PAAC

PARLIAMENT
REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

INTERIM REPORT OF

THE COMMITTEE ON

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS

THIRD SESSION OF THE 11TH PARLIAMENT

INQUIRY Examination into the Processing of Payment of Pension and Gratuity to Retired Public Officers and Contracted Employees

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:

(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.*

Current membership

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	Chairman
Dr. Lackram Bodoe	Vice-Chairman
Ms. Nicole Olivierre	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	Member
Mr. Daniel Dookie	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	Member
Ms. Jennifer Raffoul	Member

Committee Staff

The current staff members serving the Committee are:

Ms. Keiba Jacob	Secretary to the Committee
Ms. Sheranne Samuel	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Brian Lucio	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Anesha James	Administrative Support

Publication

An electronic copy of this report can be found on the Parliament website using the following link:
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Date Laid in HOR: 09.11.2018 **Date Laid in Senate: 20.11.2018**

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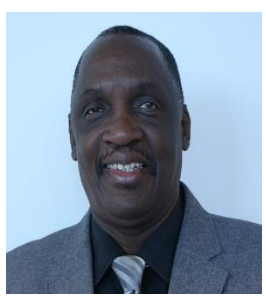

Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine
Member

Ms. Nicole Olivierre
Member

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Report of the PAAC for the Eleventh Parliament contains the details of the examination of the stakeholders on **the Processing of Payment of Pension and Gratuity to Retired Public Officers and Contracted Employees**.

The (PAAC) agreed to examine the Processing of payment of pension and gratuity to retired Public Officers and Contracted Employees to determine:

a. the reasons for the delay in the payment of pensions and gratuity to retired public servants and contracted officers;
b. whether there is appropriate forward planning for Public Servants whose retirement date is known and for contracted employees whose end-dates are known at the time of engagement;
c. whether there is efficient and effective monitoring of the processing and payment of pensions and gratuity to retired public servants and contracted officers;
d. what hindrances exist in the efficient and timely payment of pensions and gratuity to retired public servants and contracted officers;
e. what improvements can be made pertaining to the timely identification of the service records of public servants and contracted employees, including start and end dates; dates served in various Ministries and entities; periods of acting, no-pay, and relevant matters; rates of pay and other information required for the timely and accurate quantification of payment of pensions and gratuity to retired public servants and contracted employees; and
f. what recommendations can be made are for improving the timeliness and accuracy of pensions and gratuity paid to retired public servants and contracted employees

In undertaking this examination, the Committee Committee employed two (2) mechanisms: review of written submissions and a Public Hearing. The Committee focused on a review and analysis of the written submissions submitted by all stakeholders. Subsequently, the Committee conducted a Public Hearing with the following stakeholders:

- ✓ The Auditor General's Department;
- ✓ The Chief Personnel Officer, Personnel Department;

- ✓ The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance;
- ✓ The Comptroller of Accounts, Ministry of Finance;
- ✓ The Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Administration and Communications; and
- ✓ The Permanent Secretary to the Prime Minister and Head of the Public Service.

The approach adopted by the Committee took into account issues identified throughout the examination and time constraints.

The Committee extended recommendations related to the issues identified, the Observations and Recommendations are presented in Chapter 3.

1. INTRODUCTION

THE COMMITTEE

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

- examine 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.

Membership

1. In the 11th Parliament the Members of the Committee were appointed by resolutions of the House of Representatives and the Senate at sittings held on Friday November 13, 2015 and Tuesday November 17, 2015 respectively.
2. By resolution of the Senate On November 3, 2017, Ms. Jennifer Raffoul was appointed as a Member of the Committee in lieu of Mr. Dhanayshar Mahabir.
3. By resolution of the House of Representatives on November 24, 2017, Brigadier General (Ret.) Ancil Antoine was appointed as a Member of the Committee in lieu of Mr. Maxie Cuffie.
4. By resolution of the Senate on November 28, 2017 Mr. Ronald Huggins was appointed as a Member of the Committee in lieu of Ms. Allyson Baksh.
5. Mr. Ronald Huggins ceased to be a Senator with effect from September 27, 2018.

Chairman and 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. At its First Meeting held on January 27 2016, Dr. Lackram Bodoe was elected as the Vice-Chairman.

