be examined;
  - ii. Preparation of Inquiry Proposal for the selected entity. The Inquiry Proposal outlines:
    - iii. Description
    - iv. Background;
    - v. Overview of Expenditure
    - vi. Rationale/Objective of Inquiry; and
    - vii. Proposed Questions.

2. Consideration and approval of Inquiry Proposals by the Committee and when approved, questions are forwarded to the entity for written responses;

Issue of requests for written comment from the public are made via Parliament's website, social media accounts, newspaper and advertisements;

Preparation of an Issues Paper by the Secretariat for the Committee's consideration, based on written responses received from the entities. The Issues Paper identifies and summarises any matters of concern in the responses provided by the entity or received from stakeholders and the general public;

Review of the responses provided and the Issues Paper by the Committee;

Conduct of a site visit to obtain a first-hand perspective of the implementation of a project (optional);

Determination of the need for a Public Hearing based on the analysis of written submissions and the site visit (if required). If there is need for a public hearing, the relevant witnesses will be invited to attend and provide evidence. There is usually no need to examine the entity in public if the Committee believes the issues have little public interest or the Committee believes that the written responses provided are sufficient and no further explanation is necessary.

Issue of written request to the entity for further details should the Committee require any additional information after the public hearing.

Report Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry.

Engage in follow-up.

# APPENDIX III

## Minutes of Meetings

**THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE**  
**FOURTH SESSION, TWELFTH PARLIAMENT**  
**MINUTES OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> MEETING HELD ON**  
**WEDNESDAY FEBRUARY 21, 2024 AT 1:35 P.M.**

**Present were:**

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	-	Chairman
Dr. Sharda Patasar	-	Member
Mr. Laurence Hislop	-	Member
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julian	-	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	-	Member
Mr. Symon de Nobriga	-	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member
Mr. Randall Mitchell	-	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob Mottley	-	Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	-	Research Specialist

**Excused were:**

Dr. Lackram Bodoie	-	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Hassel Bacchus	-	Member

**COMMENCEMENT**

- 1.1 At 1:35 p.m., the Chairman called the meeting to order and welcomed those present. Mr. Hassel Bacchus and Dr. Lackram Bodoie were excused from the meeting.

## **EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE NINETEENTH MEETING**

- 2.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Nineteenth (19<sup>th</sup>) Meeting held on January 24, 2024.
- 2.2 There being no further omissions or corrections, the Minutes were confirmed on a motion moved by Mr. Wade Mark and seconded by Mr. Laurence Hislop.

## **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE NINETEENTH MEETING**

- 3.1 With reference to item 3.1, page 1 and 2: the Chairman informed Members that the site visit was rescheduled for February 23, 2024 at 8:30 a.m. to the Sangre Grande Community Swimming Pool. Members were asked to confirm their attendance.
- 3.2 With reference Item 3.2, page 2: the Chairman informed Members that a reminder was sent to the National Carnival Commission (NCC) upon which the NCC requested an extension to March 15, 2024.
  - The Committee agreed that NCC will be requested to appear before the Committee at its next meeting if the response is not received by the March 15<sup>th</sup> deadline.
- 3.3 With reference to Item 3.3, page 2: The Chairman informed Members that with regard to the examination into the impact of rising fuel prices the outstanding additional information was received from the following stakeholders and uploaded on the Rotunda (e-repository).
  - Ministry of Social Development and Family Services – received on March 6, 2024;
  - Ministry of Trade and Industry – received on February 29, 2024
  - The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries – received on April 30, 2024; and
  - Ministry of Works and Transport – received on February 29, 2024.
- 3.4 The Chairman indicated that a letter was sent to the Central Statistical Office on January 26, 2024 requesting a status update on the Survey of Living Conditions and the

Household Budget Survey. The response was received on February 9, 2024 and uploaded on the Rotunda (e-repository).

3.5 The Chairman informed Members that questions for additional information regarding the examination into flood mitigation (aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 11) were sent to the following stakeholders on January 29, 2024 with a deadline of February 14, 2024:

- Ministry of Planning and Development – received on February 27, 2024;
- Ministry of Works and Transport – received on March 7, 2024;
- Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government - received on February 15, 2024;
- Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries – received on February 9, 2024;
- Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management – received on February 9, 2024; and
- Tobago Emergency Management Agency - remains outstanding.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

4.1 The Chairman reminded Members that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK (CPA UK) in collaboration with the Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago will host a three (3) day workshop entitled “Caribbean Regional Public Accounts Committees (PAC) and Trade” from February 27 to 29, 2024. The Chairman indicated that the Workshop will focus on the work of PACs and trade policy scrutiny with the following three (3) aims:

- i. To enhance the technical skills of PAC Members and Clerks, to improve their capacity to scrutinise government spending and hold government to account;
- ii. To enhance delegates’ knowledge of trade policy and their capacity to effectively scrutinise trade agreements, including through committee inquiries; and
- iii. For participants to strengthen their networks and build contacts in the region.



**PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION: AN EXAMINATION INTO THE MINISTRY OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION ON SUB – HEAD 04 CURRENT TRANSFERS AND SUBSIDIES, SUB – HEAD 09 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – CONSOLIDATED FUND AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024**

- 5.1 The Chairman reminded Members that at this meeting, the Committee will examine flood mitigation in Trinidad and Tobago (aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 11).
- 5.2 The Chairman invited Members to review the Issues Paper based on the written submissions from the identified stakeholders with possible questions that can be used during the public hearing.
- 5.3 Members discussed the issues of concern and the general approach to be taken during the public hearing.

**SUSPENSION**

- 6.1 There being no further business for discussion *in camera*, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 2:28 p.m., to reconvene in public.

**AN EXAMINATION INTO THE MINISTRY OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION ON SUB – HEAD 04 CURRENT TRANSFERS AND SUBSIDIES, SUB – HEAD 09 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – CONSOLIDATED FUND AND INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2024**

- 7.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 2:35 p.m.
- 7.2 The following officials joined the meeting.

**Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT)**

Mr. Cory Belfon

- Permanent Secretary

Mrs. Tusca Francis- Scott	-	Programme Manager
Ms. Esther Clarke	-	Strategic Intelligence Specialist
Ms. Christine Ferreira	-	Head of Finance (iGovTT)
Ms. Claudina De Leon- James	-	Team Lead-Finance (iGovTT)
Mr. Sherwin Cambridge	-	Head Delivery (iGovTT)

7.3 The Chairman welcomed the officials, the media and the public.

7.4 The Chairman outlined the mandate of the Committee and the purpose of the public hearing. Introductions were exchanged.

**Key Issues Discussed:**

1. The mandate of the MDT.
2. The MDT's ability to deliver its mandate.
3. The details of the MDT's project and programme implementations in fiscal 2024.
4. The effects and challenges experienced given the shortfall in allocation received.
5. The plans to increase the human resources at iGovTT.
6. The human resource limitations faced by iGovTT.
7. The challenges iGovTT faces with the recruitment and retention of technical staff due to inability of the Division to provide competitive remuneration packages.
8. In fiscal 2023 iGovTT's was able to generate its own income through project management fees.
9. The Ministry's view on whether iGovTT has been achieving its mandate.
10. The potential of iGovTT to charge a fee when providing services to Ministries and Departments.
11. The status of the Master of Services Agreement between the MDT and the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited which was executed on March 8, 2023 and entrusted to iGovTT.
12. The details surrounding the project management fees paid to iGovTT.
13. The main achievements of the MDT since its existence namely:
  - a. Recruitment of requisite and specialised positions for its Units;
  - b. Formulation of the Strategic Plan;

- c. Establishment of the WeLearnTT Programme;
  - d. Establishment of additional Access Centres;
  - e. Job creation in communities via the establishment of Access Centres; and
  - f. Undertaking of Projects mainly, Interoperability project, data centre project; and the e-ID Platform.
14. The status updates on the following projects:
- a. Access Centres;
  - b. National e-ID Platform;
  - c. Interoperability Platform;
  - d. Government Data Centre; and
  - e. Digital Society;
  - f. Digital Economy.
15. The status of the Credit Card Policy, Petty Cash Policy and the Fixed Asset Management Policy.
16. The absence of a Fraud Policy at the Ministry.
17. The legislative agenda under consideration by the MDT to prevent cyber-attacks or breaches.
18. The status of the establishment of the Cyber Security Unit.
19. The details of the MDT's collaborations with other Ministries and Departments with regard to the implementation of the national E-ID Platform.
20. The status of the Information and Communication Technology Leadership Advisory Council.
21. The MDT's public outreach and sensitization efforts regarding the accessibility to internet devices in rural areas and the e-ID platform.
22. The details of what the recent receipt of releases from the Ministry of Finance will be spent on.
23. The clarification on the "proof of concept" initiative.
24. The locations of the 12 Access Centres across Trinidad and Tobago that are in operation and the others to be outfitted within the fiscal year.
25. The MDT's lack of pursuit of bulk procurement of equipment for Ministries and Departments.

26. The details of how the MDT “leads by example” in its processes and operations e.g. being paper free or fully digitalised.
27. The resistance received from Ministries and Departments with regard to adopting digitization and digitalisation.
28. The measurement of MDT’s successes regarding the adoption of digitisation and digitalisation by Ministries and Departments.
29. The ability of MDT to achieve its mandate with its current staff complement.
30. The details of the Mentee Programme offered by the MDT.
31. The Ministry is currently 80% operationalised.
32. The MDT’s partnership and projects undertaken in collaboration with the Tobago House of Assembly.
33. The saturated level of digital literacy in Trinidad and Tobago.
34. The Ministry’s projects that received part funding thus far.
35. The MDT is responsible for the management and outfitting of the Access Centres.
36. The status of the legislative framework for the E-Identifier.
37. The status of and the staffing at the MDT’s Internal Audit Unit.
38. The identification of inefficiencies in procedures or operations by the Internal Auditor.
39. The status update of the TV White Space Deployment under its theme Digital Society.
40. The receipt of weekly updates of the Decision Record Logs and the Change Request Log as an oversight tool for projects and programmes.
41. The submission of Achievement Reports to the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Planning and Development as on oversight mechanism.

**Please see the verbatim notes for the detailed oral submission by the witnesses.**

7.5 The Chairman thanked the officials for attending and they were excused.

### **SUSPENSION**

8.1 At 5:31 p.m., the Chairman suspended the public meeting to resume in camera for a post-hearing discussion with Members only.

### **RESUMPTION**

9.1 At 5:35 p.m., the Chairman resumed the meeting in camera.

### **POST-HEARING DISCUSSION**

10.1 The Chairman sought Members' views on the public hearing. A discussion ensued.

10.2 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to the stakeholders present.

10.3 The Chairman informed Members that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on Wednesday March 13, 2024 at 1:30 p.m. when the Committee will conduct an examination into the adequacy of pharmaceuticals and other supplies by the Ministry of Health.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

11.1 The Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting was adjourned to **Wednesday March 13, 2024 at 1:30 p.m.**

11.2 The adjournment was taken at 6:03 p.m.

**We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.**

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

*February 21, 2024*

## **Additional Information Requested**

### **Questions to the Ministry of Digital Transformation**

Provide the following in writing:

1. The sum spent on the e-ID Programme as at March 1, 2024;
2. The locations of the Access Centres to be opened by the end of 2024;
3. The project details of the Government Cloud and Data Centre;
4. The organisational structure of the iGovTT;
5. The details of any considerations to charge fees by iGovTT;
6. The groupings of the Ministries and Departments as part of the implementation of the e-ID Platform;
7. The accommodation capacity at each Access Centre in operation; and
8. A summary of the projects and programmes being undertaken by the Ministry.

#### **Sub-Head – 04 Current Transfers and Subsidies**

#### **National Information and Communication Technology (iGovTT)**

**Based on the responses to Question 1 pg. 2**

#### **Questions:**

1. How often has iGovTT requested an allocation and received less than requested?
2. When did the initiative to implement digitization projects across Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDA's) first start?
3. What initiatives will be completed in fiscal 2024 from the \$24M subvention iGovTT received?
4. As at January 31, 2024, what percentage of Government services have been digitized?
5. What are the essential human and technical resources needed?
6. What level of support is required for the MDT?
7. How will the lack of funding affect iGovTT's ability to provide value added Information and Communications Technology and support services to MDA's?

**Based on the responses to Question 2 pg. 2**

1. When is the expected completion timeline for the execution of the Master Services Agreement between the MDT and iGovTT?
2. How many phases of implementation exist?
  - a. What does each entail?
3. Provide a status update on the following digitalization initiatives:
  - a. The implementation of connected cities, and
  - b. The development of a hybrid cloud solution.
4. What is the current status of this agreement as of February 1, 2024?
5. What costs are associated with fulfilling the Master Service Agreement?
6. What is the estimated cost to complete the Master Service Agreement?

**Based in the responses to Question 4 pg. 3**

1. Is the GORTT the only client of the iGovTT?
2. How does iGovTT earn revenue?

**Based in the responses to Question 5 pg. 3**

1. Throughout iGovTT's digitalisation of the Government's services, what systems does iGovTT employ to ensure the effective compliance, proper management, adequate performance and safeguard of the Government's intangible assets such as software, intellectual property, patents, copyrights, trademarks, and trade names?

**Based on the responses to Question 6 pg. 3**

1. When was the Corporate Credit Card Policy, Petty Cash Policy and the Fixed Assets Management Policy submitted to the Ministry of Finance?
2. When was the last communication or correspondence received from the Ministry of Finance regarding these policies?
3. When was the last communication or correspondence received from the Ministry of Finance regarding these policies?

**Sub-Head 09: Development Programme - Consolidated Fund and Infrastructure  
Development Fund**

**Allocation for Fiscal year 2023/2024: \$95,780,000.**

**Based on the responses to Question 14 pg. 5**

1. What is the status of the fulfilment of each of the initiatives under the following three pillars:
  - Digital Society;
  - Digital Economy; and
  - Digital Government?

**Based on responses to Question 15 pg. 6**

1. What is the status of the three-fold focus under the digitalisation of MDT?
2. Is the necessary funding available to complete the digitalisation of the MDT?
3. If no, what sum of funding is needed to complete this project?

**Based on the response to Question 16 pg. 7**

1. Why has no funding been expended on the projects stated in Appendix IV excluding for the Digital Delivery Unit and the MDT-PMO Operationalisation?