Quorum

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 December 28, 2017, it was agreed that the Committee would engage in an inquiry with stakeholders on the Processing of Payment of Pension and Gratuity to Retired Public Officers and Contracted Employees.

Review of Documents

The Committee determined the examination would begin by carrying out a survey among all Ministries and Departments in an effort to gain an appreciation of the issues affecting individual Ministries and Departments on the subject matter. Additionally, a request for public submissions was published in three daily newspapers, Parliament Channel 11 and on all of Parliaments social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram and Twitter).

Thereafter, The Committee issued requests for written responses from stakeholders to questions posed by the Committee. Questions were sent on March 22, 2018 and written responses were requested to be submitted by April 06, 2018. The written responses were requested from the following stakeholders:

- The Auditor General's Department;
- The Personnel Department;
- The Ministry of Finance; and
- The Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outline steps taken by the Committee when conducting an inquiry into an entity or issue. The following steps outline the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC:

Identification of entity to be examined;

i. Preparation of Inquiry Proposal for the selected enquiry. The Inquiry Proposal outlines:
    - Description
    - Background;
    - Overview of Expenditure
    - Rationale/Objective of Inquiry; and

- Proposed Questions.

ii. Consideration and approval of the Inquiry Proposal by the Committee and upon approval, questions were forwarded to the entity for written responses;

iii. Requests for Written Response were sent to stakeholders on March 22, 2018. Responses were received from the following stakeholders:
   - The Auditor General's Department - received on April 06, 2018 ;
   - The Personnel Department – received on April 06, 2018;
   - The Ministry of Finance – received on April 06, 2018; and
   - The Ministry of Public Administration and Communications received on April 23, 2018.

iv. Requests for written comment from the public made via Parliament's website, social media accounts, newspaper and advertisements commenced on March 27, 2018 with a deadline of April 4, 2018;

v. Circular requesting information issued to all Ministries and Departments on April 17 2018;

vi. 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;

vii. Review of the responses received and the Issues Paper by the Committee;

viii. Determination of the need for a Public Hearing based on the analysis of written submissions and feedback from the public. 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.

ix. The Public Hearing was held on Wednesday April 25, 2018 at which the Committee conducted a panel examination with stakeholders.

x. Letters requesting additional information from stakeholders were issued on May 04, 2018 with a deadline of May 18, 2018.

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

xii. Receive Ministerial Responses. Review responses.

xiii. Engage in Follow-up.

3. ISSUES, OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Unit I: Processing of Payment of Pension and Gratuity to Retired Public

ISSUES

1. **Non-adherence to Sections 33 (1) and (2) of the Civil Service Regulations**

   Written and oral evidence indicated that Accounting Officers of Ministries and Departments were not adhering to Section 33 (1) of the Civil Service Regulations. The Section mandates that;

   "The computation and authorisation of pensions and gratuities of persons whose retirement from the Civil Service is known to be impending shall be treated as urgent matters of high priority."

   Oral submissions from stakeholders suggested that the computation and authorisation of pensions and gratuities were treated as urgent matters of high priority but the Committee noted that evidence suggested otherwise. Evidence received from the public highlighted several instances in which retired Public Officers waited in excess of two (2) years to receive their pension, an obligation which is lawfully due by the date of retirement.

   In response to the lengthy delay in the processing of pension for Public Officers, the Comptroller of Accounts indicated that Ministries and Departments frequently submitted incomplete or incorrect information to the Treasury Division. In such situations, a memorandum would be done and sent to the Ministry/Department requesting additional information, amendments or further clarification. The Committee noted that this represented a major kink in the process whereby it may take in excess of three months from the issuance of the memorandum, to when feedback is received on same.

   The practice of Ministries and Departments submitting incorrect and incomplete information with respect to the pension records of retiring Public Officers is contrary to Section 33 (2) of the Civil Service Regulations, which states that;

"Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments shall ensure that particulars of service and pay of all officers whose retirement is known to be imminent are furnished accurately to the Comptroller (Financial and Accounting Administration) not less than three calendar months before the date on which the officers concerned are due to retire, in order to enable the computation and checking of pensions, retiring allowances and gratuities to be completed by the Comptroller and the Auditor General and submitted for authorisation before the date on which the officer's retirement from the Service is due to take effect."