**Based on the response to Question 18 pg. 8**

1. Do the Permanent Secretary in the MDT and the MDT Strategic Council actually receive weekly updates of the Decision Record Logs and the Change Request Log?

**Based on the response to Question 19 pg. 8**

**Projects of the MDT:**

- i. **ICT Access Centres**
  - a. Is the project on schedule to be completed by September 2026 given that since its launch, only 20% has been completed to date?
  - b. What challenges (if any) are being faced with the completion of this project?
  - c. Has the project met its targets? If not what are the challenges?
  - d. How many ICT Access Centres have been established since October 2022?



- ii. **TV white space deployment in underserved areas**
  - a. Will the project to be completed by May 2024 as stated?
  - b. What were the reasons for the increase in the initial cost of the project?
  
- iii. **Operationalisation of the information of the Commission Office**
- iv. **Digital Wallet (Cashless Payment)**
- v. **Government Digital Eco System**
  - a. What are the reasons for no funds being expended despite these projects commencing in 2022?
  
- vi. **Outfitting of the MDT (level 13)**
  - a. Was a consultant procured?
  - b. What are the details of this arrangement?
  
- vii. **Establishment of a Cyber Security Unit**
  - a. What is the status of this Project?
  - b. Why was no funds allocated for fiscal 2024?

**Based on the response to Question 21 pg. 8**

1. State the current vacancies in the Internal Audit Unit?
2. How long have the positions been vacant?
3. What is the requisite staff complement for the Internal Audit Unit?
4. When was the last review of internal policies and procedures conducted?

**Based on the response to Question 24 pg. 9**

1. What will happen if the staffing constraint within Internal Audit is not addressed?
2. What steps in the interim is being taken to resolve this issue?

# Appendix IV

## Verbatim

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE TWENTIETH MEETING OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE HELD (IN PUBLIC) IN THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE MEETING ROOM, GROUND FLOOR, CABILDO PARLIAMENTARY COMPLEX, OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, ST. VINCENT STREET, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21, 2024, AT 2.35 P.M.**

**PRESENT**

Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George	Chairman
Mr. Randall Mitchell	Member
Mr. Laurence Hislop	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Dr. Sharda Patasar	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Mr. Symon de Nobriga	Member
Mrs. Lisa Morris-Julien	Member
Mr. Hassel Bacchus	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob Mottley	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Darien Buckmire	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Research Specialist

**ABSENT**

Dr. Lackram Bodoë	Vice-Chairman
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**MINISTRY OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

Mr. Cory Belfon	Permanent Secretary
Mrs. Tusca Francis- Scott	Programme Manager
Ms. Esther Clarke	Strategic Intelligence Specialist

Ms. Christine Ferreira

Head of Finance (iGovTT)

Ms. Claudina De Leon- James

Team Lead-Finance (iGovTT)

Mr. Sherwin Cambridge

Head Delivery (iGovTT)

**Madam Chairman:** Good afternoon and welcome to the officials of the Ministry of Digital Transformation, and of the National Information and Communication Technology Company Limited, iGovTT. My name is Bridgid Annisette-George and I am the Chairman of this PAAC, the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee. The Committee on Public Administration and Appropriations, PAAC, has the mandate to consider and report to the House on:

- (a) the budgetary expenditure of government agencies to ensure that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval;
- (b) the budgetary expenditure of government agencies as it occurs and keeps Parliament informed of how the budget allocation is being implemented; and
- (c) the administration of government agencies to determine hindrances to their efficiency and to make recommendations to the Government for improvement of public administration.

The purpose of this meeting is to examine the Ministry of Digital Transformation on Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, and Infrastructure Development Fund for the financial year 2014.

The role of the Committee is to assist the stakeholders in achieving efficient delivery of services, while ensuring that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval, determine the challenges being faced and possible solutions to these challenges, and make recommendations for improvements of public administration.

The meeting is being held in public and is being broadcast live on Parliament's Channel 11 and on Radio 105.5 FM, and the Parliament's YouTube Channel, *ParlView*. Viewers and listeners can send their comments related to today's topic via email, [parl101@tpparliament.org](mailto:parl101@tpparliament.org), at [facebook.com/tpparliament](https://www.facebook.com/tpparliament), and at Twitter [X@tpparliament](https://twitter.com/tpparliament).

I therefore now will invite members of the Committee to introduce themselves, starting from my far right.

[*Introductions made*]

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you. I know invite the representatives of the Ministry of Digital Transformation and of iGovTT to introduce themselves. So maybe we could start with you, Mr. Permanent Secretary.

*[Introductions made]*

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. Mr. Permanent Secretary, might I invite you to make a brief opening statement if you so wish.

**Mr. Belfon:** Good afternoon, again, Chair, members, members of the viewing and listening public. The Ministry of Digital Transformation, of course, has embarked upon a wide array of digitally-structured projects that would lead to the progress of Trinidad and Tobago. Along with our state agency, iGovTT, we are committed to ensuring the progress of Trinidad and Tobago, and the areas of focus delve into our digital society which is looking at digital literacy, digital inclusion, access for all, digital economy in terms of contributions of the ICT sector to GDP, as well as looking at the enabling environment, and digital government looking at the acceleration and adoption of e-services, as well as cutting-edge future technologies to propel us forward.

I thank you for the invitation to appear before the Committee today and, of course, we look forward to answering any queries that you may have. Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much, Mr. PS. I think to start off the conversation and therefore to anchor the Committee in some sort of perspective, maybe you could give us some insight into what is the mandate of the Ministry of Digital Transformation.

**Mr. Belfon:** Of course. So, yes, Chair, members, the mandate of the Ministry of Digital Transformation is to address and to provide new ways of treating with technology, in terms of the end-to-end consumption and delivery to customers, the appropriate means of technology. And essentially that means that we would bring forward compelling digital solutions to Trinidad and Tobago, but ensure that all can access and that no one is left behind.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So thank you very much. In terms of your submission, I have seen that some emphasis has been made on your shortfall in your operational expenditure of \$17.8 million. I believe that is the figure. So could you explain to us how that would affect your operations?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes, Chair. So I will give an opening remark and then I would pass, for

some additional insight, to the Head of Finance at iGovTT.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Belfon:** Just to correct the figure as being a shortfall of \$27.8 million, that really—that subvention is really used to cover human resource expenditure; \$22 million of that goes toward salaries. Probably, roughly around \$2 million is left in terms of operating expenditure. When we look at the suite of projects that iGovTT is asked to undertake, both on behalf of the MDT via its master services agreement, and then, of course, as one of the premier agencies for the public sector in terms of project implementation, having and scaling the resources necessary to support the digitalization thrust of the Government requires is certain cadre or level of technical resources to be hired and made available to support same.

So it becomes a challenge, therefore, in terms of the levels of remuneration and benefits offered to attract top talent to the company, and then, of course, to ensure that operating expenses are also covered. So I will hand it over to the Head of Finance to also add in an additional part.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much.

**Ms. Ferreira:** Chair, members, PS is correct that we have had a shortfall, and the shortfall has been an ongoing one for many years. We have been able to survive on our operating reserves over the last few years and that is now dwindling. We are at a point where it really is very low. We want to ramp up our HR, our employees, so that we can support the Ministry of Digital Transformation and to date, we are expected to have another 21 projected positions. Again, all our subventions have been allocated to our salaries and there is not sufficient to be able to bring on these additional positions that we need to support the Ministry of Digital Transformation.

**Madam Chairman:** So, I do not know, maybe it is the Head of Finance, could you give us an idea of what your current staff level is?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Currently, we have 139 persons and we need to ramp up to the CPO's total of 175 to be able to do this—to support the Ministry.

**Madam Chairman:** So these 21 projected positions still will not bring you to the 175?

**Ms. Ferreira:** No, it will not.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So that in terms of—currently, you could exist with your 139

or would that also be affected by your—

**Ms. Ferreira:** No, we cannot, because the fact is we want to—we started to establish various units like the Security and Assurance Unit, Software Development Unit, and we need to staff that now. So in order to be able to—I know we all know about the security issues that we have in the country and worldwide, and we really need to have that unit staffed at this point in time.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So seeing that we have delved into the issue of staffing, I think I will just open up the conversation here to my fellow members on the Committee. Member Mark.

**Mr. Mark:** Thank you, Madam Chair, and good afternoon to all. Ms. Ferreira, can you give us an idea of the composition, in summary form, of the 139 staffers so we will know who is technical—you know, the make-up of the staff, so at least we will have an idea?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yes, member. So at this point, we have Security Assurance and Operations, we only have one Team Lead position at the moment; Security Assurance and Operations, one Team Lead position; Security Assurance and Operations, a Senior Professional; Software Development, one Team Lead, Data Engineering; Software Development, Team Lead, Design Engineering, one; Software Development, one Senior Professional—

**Mr. Mark:** May I, Ma'am, through the Chair—

**Ms. Ferreira:** Sorry, those were vacancies. Sorry, I was reading the wrong thing.

**Mr. Mark:** No, no, if you could give us it in broad categories like, for instance, you know, you will have your professionals. Right? Give us how many people in the professional category, the middle-range category, the lower range, you know—

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yes. Okay.

**Mr. Mark:**—so we do not have to go through each one because that would take us the whole evening.

**Ms. Ferreira:** Right. In terms of the classifications, we would have the CEO, one; the CEO Heads, nine; Internal Auditor, one; team leads, 12; senior professionals, 31; Senior Professionals, Channel Specialists, two; professional, 35; associate, 11; Business Support Assistant, six; receptionist, one; driver, two; Client Service Specialist, 23; Service Centre Manager, three; Administrative Support, Facilities Management, one. That would make up our 139.

**Mr. Mark:** Do you have an organizational structure or—

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yes, we do.

**Mr. Mark:** Can you share it with the Chairman?—make a copy available to the Chair?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yes. We could do so in writing.

**Mr. Mark:** Okay. Do you have a strategic plan—

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yes.

**Mr. Mark:**—and for what period?

**Ms. Ferreira:** We have a strategic plan till 2025.

**Mr. Mark:** 2025, okay. I think this year is your third year of existence, am I right?

**Mr. Belfon:** No.

**Mr. Mark:** No, the Ministry, Sir. The Ministry—

**Mr. Belfon:** That would be the Ministry of Digital Transformation.

**Mr. Mark:** Yeah. This is your third year, right, Sir?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes, member.

**Mr. Mark:** Right. Okay. Can you share with this Committee, during those three years, what would you describe as your main achievements as an emerging Ministry?

**Mr. Belfon:** So in terms of digital transformation and our achievements, it is important to understand the context and the perspective with regard to the uptake of digital transformation across the public sector. So with the start of the Ministry being 2021, there was an urgent need, in terms of staffing, the availability of staff, technical resources, the creation of technical plans, projects, project briefs, finances, ensuring that what we would have projected for the upcoming years would be possible. Right? A large part of the operations within year one and part of year two would have been staffing out all of the units, making sure we do have all the specialists in place. We have the strategic plans in place, our operating personnel, the project management staff, a definition of all the projects that we were to embark upon.

Consequently, as a matter of getting into 2023, and coming into 2024, what we would have done is shift a gear into implementation and look towards delivery. We would have embarked upon a national digital strategy. We would have defined projects under digital society. So we do have the WeLearnTT programme that is currently available, digital literacy for public citizens at no cost.



There are also access centres. We do have 12 operationalized access centres throughout the country, and I believe there is a further four to five, or six that are coming up in terms of operationalization. By the end of the year, we hope to have roughly around 60 to 62 access centres available. Now, what that does is allow members of the public to go into any access centre to access the Internet. They could access government e-services. They could receive free training. So it really brings the accessibility to persons who may not have had access to a device or connectivity. It brings it home to them and within the community as well.

Interesting, also, it is a means of job creation because the technical staff within the access centre actually come from within that community. Right? So there is that awareness. Persons with disabilities can also access these access centres, you know, in terms of any support they may require.

With regard to digital government, we would have embarked upon a number of projects, namely the electronic ID project, the interoperability project, and, of course, the data centre project. So I will delve into each one as a means of portraying or showing some of the achievements we have made thus far.

So with regard to the e-ID, we would have gone into the procurement for a provider for the e-ID platform and that, of course, is expected to digitally identify via unique identifier that someone is who they say they are. As it is right now, this is something that may not be possible, given what we call, the identification standards, available to the public.

This e-ID will uniquely identify a citizen across any Ministry, department or agency, and it is underpinned by four components. So you have a mobile application, you have an authentication system, you have a national thrust solution and then, of course, you would have a government portal where you would be able to access via the authentication, government e-services. That is underpinned by a solution that would bring interoperability, so it is an interoperability project that would allow the deduplication of data across Ministries. So that, in terms of looking at service excellence, a member of the public could go into one Ministry and cross reference themselves, uniquely identify and validate that they are who they are, and pull permissible records, say, for example, between the Elections and Boundaries Commission and the Ministry of Works and Transport, Licensing, to be able to verify that person and their photo once they give

permission and opt in to that particular programme.

With regard to the data centre, all of the Ministries' critical data and all of our government projects have to exist somewhere. That letter of award would have been issued in terms of the construction of our own data centre, so that would bring some sovereignty in terms of where we store our data and where all of these sensitive applications will live.

Going into digital economy, one of the standout items that we would have had is the Developers' Hub, where we would have sought to engage members of the public to put forward government solutions, you know—put forward solutions to issues that would have cropped up. So we would have had liquor licences, we would have had the measurement of noise for the EMA as some of the challenges to pursue. It is the intention that, going forward, members of the public would be able to register for a particular challenge and have the solution adopted by the Government, and then, subsequently, contribute to local entrepreneurship because they would then be able to sell these solutions regionally and internationally. And it really is delving into having the local software development industry be a burgeoning area of talent, because we do have talented Trinidadians available locally doing software development, but making that widely available and using it for the benefit of Trinidad and Tobago.

So all of these items, there are various elements that would constitute achievements. So it is not really saying that it is at the final point, but we have been making efforts and have been achieving milestones for each one of these programmes in terms of making it available to Trinidad at a point in time. Digital transformation, being the bedrock of where we will go as a country, it is important to focus in terms of the time taken to focus on the quality and the substance, as opposed to rushing to market or having these things done before time. Because as you could well imagine, having a country depend on ICT and all of these digital initiatives, there is a measure of trust and security, as well as the type of messaging that we would bring forward to the populace to ensure full-scale adoption.