This prompted the Committee to further examine the Civil Service Regulations to determine whether there were consequences attached for failure to adhere to the Regulations. To this end, it was noted that Section 149 (1) of the Regulations defines the misconduct as follows;

"149. (1) An officer who without reasonable excuse does an act which—

(a) amounts to failure to perform any required lawful duty in a proper manner;

(b) contravenes any of the Regulations;

(c) contravenes any law relating to the performance of the duties of his office; or

(d) is otherwise prejudicial to the efficient conduct of the Service or tends to bring the Service into disrepute,

commits an act of misconduct."

Therefore, it can be logically concluded that Accounting Officers and Heads of Departments who oversaw and continue to oversee the untimely and inadequate submission and processing of pension particulars are in breach of Sections 33 (1) and (2) of the Civil Service Regulations. Furthermore, such officers can be considered to be committing acts of misconduct under the definition of same in accordance with Section 149 (1) of the Regulations.

2. **Backlog of Retired Public Officers awaiting Pension/Gratuity**

Written and oral evidence from the Treasury Division, Ministry of Finance, indicated that the backlog of retired Public Officers who were awaiting pension and gratuity was approximately nineteen hundred (1900) as at March 21, 2018.

In an effort to clear the backlog, the Treasury Division embarked upon the following initiatives:

i. The employment of retired Treasury Officers experienced in pension computation on short term contract;

ii. A draft Note to Cabinet to increase the staffing in the Pensions Management Branch; and

iii. Training for Ministries/Departments personnel on the necessary requirements for the preparation of pension and gratuities. This was done on 26th and 27th March, 2018 for all Ministries and Departments. Focus was placed on the following areas:

    a) Faster response to queries;
    b) Submission of accurate records;
    c) Submission of all relevant documents; and
    d) Timely submission of all documents.

Additional evidence indicated that the Treasury Division's draft Note to Cabinet to increase the staffing in the Pensions Management Branch was submitted to Cabinet for approval.

3. **Determination of Increments**

Written evidence highlighted the role of the Personnel Department in the processing of the payment of pension and gratuity to retired Public Officers. Part II of the Civil Service Regulations, Chapter 23:01 provides rules and regulations for the determination of increments to Public Officers. Additionally, guidelines are provided by the Personnel Department in the form of a Circular Memoranda on the determination of increments and incremental dates for persons who hold temporary, permanent and acting appointments and who are promoted or seconded to offices in the Public Service.

On the basis of information provided, the Personnel Department advises Ministries and Departments on complex matters relating to increments and incremental dates on promotion, acting and secondment of officers in the Civil Service and Statutory Authorities, subject to the Statutory Authorities Act, Chapter 24:01 and the Tobago House of Assembly.

However, the delay in determining increments owed to Public Officers significantly contributed to the backlog. The Personnel Department indicated that some of the challenges faced in determining increments were:

i. Insufficient and/or inadequate information received from Ministries and Departments;
ii. Need to request additional information or seek further clarification from Ministries and Departments;
iii. Length of time taken by Ministries and Departments to respond to the Department's requests, i.e., slow response rate in addressing queries; and
iv. Staff shortage within the Personnel Department.

Conversely, the Committee conducted a poll across the Public Service in response to which multiple Ministries and Departments identified that the Personnel Department took too long to respond to requests, issued complex Circulars and made inconsistent rulings in determining increments.

Written evidence received from the Personnel Department indicated that the filling of core technical positions of Human Resource Advisers was a matter of urgency to enable the Department to treat with complex matters related to the determination of increments in a timely manner. The following table outlines the vacancies for the aforementioned 'core technical positions".

POSITION	NUMBER OF VACANCIES
SENIOR HUMAN RESOURCE ADVISOR	5
HUMAN RESOURCE ADVISOR III	10
HUMAN RESOURCE ADVISOR II	14
HUMAN RESOURCE ADVISOR I	10

TOTAL	39

Additional evidence indicated that a meeting was held between representatives of the Service Commissions Department and the Personnel Department on November 27, 2017 to discuss matters related to the filling of vacant positions in the Personnel Department.

Following that meeting, in March 2018, the Chief Personnel Officer submitted strategies, options and recommendations to the Service Commissions Department with regard to filling of the core technical positions and recommendations for the promotion of persons to the following positions within the Personnel Department:

i. Human Resource Adviser III - 4 persons
ii. Human Resource Adviser II - 5 persons
iii. Human Resource Adviser I – 3 persons

The Personnel Department was subsequently requested by the Service Commissions Department to submit information pertaining to qualifications and performance appraisals in respect of the above-mentioned officers, which was provided.

4. Role of the Auditor General

The Auditor General submitted that the role of the Auditor General's Department in the processing of pensions and gratuity to Public Officers is defined in the following legislation:

i. Civil Service Act – Chapter 23:01 Regulation 33(2)
ii. Education Act – Chapter 39:02 Section 15
iii. Police Service Act – Chapter 15:01 Section 183 (20)
iv. Fire Service Act – Chapter 35"50 section 43 (2)
v. Prison Service Act – Chapter 13:02
vi. Defence Force Act – Chapter 14:01
vii. Municipal Corporations (Pensions) Act – Chapter 25:05
viii. Industrial Court 88:01

ix. Parliament Legislative Act 2:03.

However, approximately two thousand files go directly to the Auditor General's Department annually from the Defence Force, Fire Service, Prison Service and Police Service, without having gone through the Treasury Division. The Auditor General's Department submitted that this practice gives to it a human resource function which is contrary to its legislative mandate and was of the view that the process needed to be rectified. The Committee noted that the Auditor General's Department has not demonstrated that it has not taken any steps to address the issue.

5. Business Process Management (BPM) Initiative

The Committee learnt that in 2015, the then Ministry of Public Administration and Communications (MPAC), in partnership with Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG) conducted a training exercise for the Business Process Management initiative. The BPM initiative, aimed at encouraging and supporting Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) to use BPM to achieve responsive, effective, and accountable service delivery. Part of the training was focused on improving the efficiency in the processing of pensions in the Public Service. One hundred and ninety-two (192) officers were trained in the BPM Methodology by KPMG with thirty (30) officers from the cluster group trained in the payment of pensions for Public Officers.

The Committee noted that while the Ministry intended to institutionalise the BPM initiative across the Public Service as a tool for addressing challenges in the delivery of quality services to customers, active steps were not taken since 2015 to implement the initiative. To this end, the Committee requested that the MPAC submit timelines for the implementation of the BPM initiative (see Appendix I). According to the schedule, the following tasks were expected to be completed by the third quarter of 2018 (July-September 30, 2018):

i. Approval received from Executive;

ii. Prepare Cabinet Note;

iii. Submit Cabinet Note to Executive for approval; and

iv. Draft Change Management Plan / Communication Plan.

Additionally, the following tasks were expected to be completed by the fourth quarter of 2018 (October-December 31, 2018):

i. Change Management / Communication Plan reviewed and approved by Executive;
ii. Develop Material for Executive Sensitisation Sessions;
iii. Conduct Executive Sensitisation Sessions – Permanent Secretaries and Deputy Permanent Secretaries Board Meetings and Human Resources Forum

6. Development and Implementation of a Comprehensive Proposal

The Committee learnt that the MPA developed a comprehensive proposal for improving the administration of the Pension and Leave Process in the Trinidad and Tobago Public Service. While it was noted that the proposal was still in its early stages, the Committee was able to elicit timelines for the implementation of the proposal (see Appendix III).

According to the schedule, the following tasks were expected to be completed by the third quarter of 2018 (July-September 30, 2018):

i. Provide assistance to Treasury Division with implementation of Pension and Leave (P&L) Module of PeopleSoft;
ii. Project Charter for implementation of P&L Module of PeopleSoft;
iii. Develop Logical Framework;
iv. Develop Inputs for Functional and Technical Requirements;
v. Develop Request for Information (RFI) and invite submission;
vi. Evaluate submissions;
vii. Prepare Cabinet Note to focus on approval for P&L module of PeopleSoft, and inform Cabinet of areas for P&L administrative reform;
viii. Submit Cabinet Note to Executive for approval; and
ix. Approval received from Executive.