**Mr. Mark:** You know, digital transformation brings with it certain challenges, as you are well aware. Criminal terrorists exist all over the world. We were told recently at another forum, we have had 55 attacks by these terrorists into our systems, both in the

private and public sector. Could you tell this Committee what legislative architecture your Ministry is contemplating and sharing with your Minister via the Attorney General? So that, for instance, as you go headstrong—and I am supporting what you are doing—into this particular transformation exercise, we would reduce and mitigate the vulnerabilities that we would all be subject to. Is there a legal architecture, and can you share that with this Committee?

**Mr. Belfon:** So I will answer from a variety of standpoints because the Ministry of Digital Transformation embraces a collaborative approach. Right? So in terms of the legislative agenda, that has to be done in consultation with the Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs. And as well, in addition, the role of cybersecurity being a shared one—of course, we are gazetted for cybersecurity, but there is also cybersecurity responsibilities under the Ministry of National Security via TT-CSIRT—I can tell you a bit of what we are doing now in terms of cybersecurity awareness and developing a campaign to educate members of the public with regard to cybersecurity hygiene and posture.

We would have also embarked upon incident response in terms of access to Ministries, departments and agencies being able to engage with a service provider to respond to any critical threats as they may occur. Then as well, from a strategic standpoint, in collaboration with the IDB, looking to project a cybersecurity road map, and, of course, in terms of the enhancements that we would require to bolster the Government's and the public sector cybersecurity posture going forward.

So those are actual real developments that we have undertaken. The legislative component is something that will be undertaken, in concert with the parties mentioned, to look at how we could treat with cybersecurity.

**Mr. Mark:** Madam Chair, just two final points in round one. May I ask Mr. Belfon, in terms of delivery that you mentioned earlier, I am sure that as head of the Ministry and based on the work that you have been doing, there would be, in this year of delivery, your third year of implementation, some low-hanging fruits that you may want to effect and implement. Could you tell this Committee about one or two areas that the Ministry is seeking to implement and deliver to the public? For example—let me give you an example. You travel like how I travel from time to time, and when you travel to the States,

you do not have to get no kind of paper to get into Immigration. When you are coming to Port of Spain, however, you have paper in the back, paper in the front, back, all kind of thing. Could you tell this Committee whether the Ministry of Digital Transformation is looking at that, as an example, to bring an end to that paperwork that we are subjected to in any way, Mr. Belfon?

**Mr. Belfon:** So in terms of that—and, you know, it is—coincidentally, I am actually the chairman for that particular committee, and again, it is one of collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts, Immigration and Customs, where we were tasked to, you know—in terms of facilitating a report, in terms of actionable items, from transitioning from that paper-based system to one that is online.

So in terms of low-hanging fruit that is going to be immediately available, that report is scheduled to be submitted to Parliament in March 2024, and it treats with having an online platform. Persons would be able to log in 72 hours before—requisite support is available—to have all of the immigration forms filled out online, submitted, and they would be processed accordingly without having to access these paper-based forms.

I will also indicate as well, there are additional low-hanging fruits that would be upcoming, like I said, some of the operationalization of the access centres. So that is ongoing. That team works incredibly hard, along with ICT, as well as with our stakeholders, you know, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, to have all of these centres outfitted and available to communities.

There is also the data centre, which is something that would also most likely come to fruition this year, and then, of course, we will have a workable proof of concept with regard to the e-ID in 2024. So in terms of implementation and delivery, we are well focused in terms of getting, not just the short-term, but the mid to long-term items out the door and into the public's use, and, of course, treating with the messaging and communication surrounding the acceptance of same, and how to utilize some of these solutions.

**Mr. Mark:** Yeah. You talked about a data centre, Mr. Belfon. Can you share with this Committee—and the construction of same, can you tell us when you expect this data centre to hold sensitive government data? When is that going to be construction? Where is it going to be constructed? What is the proposed value, subject, of course, to

procurement?

**3.00 p.m.**

**Mr. Belfon:** So this is something that is currently—and I am glad that you brought up the procurement, in terms of the letter of award being issued I can speak to that. In terms of the relevant details surrounding the financials, that is something I would ask to submit in writing, as well as indicate that it is projected to be available and constructed, finalized construction in terms of a modular data centre before the end of 2024. Yeah?

**Mr. Mark:** Any location that you have in mind?

**Mr. Belfon:** Actually, yes. We would have gone down to the Phoenix Park Industrial Estate and, you know, would have looked at the location in terms of a site for that.

**Mr. Mark:** Okay. Madam Chair, I would just pause for the time being.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much. Member Hislop.

**Mr. Hislop:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Just have a couple of questions to the PS. In terms of your collaboration with other Ministries and departments, I am concerned that in terms of your mandate, how does the Ministry work with other Ministries, agencies and departments in terms of rolling out the mandate of digitalization for the country?

**Mr. Belfon:** Chair, through you, the Ministry of Digital Transformation—sorry. Member, the Ministry of Digital Transformation again, it is a collaborative one, while we do have the oversight for national digital transformation you do have Ministries that have embarked upon digital transformation initiatives. What we provide and what iGovTT provides, as well, is an advisory in terms of how to approach digital transformation at that level, the technical insight in terms of some of the solutions, standards to adhere to, platforms such as open source solutions that would bring to bear reduction in cost to the Government and obviously the Treasury, so we are looking at value for money. That collaboration is consistently ongoing.

We also do institutional strengthening at other Ministries in terms of the capabilities. So we do have a digital delivery unit where we assign persons to particular Ministries to assist in terms of some of the digital transformation initiatives we would be bringing to bear, as well as to provide some sort of advisory to Ministries and then iGovTT in terms of levels of approvals, business consulting, technical support, software development advice all of these things are actually being done as we speak.

Even when you look at all of the digital transformation services or the e-services we have informational and transactional services, roughly 200, across the public sector and all of those have some element of collaboration or approval and support from the Ministry of Digital Transformation. So it is ongoing and it is something that we pursue because there is that guidance that is required in terms of getting us there.

You would find there are varying levels of maturity in terms of adoption and systems but by and large we are getting to the point where a lot of Ministries are actually progressing to having a lot of end-to-end services available to the public. When you look at TTBizLink, you look at DevelopTT, the Ministry of Education can do education online via their eLearning platform all of these things speak to an adoption of the idea which is what digital transformation is. It is encapsulated between people, process, technology and the enabling environment of legislation—but you are actually seeing the maturity of Ministries going toward secure e-services.

**Mr. Hislop:** So we should not be too worried about pushback in terms of departments and Ministries' unwillingness to come on board?

**Mr. Belfon:** So I think, you know, even in terms of change management, the messaging is important that same DDU, Digital Delivery Unit, actually does change management. They have change management specialists resident in that unit that are assigned to various Ministries to bring about that change. Part of the messaging is showing the benefits or the use cases as opposed the focusing on the technology. It just works, and we show you how it will impact you and make your job easier, right. So in terms of that, that is covered and then of course other Ministries would also have their change management specialists as well, but the messaging is important to build that trust.

**Mr. Hislop:** So based on a ministerial answer, what is the ICT Leadership Advisory Council and where is that with the re-establishing based on?

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay. So that is a group of ICT directors, and managers within the public sector and the facilitation is done by the Ministry of Digital Transformation and we discuss policy, methods of implementation, solutions, pressing issues, cyber security being one. We embark on training but it is a community of practice that looks at the best practises in any given Ministry, looks at how best to adopt and get to the point of having everyone progress. So it is almost like a technical advisory board but to ensure that no

Ministry is left behind.

**Mr. Hislop:** Just two more questions, Madam Chair. Could you share with us what are the Government's high-priority digital transformation initiatives?

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay, sure. I think I would focus on the national e-ID, which I would have mentioned before, it is a unique identifier for each citizen to allow them to identify themselves properly to any member of the public or even to agencies when they come to conduct business or when they do business online to access an e-service.

Now, of course the use-case in that sense would reduce also fraud because that person will be that person in every Ministry. So there will not be a case of one person existing here, but the same person existing in another Ministry as someone else. So it also looks at the reduction of fraud or any potential for fraud in terms of the access to grants et cetera. When you look at also as part of the interoperability platform and being able to share data amongst Ministries, it actually treats with a well-known grouse by members of the public in terms of having to apply multiple times for the same thing and supply the same sets of information, we are doing away with that. Right so, one applicable record of a person will exist and their information will exist and once they give permission and they opt into this platform you would be able to access to complete the particular transaction for an e-service.

We have the access centres being an important part of the outreach to citizens, of course, all of the rural areas, persons with disabilities, persons who do not have access to Internet devices, all of these things. We have the data centre which I would have mentioned, which would house critical data. We do have the TT Wi-Fi programme in which connectivity in a variety of government areas and or populated areas via of course the USF and TATT. And then, of course, we look at some of the social management information systems to digitalize the grant management process for the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services.

So we have been assisting and the Government has been pursuing a variety of programmes to get to the point of treating with a lot of long-standing issues and getting Trinidad and Tobago to a digital future, but that digital future is now because there is no time between, you know, having to wait or anything like that. We have embarked upon that and we are implementing a lot of those things even when you look at the realm of

health information systems and patient records and the consolidation and digitalization of that, all of those things are being taken care of and there are project teams working in every Ministry in collaboration with the Ministry of Digital Transformation and iGovTT to make that happen.

**Mr. Hislop:** So PS, would you say that you are on course—based on your own timelines, you are on course in terms of year three being your year of ramping up deliveries and deliverances and your implementation of your projects? And the other thing is, where are you as it relates to public relations, as it relates to sensitizing the public about what you are doing, because there is this belief that the Ministry of Digital Transformation is a ghost Ministry, it does nothing. So where are you with those areas?

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay. So, member, I will have the first part of that question in terms of where we are at, in terms of project delivery to Mrs. Tusca Francis-Scott and I will take the second part of that question in terms of public relations, so I would allow her to respond.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Madam Chairman, member. So being our year of what we call implementation, you know, we would have really seen almost like the key turned with our ability to move forward. Just today we got confirmation through the Ministry of Finance that we have received releases for quite a few projects where we submitted things for and you are with bated breath waiting you saying, “Listen based on what I had projected, where is my spend?” But I know that we are working and unfortunately in government we need to see spend to have evidence of that work, right. And so we—just today I was telling PS, you know, what we would have submitted to you in terms of answers would have changed just between the start of this week and today.

Where are we in terms of digital government, digital economy? If I am to be fair, I would say in terms of digital government we are on point, smack on point especially in terms of e-ID and interoperability. We would have had some delays with regard to data centres and the procurement component of that because ideally we would have liked to see that implemented by the mid of this year, but we know that we will get it in by end of this year. In terms of our digital economy we would have made significant strides especially in terms of our developer’s app so we are where we want to be.

Where we would have experienced some delays are with the question that was raised by



member Mark regarding the legislative agenda and digital transformation. So we would have engaged a consultant and just the normal procurement and negotiations, so we finally signed we have our—

**Ms. Clarke:** Letter of award.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:**—we have our letter of award for that consultant so we know we have this person on board because what we wanted to do is as we work with the Attorney General, we are not just basically giving a list of recommendations, we actually want it to start to help craft the legislation so that we are moving this thing forward at the rate at which we know we are supposed to.

In terms of digital society, I think that is one where we have experienced a lot of strides because we have our digital skills there, where we would have seen the public really already benefiting from just—and at different levels because you have the person who may not understand how to use a computer—If you are like my mom computers scared you, the keyboard scared you have those type of courses. And then you have the CISCO courses for the more mature and advanced user—that we have uptake. And so even now, I was liaising with the Implementation Coordinator for that and she was indicating to me that just within a couple of weeks we will be engaging YTEPP for what would be our third cohort of users.

So we are where we want to be in terms of those ones that are public-facing. I would say where we had some delays are those that were very heavily dependent on the procurement legislation bit. So like the data centre we would have wanted to be further along with that but we have passed the hurdle of the procurement and now we are into implementation of the actual data centre.

And I believe also that we would have submitted the sheet that kind of gives you more concrete—in terms of percentages for the different places. But just to give you a sense of, are we comfortable with where we are and how we are moving, I would very unequivocally say yes.

**Mr. Hislop:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay, so with regard to media relations this is something, you know, it is careful and considered the Ministry of Digital Transformation is not a—we like to—our posture is that we would approach the public in terms of messaging, in terms of final

product as opposed to the projection that something is coming. That is not to say that we have not been employing media strategies to make the digital transformation programme aware to the public. There are elements—we would have hired a communications specialist you know, in terms of crafting appropriate messaging to the citizens with regards to each programme that we have undertaken and it really comes down to the age and target bracket that we are looking at and getting that message across for impact and adoption.

So it is something that is being pursued but as you are well aware messaging is something that has to be organic. Digital transformation is not something that is forced so in terms of the uptake and the messaging that you see come out of the Ministry of Digital Transformation it is always a natural interaction with members of the public. We rather you come and, for example, come and interact at the access centres, come and access the technologies that we have available so that you see how it works for you. When we get into more complex solutions that is where in addition to digital literacy and the upskilling that we are undertaking you will see the messaging come out in terms of the introduction to such technology and how it will work for you because the “sell” of the use-case and getting persons to realise that their digital future or their future in Trinidad and Tobago is going to be much different with the impact of technology is something that takes time. It is akin to the inception of an idea you have to plant that seed of trust and then, of course, the messaging has to be on point. So this is something that we have undertaken and we continue to do and to mould.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Might I invite member Webster-Roy.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Good afternoon to everyone again. On more than one occasion I heard the term proof of concept being used in terms of the e-ID, for my benefit and I guess for some of the persons who are viewing can you explain what that is? And also in relation to the fact that I would have noted in your submission as a PSIP project for 2024 the national e-ID has an allocation of approximately \$1.6 million. I know you said Mrs. Francis-Scott status would have changed in terms of “mills” as you spend within the last seven days or so. Could you explain what is proof of concept and also where you are now in terms of your spend?

**Mr. Belfon:** So in terms of a proof of concept it is a solution that shows that a project is

technically viable, so they will show you how it works. So when you do your messaging, you are not showing a theory you are actually showing what the interaction and the process of interacting with a particular system will be. So for instance, you may have an advertisement with someone with a mobile phone and they go into a Ministry and of course, they try to access an e-Service but it requires their e-Identifier. So they open the application and they validate against the records that the Ministry would have, the Ministry will then validate that record against a database and return the validation that that person is who they say they are and they are able to then transact or even be able to do that online, so there are two modes to that.