In an effort to ascertain whether the P&L module of PeopleSoft was compatible with IhRIS, the Committee decided to solicit further evidence from the Ministry of Public Administration. The evidence indicated that the P&L module was in fact compatible with

IhRIS. Additionally, Pension Administration module will assist in the processing of Pensions and Gratuities by facilitating:

- The storage and maintenance of all pension data in one place. When integrated with PeopleSoft Human Resources, Payroll, and Benefits Administration, all applications work together for maximum efficiency of time and resources.
- The storage of effective-dated employment history to track jobs, employment status, salaried or hourly status, union affiliation, and more.
- The access of individual historical earnings, hours, and pension contribution data; consolidate data; or keep per-period history.
- The tracking of all payees i.e., retirees, beneficiaries in one database.
- The calculation of benefits for all types of pension plans; for all optional forms of payment; and for past, present, or future dates.
- The production of worksheets with estimates and accrued benefit information for plan participants.

The Committee noted that a cost-benefit analysis was not conducted for the implementation of this module. However, the MPA indicated that it assisted the Treasury Division in preparing a Request for Information (RFI) to obtain information and costing relative to the implementation of the PeopleSoft Enterprise Pension Administration Software

Unit II: Processing of Payment of Gratuity to Contracted Employees

ISSUES

1. **Backlog in the Processing of Gratuity for Contract Employees**

   Written and oral evidence indicated that there were approximately three hundred (300) Contract Employees awaiting their gratuity. Additionally, the Committee carried out a survey across Ministries and Departments in an effort to ascertain the size of the back-log as at December 2018. From the responses, it was noted that:

   i. Approximately 4722 Contract Employees were employed of which 1505 contracts were expiring in 2018 or 32% of contracts.

   Therefore, assuming that the current backlog remains constant at 300 Contracted Employees, by December 2018, the backlog would increase to approximately 1805 Contracted Employees. As was previously indicated under Unit I, Issue 1, in an effort to clear the backlog, the Treasury Division embarked upon the identical initiatives.

   Additionally, written and oral evidence received from the Personnel Department indicated that there were approximately one thousand and nine hundred (1,900) Contract Employees without approved terms and conditions. In an effort to reduce the number of Contract Employees working without approved terms and conditions, the Department has embarked upon a standardisation exercise. This exercise was expected to drastically reduce the number of Contracted Employees working without approved terms and conditions.

2. **Decentralisation**

   Written and oral evidence received from the Ministry of Finance indicated that in an attempt to ensure the processing of pensions for Contract Employees was seamless, the Ministry of Finance embarked upon an initiative to decentralise the process. This meant that Ministries and Departments would have the authority to process and pay all contract staff. To this end, the Ministry of Finance indicated that steps were being taken to implement this initiative.

The Treasury Division was adamant that given the simplicity of the formula for calculating contract gratuity, (gross salary for contract period x 20% = gratuity payable) Ministries and Departments should have the authority to process and pay contract staff. The Committee therefore sought clarification in an effort to quantify the impact of decentralisation on the Treasury Division. The additional evidence indicated that the implementation of the initiative would result in the checking of an additional 15-21 files per day for the completeness and accuracy of Pension and Leave Records.

The Committee noted that a feasibility study was not conducted for the decentralization initiative. However, in its stead, the following steps were taken to determine the feasibility of the initiative:

- A review was done on the processes to determine how it can be re-engineered to improve efficiencies;
- Consultations were held with several stakeholders, including some of the Ministries and Departments; and
- Legal advice from the Treasury Solicitor was sought to establish whether there were any legal barriers to hinder the decentralisation of contract gratuity payments.

Additional evidence also indicated that the Treasury Solicitor advised the Ministry of Finance that no requirement was found in the Exchequer and Audit Act and the Pensions Act for the Comptroller of Accounts to be involved in the process for the payment of contract gratuities, bearing in mind that contract arrangements would not have been a practice when the legislation and Financial Regulations were formulated. However, the Treasury Solicitor further advised that in keeping with the general tone of the Financial Regulations, the Comptroller of Accounts may give consideration to some involvement in the process to ensure records are true and correct.