In terms of spend with the e-ID that is something that is currently being procured. So it is not something we could actually speak directly to in terms of cost because of the sensitivity around that, but it is something that we can provide under a cover of writing, if you so wish.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** The other question I have—and thanks for that, that helped to clear up a lot for me, because I was really confused. Sorry, in terms of the access centres you noted that by the end of the year, you are hoping to have at least 60 to 62 centres. Where are your current centres located? Where are the planned centres going to be located and what are the services that will be delivered at the new ones? Is it going to be the same thing? Are you planning to introduce any new technology at the centres you have planned for this fiscal year? Again for the public, what exactly are the access centres, so they would understand what it is and get excited to use it.

**Mr. Belfon:** Alright. So thanks, member. I am going to read here because it is—we do have 12 that are open currently; Belmont, Caiman, Cumana, Belview, Carenage, Diego Martin, Maraval, Penal, Todds Road, Marac, Lisas Gardens and Guayaguayare.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** I have a question, just a quick interjection, here so—

**Mr. Hislop:** THA.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** Yes, I did not hear anything in Tobago. Is that partnered with the THA?

**Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** Yes, I would ask.

**Mr. Belfon:** So—

**Madam Chairman:** But you are being pre-emptory [*Inaudible*] ready to advise. You said there will be 62 by the end of the year well—

**Mr. Belfon:** So, as you could well imagine calling out 62 names is going to be a stretch, right. That is not to say that Tobago will not be covered obviously in terms of our trust or digital trust, it is both Trinidad and Tobago. So yes, we would have met with representatives, you know, in terms of getting access centres operationalized in Tobago. So that conversation is ongoing in terms of how we, yes—

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Belfon:**—in terms of how we approach that. In terms of what we are looking to operationalize; there is Arima, there is Cascade, Chaguanas and Maitagual and Tacarigua right, so there is a—and that is within the next one to two months that we are looking at obviously the wider slate is something we can provide in writing, yeah. But the intention is, of course, digital literacy classes, support to access government e-Services at an access centre, ALTA online —so we have partnered with some persons, you know, and agencies to be able to bring training to the community. So they can go into an access centre and get digital literacy training, they can get technical training, they can access ALTA online in terms of reading, you know, in terms of support to access a government service, they can get that. And it really is an open avenue for persons who may wish to become entrepreneurs you can go in and use that space, upskill yourself via WeLearn and actually begin to establish a business as a sole-trader as an entrepreneur and thus contribute to the economy as a result.

So we are opening up pathways for economic development by bringing additional persons into the business fold and also ensuring that persons who may have disabilities can access, persons who do not have a device can access a device and persons who do not have internet can access internet. So it is not just geared toward one section of Trinidad and Tobago but all areas, all communities in Trinidad and Tobago eventually will have an access centre to be able to access all those services.

**Madam Chairman:** So, PS, just might I ask again, to followup with what member Webster-Roy was asking and the excitement she wishes to create, if you can tell us the opening hours and the sort of number of staff available at an access centre. And also what I would like to ask is, is there an allocation in your budget to man the anticipated number

of access centres you intend to bring on by the end of this year?

**Mr. Belfon:** So, yes. Generally speaking—Chair, sorry. Generally speaking, an access centre would have a technical trainer and then they would have a customer service representative, right. Where we operationalize an access centre we would also have an ICT person also available to provide support in terms of the smooth operations of the centre.

In terms of the allocation, so yes, we would have budgeted accordingly in terms of the operationalization of those centres, as a matter of fact, the procurement of furniture, fixtures and equipment this is something we would have embarked upon in 2023. So in terms of operationalizing it is really a matter of rollout as we go forward.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** One more question.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so, member Webster-Roy and then after member Webster-Roy I will take member de Nobriga and then member Morris-Julien.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** I wanted to—thank you, Madam Chair. I wanted to find out, at your existing centres you mentioned having access for persons with disabilities, at your existing centres, that is already provided for?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes, so in terms of the screen reading software, in terms of getting to the—and then of course when we look at access, you look at ramps, elevators all of these considerations are done in terms of conceptualizing the operationalization of a particular site in conjunction with our partners at Sport and Community Development. So that consideration is there from the get-go and it is not an afterthought.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** And this is a question that came in from a member of the public. At present, some of the access centres are located within community centres and even though the community centres are up and operational the access centres are not functioning, that came in from a member of the public. What assurances can you give the public that all access centres that have been commissioned in the past would be fully operational within this fiscal?

**Mr. Belfon:** Alright. So in terms of the operationalization of the access centres and of course in terms of any concerns that persons may have, in terms of access. Access centres are open from 9 to 6?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yes.

**Mr. Belfon:** 9 to 6 every day, well expect Sunday. And, of course, if there is an issue in terms of access this is something they can reach out to the Ministry on. But I can assure you in terms of the operationalized centres where there is no issue in terms of utilities, like electricity, if we have to close a particular day then we make that known on social media, but by and large it is always available for persons to access.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** Thank you.

**Mr. Belfon:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, member de Nobriga.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Thank you, Chair. Chairman first of all I want to thank Mrs. Francis-Scott for the information that she give us because I had a lot of questions, especially regarding the actual spend to date. I just want to get an understanding, in particular we can use—we are talking about the access centres, so let us use that as example. You say you have gotten information now about release of funds, right, so you have releases. You have a PSIP allocation of 10 million for this fiscal, is that 10 million given what the PS would have just said, is that 10 million going toward paying bills that you have already incurred with regards to procurement for desk and machines and that sort of stuff so that you can rollout, or is it that you now have into go into a procurement process in order to rollout?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Well, one good thing is the approach we took utilizing iGovTT was that we did a bulk procurement. That meant that we were subject to the delays regarding deliveries that everybody in the world was experiencing and as such, equipment and especially in terms of furniture we had delays in terms of those deliveries. And so what we are going to have now is the clearance of those deliveries and the ability to operationalize quite a few access centres well. And yes, some of the funds would have been to cover the rest of moneys that we would have had outstanding for iGovTT because as you would imagine we would have had to make some down payment so that they could have initiated the procurement and given that we are now ready to receive goods we are now at a place where, again, we would make another payment to iGovTT so as to cater for the balance of what we would have already procured.

**3.35 p.m.**

**Mr. de Nobriga:** All right. So given what you have said, your projection of 60 to 65

access centres by the end of this fiscal, that—

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Is already catered for.

**Mr. de Nobriga:**—so that is catered for—

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yes.

**Mr. de Nobriga:**—given the fact you are only now going to be able to roll out because you have funds in hand.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Correct. And—

**Mr. de Nobriga:** You have releases.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:**—releases, as well as the actual physical things—

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Physical things. Yeah.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:**—that we can install at the access centres.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** All right. You have raised an issue with regard to bulk procurement and it brings me to another question that has been raised because of something that the PS said. Your relationship as MDT with other Ministries seems to be more of in an advisory capacity. Am I correct?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes. That will be correct.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** All right. Are Ministries able to also benefit from the same sort of bulk purchases? How has that—have you been able to translate that sort of benefit to the other Ministries as well?

**Mr. Belfon:** So, thanks, member. So, I am going to ask for a clarification. Is it that you mean bulk purchases on behalf of other Ministries or do you mean in terms of approach under PPDPA for bulk procurement?

**Mr. de Nobriga:** On behalf of other Ministries. So in other words, we have one, two, three, four, we have about four Ministries represented at this table. If the four of us all wanted to purchase any sort of equipment related to our own digitization processes or our own efforts, would we be able to utilize MDT, and is that being done now?

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay. So from my understanding, I do not believe that is being pursued at this time by Ministries. It is something that would have come up in the past in terms of the bulk procurement of computers in terms of, you know, the discounts and the cost savings that you would get as a result of going as an amalgamation of Ministries to various providers to procure equipment. But to say that is being done or cannot be

pursued at this time in the absence of policy, I think that is something that would have to be discussed and finalized as a policy decision in terms of having Ministries also pursue bulk procurement, you know, as the MDT being the—via our agency—bulk procuring for a group of Ministries.

**Mr. de Nobriga:** Okay. My final question for now, Madam Chair. We spoke about the pillars, we are speaking about a digital society, and along the lines of public awareness and I think up-skilling of the public. Is the Ministry—or maybe we can elaborate, so I think you did touch on it—working alongside other Ministries like the Ministry of Community Development and Family Services, Ministry of Youth Development National Service and the Ministry of Education to deal specifically marginalized communities, at-risk communities, and I suppose communities that are geographically—

**Mr. Belfon:** So actually, yes. So those discussions do take place, you know, in terms of having what, you know, we would say as a whole-of-government approach, and even supporting other Ministries in terms of their targeting of programmes towards specific communities that may be geographically located in areas, persons with disabilities, you are looking at the school community or the education community. So this is something that has been ongoing and that conversation regularly happens in terms of getting services and support to all of the persons mentioned and locations. So in terms of coming up with a solution, it is not done in isolation, but rather in collaboration to bring the best possible fit-for-purpose solution to a particular target area or persons who may be disadvantaged, so to speak.

**Madam Chairman:** Member Morris-Julian.

**Mrs. Morris-Julian:** Thank you very much Madam Chair. Madam Chair, because I had the pleasure of working with the PS, obviously I would not be privy to certain information. So now that you are PS of this particular Ministry, can you honestly say that iGovTT is operating at its optimal best? And please remember I would have been there when you were going through—*[Laughter]*

**Mr. Belfon:** So, I think we can look at it, and thanks, member, for the question, always a pleasure. We can look at it from a standpoint of resourcing because the level of resources required to optimally respond to a lot of digital projects and to drive some of the procurement and project management oversight that iGovTT embarks on essentially is



stymied to some extent.

You also have a challenge of remuneration levels in terms of retaining talent to be able to effectively support Ministries in various aspects, and I could give you an example. It is exceedingly difficult to find cybersecurity personnel, simply because you are competing with the private sector. Right? And the level of certifications someone may come with, the band of remuneration that would be available at iGovTT may not satisfy a particular candidate, so they do not end up taking the job, so it leads to a capability and capacity issue where they may not be able to be effectively resourced to respond in a particular area. So the knock-on effect of that would be project delays or the unavailability of technical advice with respect to a particular project. It does not mean that it is not being addressed.

Even as we speak about the subvention shortfalls that iGovTT would have brought to the fore, all of these items actually come forward in discussions with the Ministry of Finance in terms of advocating for and justifying the relevant increases to iGovTT, as well the justifications as to why we would require a variety of personnel and an increase in resources to support not just the Ministry of Digital Transformation, but the wider public sector in digitalization and digitization. So, in essence, it is a two-part problem, right?—but one that is effectively and can be effectively solved through continued collaboration with the Ministry of Finance in trying to get the fiscal resources made available and then, of course, pursuing the rapid head hunting or human resource function to get iGovTT to the point of supporting the functional areas required.

**Mrs. Morris-Julian:** Thank you very much, but I do have one last question. Again, well I was hoping that Mr. Cambridge would have chimed in, but I understand completely what you have said, remuneration is very important if you want the very best, but I do have—I just want to ask, what I have noticed and again, Mr. Belfon, I know how much you have invested into the digitization of the Ministry of Education which is head and shoulders above all Ministries except for Parliament which is really, really good, I must say. [*Laughter*] Right? But I am a little disappointed and I have to say, I am looking at you all and I am seeing paper everywhere. Two iPads [*Laughter*] or one Mac.

So I really—and then there is a document here that I could not read at all and I really expected that this Ministry would have been the beacon for digital and everything is

paperless and I do not know, I envisioned that the day that you ever invite me to visit everything would be recycled here, there. You know, something like an Apple store, that is what I envisioned. But I really want to know what are you all doing in the Ministry itself towards representing what this Ministry is supposed to be about. Now, I am a paper person which is why it is I almost never have the Parliament's iPad on me, I like to write, but during the pandemic I learnt the importance of these tools and we know that. So could you just let us know exactly what are you all doing because you all are supposed to be leading by example. Right? I also know that for a fact that Estonia is supposed to be the country that we are following. Where are we with that? How far along? Thank you so much.

**Mr. Belfon:** So thanks, member. Excellent question. As a matter of fact we do have a consultancy ongoing in terms of mapping the internal Ministry processes, all of the paper-based processes across the functional areas. Coming out of that would provide a template. We would provide—we would be provided with a template in terms of digitalization of platforms and digitized processes that would be made available to other MDAs. So it is a matter of providing a direction or guidance in terms all of the common processes that Ministries have that would be digitized, so we would show you how to digitalize that particular process, what needs to be digitized, and how it could be stored digitally.

I am glad that you bought up your iPad because I will bring that into the fray. And, of course, in terms of access to the copies provided, this is something, of course you know, whether it is hosted, we do have an open source hosting platform in use at the Ministry of Digital Transformation, so they rarely use paper, unless it is required statute. Right? So it is an advance that would be brought to other Ministries to allow that sort of linkage to happen, but in a value-for-money context without any sort of attached software licences. So all of that would be brought to the fore.

And, of course, if the submissions we were asked to also submit in paper but, of course, we could have done it electronically, right?—which is the preferred method. But, yes, we are making strides in terms of the overall digital transformation and that advisory. We understand that the Ministry being the poster child for digital transformation and the beacon would have to provide a level of guidance and advisory, either through ourselves

or iGovTT to other Ministries in terms of a working set of instructions or templates in terms of how to digitalize their platforms and what to digitize and how to get there and that process of getting from a lower level of maturity to a higher level of maturity in terms of digital acceptance and adoption. Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** Member Patasar.

**Dr. Patasar:** Thank you, Chair. This question is sort of a follow-up. I am reading that the main challenges lie in transforming the culture of the organization. Right? How, what does the resistance look like? And how do you measure its success rate of adoption?

**3.50 p.m.**

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay. Could you repeat just the first part, member, sorry?

**Dr. Patasar:** What does resistance to adoption look like and therefore how would you measure success?

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay. So resistance to adoption is—you could look at it in a different way, is not really a matter of entrenched resistance. It is a matter of in most cases not being aware of or not knowing how to utilize, or what the impact of a particular solution will be on a person or a Ministry. The adoption therefore and that resistance, you are looking at proper communication and messaging in terms of bringing the impact across to either the Ministry or a variety of persons. And of course, in terms of literacy being able to be technically proficient.