Recommendations:

- ***The Ministry of Finance shall create a comprehensive strategy which must include short-term, medium-term and long-term measures to address all issues relating to the timely payment of pension and gratuity to Public Officers and Contracted Employees; and***
- ***The Ministry of Finance shall devise a mechanism within the existing legislative framework to hold Accounting Officers liable for contravening Sections 33 (1) and (2) of the Civil Service Regulations. This Ministerial Response must also include the Ministry's proposed sanctions for the aforementioned Accounting Officers.***
- ***The matters above shall be submitted to Parliament within sixty days (60) of the laying of this report,***

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

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George
Chairman

Dr. Lackram Bodoe
Vice-Chairman

Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy
Member

Ms. Nicole Olivierre
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APPENDIX I

The Inquiry Process

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 outlines the Inquiry process followed by the PAAC:

xiv. Identification of entity to be examined;

xv. Preparation of Inquiry Proposal for the selected entity. The Inquiry Proposal outlines:

- Description
- Background;
- Overview of Expenditure
- Rationale/Objective of Inquiry; and
- Proposed Questions.

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

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

xviii. 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;

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

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

xxi. 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:

xxii. the Committee believes the issues have little public interest; or

xxiii. the Committee believes that the written responses provided are sufficient and no further explanation is necessary.

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

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

APPENDIX II

Timeline for the Implementation of the Comprehensive Proposal

IMPROVING THE PENSION AND LEAVE SYSTEM IN THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO PUBLIC SERVICE

ACTIVITY SCHEDULE (HIGH LEVEL)

Activity Area	Task	Period (Calendar)
Pension and Leave (P&L) Proposal [1]	• Develop P&L Proposal • Finalise Draft P&L Proposal and submit to Executive for Approval • Approval Received from Executive	Q1, 2017 Q1, 2017 -
P&L Module of PeopleSoft	• Provide assistance to Treasury Div. with implementation of P&L Module of PeopleSoft • Project Charter for implementation of P&L Module of PeopleSoft • Develop Logical Framework • Develop Inputs for Functional and Technical Requirements • Develop Request for Information (RFI) & invite submission • Evaluate submissions	Q1, 2018 & continuing Q1, 2018 Q1, 2018 Q2, 2018 Q2, 2018 Q2, 2018
Cabinet Note	• Prepare Cabinet Note to focus on approval for P&L module of PeopleSoft, and inform Cabinet of areas for P&L administrative reform • Submit Cabinet Note to Executive for approval • Approval Received from Executive • Submit Note to Cabinet for approval • Cabinet Approval Received	Q3, 2018 Q3, 2018 Q3, 2018 Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018
Hire Consultant	• Develop Request for Proposal (RFP) and invite tenders • Convene Committee to evaluate tenders • Evaluate tenders and select consultant • Prepare Note for Cabinet	Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018
Governance Structure	• Develop Governance Structure • Develop Terms of Reference for Groups in Governance Structure • Convene Meetings at various Governance Levels	Q2, 2018 Q2, 2018 Q3, 2018

[1] This Report was developed as a comprehensive approach to improving the administration of pension & leave in the Public Service. Subsequent to the development of this Report, MPAC was approached for assistance by Treasury Division in December 2017 regarding the implementation of the P&L People Soft module. A Committee was established in January 2018 where a collaborative approach was undertaken, comprising an IT platform containing existing documents, inclusive of this report, for the group to collaborate on this matter.