For instance, some persons can utilize a tablet but not a PC. They can utilize different operating systems. They may be more proficient with their phones but they may not be able to read, so there is an additional point there. So all of those items, which is why we have partnered with ALTA Online. We have courses in collaboration with YTEPP, Coursera, Google. We are doing WeLearnTT. All of these things to make sure that persons on every level of that spectrum, actually have an idea as to how the technology will work. So it erases the, “I do not know how to” component of resistance, to, “The solution is there, but I may have apprehensions of using a solution”.

So you get to trust, when you get to trust, it is about the messaging and having a natural and organic relay of someone utilizing a solution and showing you that it can work for you. And that is where you go to word-of-mouth approaches, having members of the

public try something, and then given the positive reaction of how well it works and the support that they would have gotten in utilizing a platform or e-service, they would then project and advertise your solution for you.

So resistance to change is multifaceted but there are ways to address. I like that you brought in the measurement of success. Success is really the adoption of the idea. So you can no longer ignore that a digital Trinidad and Tobago could exist, so there is still that belief. So you believe that your future will change based on the solutions and the platforms that we make available.

Now, the entrenched success is getting persons to believe in the use case and going and trying based on word-of-mouth, based on messaging, trying the e-service, or trying the new platform. So the effort there in terms of adoption, is really, going to access, as opposed to going and saying, “Okay, this is too hard”. So they will be well equipped before they even access the platform or service, they will know what it is, and that in itself is a success before they actually access any particular service.

**Dr. Patasar:** So, drawing off what Mrs. Francis-Scott was saying about the uptake in the—is it on WeLearn? Was it WeLearn? Right. So I am looking at there are currently 980 persons, right? Is that 980 across all the access centres or is that 980 in a training programme?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** That would represent 980 across the main—That 980 would not only speak to access centre use because you can access the WeLearn platform from your home if you have access, and if you are proficient to a particular degree. In addition to that, you have persons who are impaired. What we are finding is that we are really hitting a chord with persons with disabilities accessing the access centres as the place that they can get the help that they need. Because we have 59 persons living with visually impaired—issues regarding, surrounding visual impairment who would have accessed the platform.

We do have persons from Tobago as well. So although we do not have an access centre in Tobago, we do have an identification that, you know, persons from Tobago would have accessed the WeLearn platform. We have other persons who would have been declared disabled not necessarily visually impaired.

Now, because of the blend that we—there should be no wrong door basically. So while

the access centre is an avenue that you can learn, you would never find that that number would only speak to access centre usage. It would also speak to usage from home or even from libraries, that may be outfitted, you know, with internet access. Once you can have access to the internet, you can access the WeLearn platform and as such, you know, the training is available to you also.

**Dr. Patasar:** I have two more questions; one of them is, what is the accommodation capacity at the access centres to accommodate people?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Well, that would vary based on the access centre. And instead of winging it, I would prefer to like, send in writing our accommodation by access centre so you can get a sense that, okay, at this location we can accommodate X amount of persons because I know that varies based on the location that we are at.

**Dr. Patasar:** And then the last question had to do with the Digital Literacy Programme, what does that consist of?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** The Digital Literacy Programme?

**Dr. Patasar:** Yeah.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** So, that is a programme that we did in collaboration with ALTA, which really allows us to take someone who has no knowledge. We are assuming that you do not have any knowledge or understanding of, or no competency with a computer or with applications and take you to a point where basic literacy is covered. And by basic literacy, I mean an understanding of the device itself. I mean, there are a lot of things that we take for granted, basic, input-output devices.

Now we have the utilization of the internet and key applications that the average person we are expecting to be able, what should you be able to do if you are to be proficient? Something like looking at email. When I did computer literacy, email was not a thing. But now, if you are doing computer literacy, understanding email, understanding social media interactions, that would all form part of the literacy package with the view of ensuring that at the end of this, this person can then go on to intermediate literacy where they may zero in on different types of applications, so that you may get a utilization of Microsoft Word, or Excel. So you kind of start to dig a little deeper into software that—productivity software.

And then we go to the next level of developers, where we have programmers who would

want to understand what tools do I need to use, what languages do I need to understand. And as such, each level is represented differently but basic literacy is just about equipping that person who is coming barebones, “I do not understand everything”, and ensuring that at the end of it they can function proficiently with a PC and with the basic applications that you would expect someone to be able to.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Member Mitchell.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Mr. Permanent Secretary, you have used the words “HR” and “consultant” a few times well, and I have to say that I have known your predecessor, so I think I know where that comes from. Well, let us go back into the HR function of the Ministry. Can you describe for us the structure of the establishment of the Ministry? The amount of positions? How many are filled? How many are vacant?

**Mr. Belfon:** Sure. Thanks, member, for the question. We do have 31 establishment positions, and 19 are filled. In terms of contract staff, we do have 227 persons employed on contract.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Okay. So you have 221 plus 19.

**Mr. Belfon:** Yeah.

**Mr. Mitchell:** In terms of the split, in terms of your structure, what percentage are the support functions, and what percentage are the operational functions in the Ministry?

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay. So, it is roughly a 75/25 per cent split, with 75 being technical, 25 per cent being operational. The majority of establishment being in the support areas as well as the business operations assistants, as well as the administrative specialists.

**Mr. Mitchell:** All right. And with respect to the state of your complement of your staff, are you comfortable that you are able to deliver on your mandate?

**Mr. Belfon:** Our mandate as it were, is ever evolving much like technology so there are areas where we still would require some level of resourcing at the Ministry, in terms of the talent required to bring some of the solutions to bear. But by and large, the Ministry itself is really in or getting to the point of offering standardized contracts as opposed to short-term contracts. When you look at where we are at now, getting the technical persons or advertising through a fair and transparent process, I might add, the relevant positions for the project units, project managers, based on the amount of projects we have

outstanding, financial and cost accounting specialists, digital literacy officers as well, this is something that is—we would have recently closed some advertisements. There is another phase of recruitment that will be upcoming, but by and large, we will be able to deliver on our mandate using the mix that we have currently and as we proceed, having more long-tenured contract staff on board.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Well, perhaps I should have asked, based on the deliverables here, deliverables now, is your complement satisfactory?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes. There are some elements of the public sector establishment that would require some attention, particularly with the finance and accounts department and internal audit, but yes, we would be able to deliver on our mandate as is.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Okay, because Ms. Ferreira, you were indicating that you were short on resources and you identified that your complement would be satisfactory if you were up to the CPO's approved number of positions. And I was curious as to why you juxtaposed it as to the CPO and not with respect to what is the demand on your agency to deliver, and what are the shortfalls? Because I will tell you this, it is a bit paradoxical, you are a digital transformation company, yet we are talking about increasing staff and a shortage of staff resources.

So, perhaps you do need it, perhaps your mandate is across the Ministries, all Ministries, all MDAs, I am not sure. And I think there is a problem there because I am aware of an old Cabinet Note that identified all Ministries to utilize iGovTT as their digital partner, but Ministries do not bypass iGovTT. So is it that you need to streamline or, you know, what is really the state of your human resources?

**Mr. Belfon:** So member, thanks for the comment but I would like to clarify a few things, of course, based on your comments/statement. So in terms of the start-up of the Ministry of Digital Transformation, before we get to iGovTT, we would have started of course in terms of a staff complement that was largely on short-term contracts. There is a phased approach to recruitment that would have started in terms of getting longer-tenured staff on board. That streamlining that you would have mentioned is in the process of happening where we have short-term positions being wound down as we hire on long-term contract positions. So it may appear as though the number is high but it is actually going to decrease as we go by or go through 2024. So it is not expected to be a bloated

Ministry, obviously because of the digitalized processes that we would employ as well as some of the digitization that we would have, and then of course, the roles and functions that specific departments would pursue. Right? So it is not expected to remain at the same level, right?

**Mr. Mitchell:** So it is expected to decrease?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes, it is expected to decrease.

**Mr. Mitchell:** So the resources that you are saying that you are short on, are not necessarily human resources, but perhaps some other type of resource?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Okay. Let me ask you this, in terms of the—what is the average age—and I am asking you this not to engage in ageism, but we know that the younger people are more tech-savvy, are more adventurous and maverick when it comes to bringing across solutions, are less bureaucratic, are less respectful of the—

**Mr. Belfon:** Status quo.

**Mr. Mitchell:**—wasteful bureaucracy that we experience here in the Ministry? So what is the average age?

**Mr. Belfon:** Right, so I am very happy you brought that up, member, because the Ministry of Digital Transformation probably has the youngest complement of staff throughout the public sector, and that is due in part to a particular Cabinet Minute that speaks to a mentee programme where we utilize associate professionals.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yes.

**Mr. Belfon:** There is a pathway for them to be absorbed into the Ministry as digital transformation associates. You would find by and large a lot of persons came in as associate professionals but are leading some of the complex programmes that we spoke about earlier.

So there is generally a sense of energy, new ideas, innovation, across the board and in every functional area, especially with regard to the project, the PMO, the Project Management Office, and getting those results to bear, right? So I think the focus is a good one for the Ministry, the whole approach has been to target and look at younger persons, and bringing their ideas and all their creativity to the fore. So that has been in place at the Ministry.



**Mr. Mitchell:** All right. Quickly, because I do not have much time. Give me quickly the percentage of your operationalization of the Ministry; you are around for two years. What percentage, 100 per cent?

**Mr. Belfon:** Operationalization in terms of staff or spending?

**Mr. Mitchell:** In terms of everything, staff, equipment, software, chairs, desks.

**Mr. Belfon:** All right. I would say roughly 85, 80-85 per cent, and that is really because there is a phased migration. As you know, we would have gotten approval to move to Level 13 in Tower C.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yes.

**Mr. Belfon:** So we do have an element of staff at that National Library building that we are seeking to move across to Tower C. So that is where the outstanding percentage in terms of operationalization. Obviously, for optimal efficiency, you would not want your staff in two places. So that is where we have some focus in terms of getting that resolved in the soonest possible time.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Okay. On to your two flagship projects. And if you were to achieve these two flagship projects, you would earn the name “Transformation” in the name of your Ministry; that is interoperability and the national e-ID.

Now, we have heard descriptions of your progression but we want it in terms of a percentage. What percentage are you all in terms of your interoperability project and national e-identification project? And let me just give you some context. These are extremely important. I am sure and if know the answer, I am sure you do, perhaps not off the top of your head but in terms of interoperability, this project alone could save taxpayers tens of millions of dollars in terms of double-dipping, cashing dead people’s cheques and many other things.

In terms of your national e-identification, I will tell you a quick story in my past. I was studying in England, using the train station, I had a friend, he was a little hasty, got into an altercation, a police officer came across asked him his name. Of course, strong Trini accent, “Where you from”? He said, “I am a resident of the UK”. “What is your name and address?” And quickly went onto his phone, went into a site and was able to get him on the electoral register and determine that he was a resident of the UK.

That has the impact, this national e-identification to help us with the crime challenges

that we have today, with stop and search, roadblocks, with a lot of these different things. So these two projects are extremely important, and if you simply achieve these projects, I think you would earn anything you ask for. So where are we by way of percentage and when can we expect completion on these projects?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** So at the risk of—this particular project is one where I cannot say, “We will be 100 per cent complete by December”, because of the phased approach we need to use. For example, this first section that we are dealing with, we would have targeted the key agencies that everybody—I smiled when everybody was talking about their little peeves. Member Mark, I felt the same way when I travelled this year. I was like why am I filling out a form when I return home, right? We are citizens also experiencing the same thing with the energy and drive to get it fixed and changed. And as such, we would have targeted the agencies that we felt were core in the first instance, and that would include Immigration, Licensing, RG, EBC. You would notice those are the people who deal with our identity, right, in one form or the other. And the vision is, that we have those four runners on board on the interoperability platform by the starting of our new financial year, right?

After we finish with them though, our job is not done, in terms of this. So that is why I started off by saying, I cannot tell you it will be 100 per cent finished by December. Because then, we have to start looking at the other groups that we are talking about, the same dead men who are cashing cheques, right? So we are talking about Social Development, we are talking about Education. So we want to deal with each in groups and we have divided them into groups of nine. And those change a bit because sometimes you find an agency who would put up their hand and say, “You did not include me, but I want to be included”, right?

**Mr. Mitchell:** Or resisters.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Or resisters.

**Mr. Mitchell:** But when would the platform—

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** So the platform is expected—for example, next month, we want to actually do a launch. Not next month—April, the month of April, we want to actually do a launch of the e-ID and to begin with the public sensitization because we know we cannot just put it out there and say, “Okay, use it now”. That whole citizen engagement where

we start to build trust around it because I am telling you, one of my church members said, “So, you are one of the 666 people”. You know, you have people with all different types of conceptions as to what an e-ID would mean for them, and so, we are very aware that we need to begin that sensitization. So to answer directly, with this first group of what I would call our early adopters, we are expecting that by this year, we would have those on the interoperability platform and have the e-ID solution procured.

We have our chief technical advisor right now heading out to Copenhagen to review some of the persons who would have submitted for the e-ID itself, and with the expectation to have implementation of the e-ID, which would be needed of course to support access to e-services and the interoperability by the end of this year, but that is just to first wave of nine, and then we expect another wave. And each wave we are giving an average of six to eight months that once we engage this wave, we expect within six to eight months you are on the interoperability platform. If we have to work with you in terms of your processes—because as you would imagine, it is not just about the technology. If you want to streamline somebody’s service, you have to look at process, and so it is a bit involved, right, which we would have started work already with that.

So, with Licensing, with police, TTPS is one of those who would have raised their hands and said, “Aye, we were not in your first catch, but we are interested in revising some of our processes”. And so we included them with the **SOL** engagement, yes.

**Mr. Mitchell:** So I mean, we are looking at implementation.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yes.

**Mr. Mitchell:** So with the waves we expect some waves of spend as well, right?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** That is right. Yes.

**Mr. Mitchell:** So we would remove these nils?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yes.

**Mr. Mitchell:** All right, well, just two comments, right. So I am happy that you said that because PS, I disagree with you in terms of public relations, not media relations, eh, public relations. You all are doing so many things in terms of improving digital literacy, and all of these things that you all are doing and the public does not know.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Right.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I did not know. And any one of us trained to look at your—to determine

what you are doing based on the movements of your spend—

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yes.

**Mr. Mitchell:**—we would think that you are doing nothing but talking.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** All right.

**Mr. Mitchell:** So you need to engage a bit more in terms of your public relations. And yes, I have seen what Jamaica has done in terms of their national e-identity, I have seen the pushback and that is probably going to be your biggest hurdle in terms of getting people to accept that this is going to be a net benefit and not a member of the 666 cult-type arrangement.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** If I may, PS and Chair. That issue of public engagement is not one that would have passed us at all. In fact, just on Monday, we were in meetings with IDB to speak about a citizen engagement programme, and I remember at the meeting one of my colleagues asking, “Can you share with us, you know, some things from other jurisdictions as to, you know, how they would have approached it”. And they said, quite frankly, “Your jurisdiction is the first that is looking at the engagement before it is actually ready to launch”.

So even our approach with this, we are doing new things and we are doing it a new way. And fortunately or unfortunately for us, there is not a script to do it with, but I can assure you that even looking at the public engagement and ensuring that for each project—because as you would imagine, from where I sit, I have to ensure that I do not have a million projects each trying to do their own engagement thing, and then misusing our funds. I have to ensure that we are approaching this thing in a kind of thorough way, and where we can leverage from one project we are doing. And as such, we have embarked upon developing that citizen engagement program with the help of the IDB to really help us navigate looking at engaging the citizen. Not when we are ready to tell you, “Okay, now get your e-ID.” But even from before because—

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yes.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:**—we realize especially with the cyber-attacks people are nervous.

**4.20 p.m.**

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yes, they want to do it but they are nervous as to—“Yeah, I will trust Facebook, but I do not know if I want to trust the Government with meh”—and that is the reality, you know.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** And so we are really looking at it.

**Mr. Mitchell:** So it is public relations and I will tell you—I mean, there is some MDAs, if they sweep the street, the public will know, eh.

**Mr. Hislop:** [*Laughter*]

**Mr. Mitchell:** Now, last point. PS, you started off by saying something that I totally agree with. We have a lot of bright people around and with respect to your advancing your legislative agenda, you do not need a \$500,000/\$600,000 consultant. We have a whole department in government that deals with legislation, and nothing that you are going to do or propose has not been done elsewhere in the Commonwealth. So you simply get some samples, you tweak it as a first draft, and advance it, and work with the CPC’s department. You do not need a three-month procurement process, a six-month legislative drafting and consultative process, and all of that, and by the time, you know, we all are done and grey. All right, thanks, PS.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, member Hislop.

**Mr. Hislop:** Thank you, Chair. I have just two quick questions: What is it partnership with the Ministry as it relates to the Tobago House of Assembly, and what projects are you engaged in with the THA?

**Mr. Belfon:** Thanks, member. So in terms of our collaboration, we would have recently gone across and looked at some of the areas of concern surrounding connectivity, infrastructure, the access centres, and that conversation continues in terms of getting to the point of implementation. Right? So it is not at a standstill but, you know, in terms of the respect that we hold for the THA, this is something that we do in collaboration with, and it continues into that outreach to get to the point of actual fruition, so it is ongoing—these discussions are ongoing.

**Mr. Hislop:** Okay. So I want to speak to a particular project that has been touted by THA, which is the My THA project. Are you aware of that and what is your—

**Mr. Belfon:** So, no, I would not be able to speak to that in particular. The three areas I would have looked at would have been the connectivity, the access centres, and infrastructure.

**Mr. Hislop:** Okay. And my final question: Have you experienced—or what Ministries—all right. I would not want you to identify Ministries per se, but have all Ministries and departments bought into your digitalization or to the Government's digitalization process?

**Mr. Belfon:** So, yes, member, by and large, you know, in terms of—I would have referenced around 200 e-services being available across the public sector. Of course, there are some Ministries where the technology adoption is pretty high and digital transformation initiatives are a pace. Even when you look at some of the PSIP submissions across the board, individual Ministries have progressed in terms of the development of their platforms, development of e-services to the wider public. Right? So they have bought into digital transformation, as it is, from a collective standpoint.

There is also the digitization of files and paper records that are ongoing in various Ministries. So there is a move away from a lot of the paper-based processes and a lot of the paper-based storage where you find a variety of document management systems, automated applications for approval, platforms for their own customers or their staff members or persons that access a particular Ministry, to access their services online. So we have been seeing that uptake.

**Mr. Hislop:** Just one more, Chair. Do you think that the Ministry requires a greater say in what happens at other Ministries and departments when it comes to digitalization? Do you think that you have enough input? Are you satisfied with whether your recommendations are accepted by departments and Ministries?

**Mr. Belfon:** So collaboration and actually having a bipartisan approach with all other Ministries and the ICT personnel is something that we endeavour to strengthen—*[Laughter]*—right? I would always advocate for a larger voice for digital transformation, just knowing where it can take Trinidad and Tobago, and where we are now and getting to that point where, you know, we are a cashless society, systems are digitalized, citizens can access services in their homes, the support for all of these systems is online, everyone is digitally literate, they accept and adopt platforms because of the use case. So I would

always advocate for that for the Ministry of Digital Transformation, but I would not do so at the expense of any negative impact to relationship building and ongoing relationships that we may have with Ministries and our partners as well.

**Mr. Hislop:** Thank you, PS. I think I got the answer.

**Mr. Belfon:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member Webster-Roy.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Mrs. Francis-Scott, in your response to member Mitchell, you noted that you were using a phased approach for the implementation of the e-ID, and you were grouping agencies and departments into groups of nine. You said that some agencies were advocating to be in the first grouping. What I wanted to know, if you could give me an idea of the different entities within the first two groupings you have, please?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** So I would repeat. I can give you our grouping or first grouping and we can submit in writing the other groups. Because as you would imagine, what you write down the first time, you write it down with your plan. As you move forward, you may recognize you may need to engage this agency. This Ministry may be, or agency may be deprioritized. So I would prefer to liaise with the programme team and say, “What are our next sets based on our experience?” But as of now, the agencies that are in this existing group would include Immigration, Works and Transport, specifically Licensing. We also—

**Member:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Immigration, Registrar General, EBC.

Now, we have engaged TTPS and—well, TTPS engaged us and we have worked with them with regard to some processes. I am not sure if they would be on the interoperability platform just yet, but we have engaged—they have been included in this group in terms of engagements with our consultants and partners. Right? So for now, those there—

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yes, our key ID persons, everyone that has something to do with either our birth papers or our valid forms of IDs are the ones that are currently engaged as the forerunners—sorry, Social Development and Family Services gets as well.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** So, it is six—[*Inaudible*]

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yes.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** Okay, my other question. I am assuming that the e-ID would be voluntary, that citizens would have the option to—

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Correct. So based on what would have happened in other jurisdictions, we recognize that it may not be the best idea to tell someone, “You have to do this.” And so the approach that we are taking is one where you opt in; opt in based on what you see the perceived value is and that you want to actually benefit from that perceived value. So you know what? I want to be able to apply, for example, my licence online, or I want to be able to get my certified copy for my vehicle, then one of the ways—and since it is an opt in, it is not going to be the only way the citizen can access the service. Right?

So we are not strong-arming anybody, we are not squeezing you in a corner to say, “If you do not use this with this e-ID, there is no other way.” No. You are opting in and you can opt out. Even if after six months, I say, “I do not like how this thing going, I am opting out”—and I can also opt in for particular services with particular agencies. So I can say, “I do not mind Licensing having access to me as e-ID Tusca. However, I am not so sure how I feel about social dev.” So you can opt in with regard to the services that you want to have access to your e-ID as well.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** So I am excited, right? But my days are usually very busy. I want to know if I will be able to be—a Saturday night on my bed with my laptop on my lap, and I could sign up for this e-ID, and I do not have to leave home to go anywhere to ask anybody anything or to face anybody or, “Bring this paper”, “Oh, I forgot to tell you bring this one.” And then when I bring that next one, “Oh, you know, you were supposed to bring this too.” What is the plan? How are we going to ensure that we make it easy for citizens?

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** For onboarding?

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** Yes.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** So this is where I would have to tell you, I cannot tell you what the full process for onboarding is just yet. I can tell you what we dream it would be, and we dream it would be your experience—[*Laughter*]—because that is the experience that makes the most sense. But as you can imagine, we have legislation that will require us to



function a particular way and as such, as it is right now, we would have to work with our regulatory frameworks that tell us how we have to behave while we move forward to change things. But to say that we have documented precisely what the onboarding process would be yet for e-ID, we would not have, because that will largely be dependent on the tool that is finalized—the application and the platform that we finalize in terms of using, and then that will kind of tell us what leverage we have, what ability we have to do the different things that we want to do.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** So I can share with you one of the things that frustrated persons at first with getting the iGovTT ID was having to go someplace.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yes.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** I remember I started the process online and then I scrapped that, because I just could not find the time. So just as we look towards the future, to ensure we make it as easy as possible for citizens to, you know, get excited to be a part of the process.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Yeah.

**Mrs. Webster-Roy:** Thank you.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** So I wanted to ask this—and I am not sure if it is to the PS or the Head of Finance, iGovTT. Now—and I stand corrected from my earlier intervention, in that, your request was for \$69 million, the appropriation is \$24 million, so your shortfall is 45. Is that correct?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Chair, we revised—yes, it was 45. But we revised the request after we had received the \$24 million.

**Madam Chairman:** Right. But your—so, okay, you got an appropriation of 24, so your shortfall would have been 45, I am correct?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Now, do you all receive income? I got an impression from Mrs. Francis-Scott.

**Ms. Ferreira:** We—for the first time, we actually received some income in the last fiscal in terms of project fees.

**Madam Chairman:** Project fees?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. And that is the \$79 million? Would that be 79?

**Ms. Ferreira:** No, no, no

**Madam Chairman:** No?

**Ms. Ferreira:** No, Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Or that is the 38?

**Ms. Ferreira:** That would be Microsoft pass-through.

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah, so that is the 38, right? The 38.4?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yes, that is correct.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. Okay. So, all right, if I understand this well, you estimate this year that you would have income, other than the subvention, of about \$81 million?

**Ms. Ferreira:** That, again, is the pass-through. The \$53 million—you will notice the \$53.4 million—

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah.

**Ms. Ferreira:** —would be the pass-through for the MEA—

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Ms. Ferreira:** —and we are short \$27.8 million—

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

**Ms. Ferreira:** —after we revised our income.

**Madam Chairman:** So the cash in bank—the cash from bank?

**Ms. Ferreira:** We normally would have received—we would have utilized the reserves, which will be our cash in bank—

**Madam Chairman:** Right.

**Ms. Ferreira:** —and this is what we require at this point in time after we removed the \$24 million subvention.

**Madam Chairman:** Right. But what I am asking is—and you will excuse me because I need really some clarification on this. My understanding would have been, and you will correct me, that having regard to the appropriation and the income from other sources, you really have a shortfall of \$17 million.

**Ms. Ferreira:** Of \$27 million.

**Madam Chairman:** Of \$27 million.

**Ms. Ferreira:** Of \$27.8 million.

**Madam Chairman:** And that is where you are showing for cash from bank?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** But is that not income?

**Ms. Ferreira:** No, no, that is not income.

**Madam Chairman:** No?

**Ms. Ferreira:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** No? Okay. Because I think that is where we have a difficulty in understanding, because when you carry it over to your increase or decrease column—

**Ms. Ferreira:** So our total expenditure for the fiscal—if we look at—our total expenditure, minus the MEA, would be that \$27.8 million plus the \$24 million, which is \$51.8 million.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Let me see.

**Ms. Ferreira:** We only received 24. That will leave us with a shortfall of \$27 million—27.8.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Well, I think we all having a little challenge in understanding what is being shown as Appendix VIII. Do you think you understand it?

**Mr. Mitchell:** This \$27 million—

**Madam Chairman:** “Mm-hmm”.

**Mr. Mitchell:** —what she is saying, their reserve in the bank—

**Madam Chairman:** Right.

**Mr. Mitchell:** —what they have now—*[Inaudible]*

**Madam Chairman:** So—

**Mr. Mitchell:** *[Inaudible]*

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So it is not really income.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Well, it has to be income.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Mitchell:** *[Inaudible]*

**Madam Chairman:** But it is not really income. Yes, and that was the difficulty in us understanding this statement. Yeah? So it is not really income.

**Mr. Mitchell:** No.

**Ms. Ferreira:** No.

**Madam Chairman:** So the shortfall is a slightly less than than the \$45 million, if we put in your income of 53?

**Ms. Ferreira:** So the original budget that that we requested was \$69.6 million

**Madam Chairman:** Right.

**Ms. Ferreira:** We revised it after we were allocated our subvention of \$24 million—

**Madam Chairman:** Right.

**Ms. Ferreira:** —and we revised it downwards to \$51.8 million. Then we had the MEA for the \$53 million, which is the pass-through, and if we subtract the \$24 million we got from the \$51 million, we would have a shortfall of \$27.8 million.

**Madam Chairman:** Right. Okay. But how the figures were presented to us, we are not seeing that.

**Ms. Ferreira:** Okay.

**Madam Chairman:** I think that is what has happened.

**Ms. Ferreira:** Right.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So thanks for the clarification though.

**Ms. Ferreira:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. And therefore, I think too the questions that we wanted to ask, again based on some things in your submissions, on page 3, question six, in response to the revision and the review of your internal policies and procedures, we were told that, you know, you have done a lot some have been approved but those that are awaiting approval are the corporate credit card policy, the petty cash policy and the fixed asset management policy. Is that still so? Are they still outstanding?

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yes, these are still outstanding.

**Madam Chairman:** Yeah. And any idea where it has reached with the Ministry of Finance?

**Ms. Ferreira:** No, I have no idea.

**Madam Chairman:** You have no idea. Has there been any recent communication with the Ministry of Finance?

**Mr. Belfon:** So we will follow up to ascertain the status and report back in writing.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. All right. Thank you. And the other thing we wanted to find out about the master services agreement, which was executed in February of—would have been March of 2023, in terms of putting this in context, is there a duration for this master services agreement?

**Mr. Belfon:** Thanks, Chair, for the question. So the master services agreement was meant to pull together all of the elements of contract management, project management by iGovTT for a variety of digitalization projects to be implemented by the MDT. So it concerns procurement, all of the evaluation items, subsequent reporting of the process and progress of various elements relative to that project oversight as the executing—it treats with the considerations for access centres, TT Wi-Fi, the data center, all of these projects that we would have mentioned earlier, with the exception to some part of the e-ID. But by and large, it is the umbrella agreement that we would have entered into for those services, as provided by iGovTT.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So it is a sort of overarching agreement.

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** And when you engage iGovTT—I think that is when Mrs. Francis-Scott said something about the bulk purchase—is some fee paid to them?

**Mr. Belfon:** So, yes, as a matter of fact, in terms of the professional fees—

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Mr. Belfon:** —and the project management fees, that is a quantum of, and is stipulated within the master services agreement for particular projects as well.

**Madam Chairman:** Have they been paid for any services?

**Mr. Belfon:** So, yes—*[Laughter]*—for as long as we embark upon a project, the professional fees are remitted to iGovTT as well. Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So could you share with us in writing what sort of professional fees in the—the agreement should be about a year now—within the duration of the agreement.

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes, Chair.

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you, Mr. Mitchell.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah, just piggybacking off of that. Ms. Ferreira just said that last year you were able to—you got, is it 64,587 in project management fees, in terms of other income?

**Ms. Ferreira:** No, member, I did not say that.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Okay. I thought you said last year you were able to—

**Ms. Ferreira:** We received some project management fees, but not to that extent.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Okay, \$8 million? Oh, this is project income. The reason I am asking, the project management fees for state enterprises usually range between 4 per cent and 7 per cent, and you all have been in existence for over 15 years now. Is it that you have a large account receivables account that Ministries who have used your services have not been paying, or is it that you have not been charging the project management fees?

**Ms. Ferreira:** We have not been charging project management fees. This is really has been the first time we have charged anything that is significant. Am I correct Sherwin?

**Mr. Cambridge:** Yes.

**Ms. Ferreira:** Yeah.

**Mr. Mitchell:** So is it now that you will enforce the policy of project management fees for things like purchasing of laptops and—I mean, I know that everybody consults you, in terms of specs, but to actually go ahead and make the purchases and engage with the suppliers directly and—I mean, you must—I mean, everybody—every other state enterprise is paid a project management fee, from NIPDEC to UDeCOTT to RDC, everybody.

**Ms. Ferreira:** I think we would like to do so.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I think you should.

**Ms. Ferreira:** I think in the past we were told that we could not and we had pushback from some of the Ministries, but I believe our CEO is working towards making sure that that happens going forward.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah. Okay. PS, could you tell us, right—and I am asking this question because I saw, you know, there is a local election going on in Jamaica and there is this big boast about their digital penetration or their level of digital literacy, whatever the term is. Can you tell us what it is in Trinidad and Tobago? I am sure we are way more advanced.

**Mr. Belfon:** I think it is saturated actually.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah.

**Mr. Belfon:** We would have done a digital readiness survey, I think, with the UNDP at a time, looking at penetration, the digital penetration, and it was particularly high in terms of access to connectivity. There are some areas of concern, especially with regard to the rural areas and, of course, in actioning some of those, that actually led to the pursuance of concessions with low Earth orbit concessionaires, the expansion of connectivity in some of those areas, and even the Ministry of Digital Transformation looking into and researching TV white space. This is something that continues to be of concern for the rural areas but with regard to the urban areas, the penetration is high. While I cannot give you the specific percentage, it is higher than most for regional countries.

**Mr. Mitchell:** I think that is something that you should determine and publish. And can I ask you as well, what is the status of the—I forgot the name of the fund, but the fund that is supposed to—

**Mr. Belfon:** The USF?

**Mr. Mitchell:** Yeah, that Universal Service Fund.

**Mr. Belfon:** Right. So—

**Mr. Mitchell:** And rural penetration.

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay. So—and this is where there is a tie in with the TT Wi-Fi. So, for instance, under the USF, the Universal Service Fund, tagged together with the ISPs, would look at reinvesting into the infrastructural framework and connectivity framework, or infrastructure within Trinidad and Tobago. Right? There have been USF applications of TT Wi-Fi for schools, primary schools as well as secondary schools in rural areas with regard to the rural areas that we would have looked at and some of the health centres, as well as on the Ministry of Digital Transformation side, looking at the regional corporation and some of the more populated congregation areas.

So there is a concerted effort via the USF to address that disparity, or some areas of disparity with regard to connectivity, and it has been ongoing. I think when last I left, the Ministry of Education, the USF would have been utilized to provide connectivity to roughly about 45 to 64 primary schools in rural areas. So that fund is working and it is

bringing some level of relief to persons who may not have had connectivity. As it is right now, they would have completed around 68 schools, 25 libraries, 13 transport hubs, and I think it is allocated to be at 91 health institutions as well.

**4.50 p.m.**

**Mr. Mitchell:** So with that, with the level of digital penetration and digital literacy, we are well prepared to proceed with the national e-ID and interoperability and those things. So we are just waiting on yourselves?

**Mr. Belfon:** So the digital literacy will be an ongoing process to get everyone on board while there is that—because there are some instances of the familiarity with technology and then of course, ensuring that we also consider persons with disabilities, the elderly or senior citizens, to make sure we do not leave anyone behind. So that consideration is inherent. So, yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Mrs. Morris-Julian.

**Mrs. Morris-Julian:** Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I have two questions from the public. So, one, through you Madam Chair, to the programme manager. The projects that received the funding releases, I do not know if I missed that. Can we—

**Madam Chairman:** [*Inaudible*].

**Mrs. Morris-Julian:** Um hmm

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** So, I can specify, we had ISE which is the—

**Mrs. Morris-Julian:** Thank you

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** We had ISE, which is our integrated service centre project. Before, we had that at \$6.6 million awaiting releases from the Ministry of Finance and I believe those releases were received—PS, is it fair to say earlier this week?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** Right. So, of course we would have expected to receive the cheque later this week or early next week. In addition to that, we have invoices also submitted with regard to the interoperability platform to the tune of US \$517,000 that is submitted for approval of payment from PS, and that will be followed by the following month of payment of US \$720,000 and then US \$1.1 million. Now, because of these values, although this project is one that iGovTT manages on our behalf—because of the amount of foreign exchange. We actually do requests for releases and payments, which comes



back through the Ministry and we do direct wire transfer to the agency, because of the volume of foreign exchange. But that can be expected, this month, next month and the following month, subsequently.

**Mrs. Morris-Julian:** One last question. Now, I did not notice D'Abadie/O'meara when you spoke about the access centres, but I do know—PS, this is for you—

**Mr. Belfon:** [*Laughter*]

**Mrs. Morris-Julian:** —that D'Abadie/O'meara will be included and I think it is actually something that is happening there, if I am not mistaken. But the public wants to know, exactly who owns the access centres and therefore who is responsible for the maintenance, the approval of the use for public and, as well as, the security of the items.

**Mrs. Francis-Scott:** So, with regard to the access centres, we have actually embarked on a relationship. You would hear our Minister saying over and over, we are a partnership Ministry. So instead of us going and creating these buildings, is there a Ministry with access to community centres? And so we have teamed up with the Ministry of Community Development.

So, where there are centres that may need refurbishment, that is where we partner with them. We may come in and assist with the refurbishment, so, as to have the access centres available for use, or if we know there is a new community centre that would be made available, we partner with them to ensure that we outfit the new access centre in a way that when it is launched, new and spanking, it is also launched with the access centres. So who owns it, really and truly, it is the Ministry of Community Development. But in partnership with them, we are responsible for the management and operation of the access centres itself.

**Mrs. Morris-Julian:** Thank you.

**Madam Chairman:** Member Mark.

**Mr. Mark:** Mr. PS Belfon, digital penetration—and I know that we are all happy to have penetration, at the rate that we have in Trinidad and Tobago. You know there is a saying, Mr. PS Belfon, that information is knowledge, and knowledge is power. Who will have access, who will control to this data centre that you mentioned earlier, that is to be constructed at Phoenix Park? Who will be the owners, who will have access to all this data? Is it the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, is it the Ministry of Digital

Transformation? Who? Who will be in charge of the data, that is at the centre?

**Mr. Belfon:** Thanks, member for the question. By default and of course, the Ministry of Digital Transformation carrying out the project, does not mean to say that we would technically own the data centre. It is in effect, a project of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and as such the ownership would lie within the structure of government.

In terms of the operationalization of the data centre, that is something that would have to be entered to, in terms of a service contract to manage. However, when you look at access to data, that is not something that can be spoken to loosely, because we would not be accessing any citizen's data or private records, but rather seeking to secure via encryption and secure methods. Secure access methods are for persons, or for applications and platforms, I could say, that would reside there.

The criticality in this, is the sovereignty of the data being stored in Trinidad and Tobago, as opposed to what may exist now, where it may be stored in other jurisdictions, and of course, as you know with regard to the data protection act, and looking at where that data is stored, who is handling it, the data privacy principles would apply. So in essence, you know that assurance is there, in terms of the security of the systems, and the data centres to be put in place by the Government.

The Ministry of Digital Transformation and its executing partners, of course, would seek to get this milestone implemented and have the data centres available, so that we could actually move critical data, as part of a cybersecurity trust, move critical government data from the Ministries where it currently resides, to a government owned and operated data centre.

**Mr. Mark:** [*Inaudible*] Can I repeat? My microphone was off. The unique identifier that you referred to earlier, that all of us would need to have to access services, among other things. Will that ID, unique identifier rather, replace my ID card and your ID card that we get from the EBC, or would that be part—would I be able to retain my ID card?

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay. So, thanks member, we would have spoken about the legislative environment in which we operate. So, in essence the e-ID is meant to uniquely identify someone, your ID card from the EBC is actually used to be presented to actually participate to vote, in terms of a means of what we call factored authentication. The e-ID

is something that would validate your identity and “your proof of life”. So, it is not that, at this point in time an avenue to replace what is currently there, but rather to allow citizens and Trinidad and Tobago personnel to accurately identify and see that they are, who they say they are.

**Mr. Mark:** But from your experience, Mr. Belfon, in other jurisdictions, do you have a situation where one’s ID card for voting purposes is subsumed in the unique identifier arrangement whether in—I understand Barbados, if I am not mistaken, has legislation dealing with this unique identifier concept.

**Mr. Belfon:** It is interesting, of course again, once again, going to the parameters of legislation and the requirements for the necessary majorities to pass associated legislation with something like that. This is something that would need to be pursued at a government level, in terms of that policy decision, and of course making that decision to subsume, as you would put it, in that case.

**Mr. Mark:** Now this is a chicken and egg situation, which one comes first? Because, do you anticipate, or at this stage, can you share with this Committee, where are we with, one, the unique identifier legislative framework? Because, we cannot be talking about digital penetration, we cannot be talking about transformation, e-trade, digital economy, cashless society, and we do not have from the Ministry, that is driving this process and appreciation as to when would the appropriate legislative framework come. Is it going to come after, or would it come before, or is it going to be in conjunction? I am not to clear. I am trying to get clarification.

**Mr. Belfon:** Sure, just to provide a position, I would tell you that, while the legislation is important, the Ministry of Digital Transformation has a package of legislation that will be reviewed in 2024, and of course that package of legislation will be done in, or reviewed in collaboration with the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs, and then subsequent to which, if there is that decision by the Government on same, in terms of whether or not it is before, or in parallel to the roll out of the e-identifier. I think at that point we would pronounce, but before that, that aspect is pronounced upon by the Government, I would not presumed to say either.

**Mr. Mark:** Would you care to share with this Committee, what is the thinking as it relates to possible pieces that you have in mind of legislation? .

**Mr. Belfon:** I would just reference the usage of an e-ID, the use cases. Possibly, the legality, and in terms of the overarching framework, or providing the legislative environment for citizens to adopt, but again, that is something that would be pronounced upon more fully, when the legislation is reviewed by the Ministry of Attorney General, and subsequently by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Mr. Mark:** The Ministry of Digital Transformation has been outfitted?

**Mr. Belfon:** To some extent, we do have Level 14 at Tower C, which is fully outfitted. Level 13 is currently in the process of being outfitted to transition staff members who are present there, to move from the National Library building to Level 13 at Tower C.

**Mr. Mark:** And how was this outfitting executed? Did you procure a consultant for that whole project?

**Mr. Belfon:** So in terms of the adequate processes for the outfitting, if you are speaking about Level 14, with the start-up of the Ministry, that is something of course, with due procurement practice. We would have gone out and procured furniture, equipment and done the subsequent outfitting of F, F and E—well furniture, fixtures and equipment. It is expected to follow the same format, and compliance with procurement legislation for Level 13.

**5.05 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** And any idea of what would it have cost you all to outfit?

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay. So, in essence, we would have received an estimate—an allocation, I should say, this year, but it does not mean that the entire allocation would be utilized because we seek value for money, via transparent process, so it would essentially be less than what is allocated at this time.

**Mr. Mark:** Yeah, but you have not answered me.

**Mr. Belfon:** No, you were—

**Mr. Mark:** What is the estimate? I am saying you have to arrive at—

**Mr. Belfon:** Right. So that allocation was \$5 million.

**Mr. Mark:** \$5 million. Thank you. Now, as it relates to the cybersecurity unit and its establishment, could you tell this Committee what is the status of this project?

**Mr. Belfon:** All right. So the Ministry of Digital Transformation would have placed a keen focus on cybersecurity, in that— So we actually have a Deputy National Chief

Digital Officer whose role is cybersecurity, and the recruitment of persons for his unit is currently ongoing. Of course, I would have mentioned some of the challenges in terms of attracting and retaining talent to fill those positions. The first phase of the recruitment would not have been thoroughly successful in terms of getting persons to assume, so this is something that we would have to re-embark to get personnel to be employed at the Ministry under our Deputy National Chief Digital Officer for cybersecurity.

**Mr. Mark:** In terms of a fraud policy—I know you are a young Ministry, have you looked at formulating a fraud policy, or do you have in existence a fraud policy at this material time?

**Mr. Belfon:** So, yes. When you look at—and I would like to make a point here in terms of fraud, there are applicable processes within the public sector that deal with the identification of compliance with fraudulent processes as they may occur, and what you action, as it were, when it happens, or if it should happen. The essence of fraud prevention is actually baked into a lot of the processes for the submission of project briefs, project management oversight, management touch point meetings, the reporting of project spends, expenditure, itemized cost, materials, asset registers being available. All of these things are actually done at every level and it is reported on.

There is also the external factor of the internal—the Auditor General to look at the records of particular Ministries, as they so choose, to assess whether or not that level of fraud prevention is present and report on same, and make recommendations to strengthen the internal controls against fraud. So it is, by and large, an inherent part of the public sector in terms of the prevention of fraud.

**Mr. Mark:** So the Ministries themselves do not really actively promote fraud polices?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes.

**Mr. Mark:** Is that what you are saying?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes, they do. It is inherent in every process, as I would have mentioned, from reporting the asset management, your asset register, your project expenditure, your cost control, your project briefs, request for approvals; all of these things, so it is native to any Ministry.

**Mr. Mark:** Yeah. I think—just let me be simple and straightforward and clear. Can you tell this Committee if, in the Ministry of Digital Transformation, there exists a fraud

policy? That is what I want to find out. Is there a fraud policy? That is all.

**Mr. Belfon:** So I would tell you—

**Mr. Mark:** Yes or no?

**Mr. Belfon:** No.

**Mr. Mark:** Well, that is all I want to find out. Now, can you tell us why you do not have one and how soon you are going to develop one?

**Mr. Belfon:** Right. So this is something that is an ongoing process. Like I would have mentioned, it is inherent in a lot of processes to be anti-fraud. Right? The documentation of the actions is something that will be addressed throughout the early part of 2024 to ensure that that is there. It is also the responsibility of the accounting officer to make sure that there is not fraud or there are applicable policies available to prevent same, which there are. It is simply a matter of documenting in a physical document.

**Mr. Mark:** Can you give this Committee, and through the Chairman, a time frame for the foundation and operationalization of a fraud police in the Ministry?

**Mr. Belfon:** Sure. I can commit to doing that before the end of the first half of the year.

**Mr. Mark:** Thank you.

**Mr. Belfon:** Yeah.

**Mr. Mark:** Now, I would also like to find out, Mr. Belfon, whether there is an internal auditor in the Ministry of Digital Transformation as we speak.

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes, there is.

**Mr. Mark:** Okay. Do you have a unit or do you just have an auditor?

**Mr. Belfon:** So we just have an Auditor II. The position of Auditor I and the Auditor Assistant, as well as the Clerk Typist assigned to the internal audit function, is currently vacant. One person was appointed for the Auditor I position, but subsequently would not have accepted the appointment.

**Mr. Mark:** Okay. And the final question, Madam Chair, is this—I think my colleague, hon. Mitchell, had raised an issue of fees; I think that came for iGovTT, so may I address this to Ms. Ferreira. Ms. Ferreira, can you tell me if iGovTT has received Cabinet blessings and approval via policy for iGovTT to charge a fee for project, projects or assistance being granted by iGovTT to other Ministries, as was said earlier, to maybe acquire or help them secure laptops, as example—just as an example, or is that an

internally-driven policy decision by iGovTT? That is the point I would like to clarify.

**Ms. Ferreira:** Member, this was incorporated in inception. We never went forward with doing anything, but it is a more recent thing that we have started to do.

**Mr. Mark:** No. All I am asking is that—

**Ms. Ferreira:** [*Inaudible*]*—charging fees.*

**Mr. Mark:**—seeing that you are a state enterprise and you are governed by—or guided by a performance manual, I am just asking whether, from a policy perspective, whether that matter of charging fees would have been—at least from a courtesy point of view because you are a company, and you may have that right to operate freely, but because you are a state-owned entity, you are before this body today, so I am just asking whether courtesy did not require iGovTT to inform the Government through the Minister so it could be taken to Cabinet that you wish to pursue a policy to charge fees?—and if it is 3 per cent, 4 per cent, 5 per cent, at least the Cabinet would be aware, whether they approve, they do not approve, you are a company incorporated under law so you might have some flexibility. But I am just asking whether any decision was taken or any consideration given to informing the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago that that was a course of action that was being pursued by iGovTT.

**Ms. Ferreira:** Thank you, member. I do believe that this would probably have go through our board, but I would like to give an accurate position in writing to you.

**Mr. Mark:** I think that would be very useful so that the Chairman and the Committee would be guided accordingly. Madam Chair, thank you very much.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. So thank you, member Mark. Okay. So I just wanted to ask, PS, Mrs. Francis-Scott had indicated that you all recently got some allocations for your—notification of allocations for your PSIP, so we dealt a lot with their access centres, I just wanted to find out, the TV White Space deployment, I think that should have been completed in May.

**Mr. Belfon:** Yeah. Thanks, Chair, for the question. I think in terms of the TV White Space, we would have looked at some project optimization in terms of the project portfolio, and that is something that is currently on hold, simply because of the—

**Madam Chairman:** Excuse me, something that is currently?

**Mr. Belfon:** Currently on hold, because there is the emergence of alternative solutions

that can be utilized, one being the emergence of low earth orbit operators, such as Starlink and Neptune Communications within Trinidad and Tobago, that may be able to provide the sort of coverage and connectivity that we require in some of those geographically far-flung area at possibly lower cost and value for money.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So could you give us an idea of when a determination would be made which you all will be proceeding?

**Mr. Belfon:** So in terms of our project review, quite possibly at our next project and executive team meeting, or executive council meeting, we would seek to produce our final decision on same.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Thank you. I also wanted to find out about the progress on your digital end.

**Mr. Belfon:** All right. So Digital Skills Programme, that is currently in progress. We would have brought on digital literacy experts in terms of e-learning programmes, the production of short but targeted quizzes, digital literacy applications. We would have looked at upskilling via our collaborations with WeLearnTT, as well as YTEPP and Coursera, Lennox Foundation, and Google. So that is an ongoing process.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, because I think we had spoken about some aspects of it—

**Mr. Belfon:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:**—which I expect you were saying that you could access in the access centres, and so on.

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes. And at home as well.

**Madam Chairman:** And at home?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes. So, does this project come to an end or it is going to be an ongoing project?—because based on what I am seeing here, there is a completion date of December 24, unless I am—

**Mr. Belfon:** No. No. So it is an ongoing process because digital skills and the retraining and upskilling required for some of the jobs of tomorrow, and then the technical competency that we seek to increase within society, is something that would be ongoing. So it is not going to be—even though there is an end, there is an end for the fiscal, but it does not mean that the programme itself would end.



**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, one last thing just so that I would understand, when we say, “the end for the fiscal”, that would not be December 24?

**Mr. Belfon:** No. It would be September 2024, in terms of our fiscal.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Belfon:** But the programme would run to December—

**Madam Chairman:** Into the other fiscal and end in December—

**Mr. Belfon:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:**—and a new programme will then arise.

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** All right. Okay. Thank you very much. Now, I just wanted to follow on the conversation with member Mark and the fraud policy, and so, and your statement about the role of the accounting officer. So in terms of the question we had asked with respect to who would be responsible for the prevention, detection and so of fraud in your Ministry? I take it from your answers, it would be you, the accounting officer?

**Mr. Belfon:** Yeah. Simply because of the accounting of public expenditure, and that is why I brought up the element of it being inherent in all of our processes within projects and project cost reporting, as well as the safeguarding of assets; the accounting officer, being the custodian of such items on behalf of. So that is a critical component. It is practised in terms of anti-fraud and fraud-prevention measures. So in terms of all the documents against and having accurate inventories, all of these things, reporting on itemized cost within projects, looking at cost variances, standard cost accounting, that is actually done, but if, and as, you know, pointed out, the written form, which is the fraud policy, that is something that could be done and submitted.

**5.20 p.m.**

**Madam Chairman:** Alright so, let me ask this, in terms of—I would be correct then in concluding that since you have been PS, there have been no instances of fraud in the projects being administered by your Ministry?

**Mr. Belfon:** None whatsoever.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. Now, I want to find out in terms of—you have told me there are processes and I like that, so do you receive weekly updates of the decision record logs and change request logs?

**Mr. Belfon:** So yes, and of course, all of these things because we established a baseline very early on within the project conceptualization, the cost variance rarely ever changes, from what is anticipated to what is actually spent. In some instances and in relation to spend, many of our projects because they utilize open source software, they would incur a zero cost. So, in terms of tracking the progress of some of these projects, that actual spend is not really a true indicator of how far we have reached, but rather the efforts that we have made and articulated during the course of the hearing.

**Madam Chairman:** And in terms of this, I know you have indicated that your Internal Audit Unit is not fully staffed, has that affected the operations of the internal audit?

**Mr. Belfon:** To some extent, even though I would have received the audit work programme for this year and subsequent years that I have been there. The elements of auditing project expenditure would require additional personnel to be able to undertake the work, but not only the personnel but the relevant skill sets. When you look at computer-based auditing, especially for technical projects like these, and as well as forensic accounting, which may not be necessarily present in internal auditors within the public sector or the internal audit but would be present with external agencies.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so, and that is what I was going to ask, for those deficiencies, how do you make up for that, do you employ external auditors?

**Mr. Belfon:** So, there are a couple of ways to go about that because we are looking at “least cost” but at the same time the developmental path for internal audit, which is to access any additional training that may be available from the Public Service Academy and also sending them to do private certifications, one in particular being a Certified Information Systems Auditor specialization. This conversation would have been had with the internal audit in terms of their training programme and certification programme for 2024 to address the deficiency of having those skill sets present at the MDT.

**Madam Chairman:** That is providing they get staff?

**Mr. Belfon:** So, yes, and also training the current auditor. So taking on an extra workload, but the representations have been made to the Service Commissions to address

the issue of staffing, right, and it has in fact been positive, so I do expect that it will be addressed throughout the—well, within the first part of 2024.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, is there any other staff available within your Ministry to train in the audit function?

**Mr. Belfon:** Not from that aspect, because when you also look at fraud prevention, you look at separation of duties. So they really have to come from within the audit function, and of course, the audit function reports directly to the PS or the Accounting Officer. So, you want a person who has been not “sullied” I should say, with any other facet of the operations to come in and then pronounce upon the veracity of statements being presented or fiscal prudence as it were.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, and, has in the last year, the auditor in—because you said that you get a programme of work—I expect that the auditor in every year fulfills that programme that is set out.

**Mr. Belfon:** Yes Ma’am.

**Madam Chairman:** Has the auditor highlighted any deficiencies in procedures and functions in the last year? And if so, what steps have been taken to remedy those?

**Mr. Belfon:** Okay, so, not to any large extent in terms of the areas that would have been audited, we have not received any deficiencies across the controls for inventory, project expenditure, or actually project files, and documentation. This is something that has been ramped up because as a digital-first Ministry, I should say, the on-paper documentation is something that would have been recognized as being moderate and it has been more or less improved to being a parallel function because of the statutory obligations of keeping the appropriate records even though the digital record exists.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. And might I ask, when last was an achievement report submitted to the Ministry of Planning and Development and the Ministry of Finance?

**Mr. Belfon:** So, I can—just for inclusion, I will have, via you Chair, Strategic Intelligence Specialist answer.

**Ms. Clarke:** Hi, Chair. So, we have been very prudent in submitting our achievement reports. So we are due to submit our achievement report for January. We have not missed any reports, so I think we are pretty much up to date.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, what is the lag time? Because the—

**Ms. Clarke:** Well, the report is usually due on the 15<sup>th</sup>—

**Madam Chairman:** Of the month.

**Ms. Clarke:**—of each month.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes, of the following month?

**Ms. Clarke:**—of the following month.

**Madam Chairman:** Yes.

**Ms. Clarke:**—we have been keeping with that deadline. Only for the last two months, we had a little lag due to the workload of the project managers having to send the updates to us, but we pretty much submit on time.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so you told me the one for January will be submitted when?

**Ms. Clarke:** We are due to submit it, hopefully by the end of this week it will go out to Ministry of Planning and Development.

**Madam Chairman:** By the end of this week.

**Ms. Clarke:** Yeah.

**Madam Chairman:** And do you see this lag as a greater slippage, or are you going to be able to rectify what has been occurring in the last two months?

**Ms. Clarke:** Yes, we will be able to rectify. I think it is a matter of just following up a little more frequently with the project managers.

**Madam Chairman:** So that falls to you?

**Ms. Clarke:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So, there is an admission then that you have not been following up? Okay.

**Ms. Clarke:** No, we have weekly follow-ups, but I guess the workload on the project managers is pretty heavy due to the implementations that we are going into right now.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay. So you have everything necessary to be able to submit this achievement report—

**Ms. Clarke:** Yes.

**Madam Chairman:**—for the end—so, if there is any slippage at this stage it is you?

**Ms. Clarke:** Which does not happen.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, all right.

**Members:** [*Laughter*]

**Madam Chairman:** I love that. I love what I heard, Ms. Clarke, thank you very much. Okay, so are there any further questions? Yes, member Hislop.

**Mr. Hislop:** Last question. Madam Chair, if it is possible, and this can be done in writing. If we could get a status report of all the projects, the progression of the projects under the Ministry, digital society, digital economy, digital government, and the MDT internal project.

**Madam Chairman:** So, just let me pre-empt, we have it. We cannot read it.

**Mr. Hislop:** Well, well.

**Madam Chairman:** And I have 20/20 vision.

**Mr. Hislop:** Yeah. Which is the same thing I was sharing. We I have it here “inno” and I was trying to figure out if it is the same thing, but we cannot really figure it out. This—

**Madam Chairman:** So, not in grey ink. Not in grey ink. Not in 64 single pages and not in font 5.2.

**Mr. Belfon:** You could be well appreciative of the volume of work presented by the team, but we will try our best to have it displayed and printed or even submitted electronically to improve readability. [*Laughter*] Alright?

**Madam Chairman:** Thank you very much.

**Mr. Belfon:** You are welcome.

**Madam Chairman:** Okay, so I think now it is 5:30 p.m., it is a good time to bring the conversation to a close.

I want to thank the Permanent Secretary, the Programme Manager, the Strategic Intelligence Specialist, the Head of Finance (iGovTT), the Team Lead-Finance(iGovTT), and the Head Delivery, for attending and for this very fruitful conversation. It has been really enlightening, and we have some further questions which we will send to you in writing and Mr. PS you have given some undertakings and Ms. Programme Manager, so we will remind you of the undertakings that you have given and with a deadline for those submissions. Okay, so I want to thank you all again, reach home safely and I want to thank the members of the public and the members of the media who followed us and stayed with us. This meeting is now suspended. Pleasant evening all.

**5.31 p.m.:** *Meeting suspended.*