Activity Area	Task	Period (Calendar)
Correspondence to MDAs	• Draft Correspondence inviting participation of MDAs • Submit Correspondence for Executive Approval and Signature • Signed Correspondence received from Executive Correspondence despatched	Q2, 2018 Q2, 2018 Q2, 2018
Executive Sensitisation Sessions	• Develop Material for Executive Sensitisation Sessions • Invite Officials to Executive Sensitisation Sessions • Conduct Executive Sensitisation Sessions	Q3, 2018 Q3, 2018 Q3, 2018
Engagement Session with MDAs participating in the P&L Initiative	• Develop Material for Engagement Sessions • Host Engagement Sessions	Q3, 2018 Q3, 2018
Training and Development Workshops incorporating BPM Methodologies	• Hold Meetings with PSA to outline training requirements • Training Material developed by PSA • Training Material reviewed and finalised • Invite Ministry Teams to Training Workshops • Conduct Workshops • Perform Assessment of Participants	Q2, 2018 Q3, 2018 Q3, 2018 Q3, 2018 Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018
Policies and Procedures	• Hold meetings with officers involved in P&L processes • Identify redundant P&L processes for elimination • Develop and implement standardised approach to P&L • Develop P&L Handbook with procedures/guidelines	Q3, 2018 Q3, 2018 Q4, 2018 Q1, 2019
Strategic Human Resources Management	• Identify and implement procedures for effective succession planning • Work with HR Depts and Audit Units to develop and implement system for comprehensive checks of documents for P&L processing • Work with HR Depts and Treasury Dept. to develop a more simplified approach to P&L computation	Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018 Q1, 2019

Activity Area	Task	Period (Calendar)
Organisation Development	• Determination by PMCD of most effective placement of P&L Units within MDA organisational structures • Development of standardised P&L Unit structures by PMCD • Staffing of P&L Units within MDAs	Q1, 2019 Q1, 2019 Q2, 2019 and continuing
Customer Service	• Develop and Implement Complaints System within MDAs to treat with P&L matters • Develop and Implement centralised Complaints System within the Treasury Division	Q1, 2019 Q2, 2019
Change Management Plan	• Draft Change Management Plan • Change Management Plan reviewed & approved by Executive • Develop Change Management Strategy documents • Implement Change activities	Q3, 2018 Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018 and ongoing
Monitoring and Evaluation	• Develop M&E Framework • Develop M&E Templates • Conduct M&E activities • Prepare M&E Reports	Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018 Q4, 2018 & ongoing Q1, 2019 & ongoing
Annual Report	• Draft Annual Report on the P&L Initiative • Finalise draft Annual Report and submit • Annual Report approved by Executive	Q2, 2019 Q2, 2019 Q3, 2019
Independent Evaluation	• Develop ToR and RFP for Evaluation Consultancy • Send out RFP for Evaluation Consultancy • Evaluate Proposals Received • Engage Consultant	Q2, 2020 Q3, 2020 Q3, 2020 Q4, 2020

APPENDIX III

Minutes of Meetings

THE PUBLIC ADMINSTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE – THIRD SESSION, ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT

MINUTES OF THE THIRTY-FOURTH MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY APRIL 25, 2018 AT 2:18 P.M.IN THE ARNOLD THOMASOS (EAST) MEETING ROOM, LEVEL 6 AND THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, TOWER D, OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, 1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN.

Present were:

Mrs. Bridgid Mary Annisette-George	-	Chairman
Mr. Wade Mark	-	Member
Mr. Daniel Dookie	-	Member

Ms. Keiba Jacob	-	Procedural Clerk
Mr. Brian Lucio	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Rachel Nunes	-	Graduate Research Assistant

Absent were:

Dr. Lackram Bodoe	-	Vice-Chairman (Excused)
Ms. Nicole Olivierre	-	Member (Excused)
Ms. Jennifer Raffoul	-	Member (Excused)
Mr. Ronald Huggins	-	Member (Excused)
Mr. Clarence Rambharat	-	Member (Excused)
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member (Excused)
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine	-	Member (Excused)

<u>EXAMINATION OF RELEVANT STAKEHOLDERS – PROCESSING OF PAYMENT OF PENSIONS AND GRATUITY TO RETIRED PUBLIC SERVANTS AND CONTRACTED EMPLOYEES</u>

5.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 2:59 p.m., in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor.

5.2 The following officials joined the meeting:

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Ms. Michelle Durham- Kissoon - Permanent Secretary

Ms. Catherine Laban	-	Comptroller of Accounts
Mrs. Vashti Maharaj	-	Treasury Director, Pensions

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND COMMUNICATION

Mr. Claudelle McKellar	-	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Mrs. Laura Daniel	-	Human Resource Director

AUDITOR GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Ms. Lorelly Pujadas	-	Deputy Auditor General
Mrs. June Belle	-	Director, Human Resource Services
Ms. Kissundai Rampersad	-	Audit Executive I, Pension Unit
Ms. Devika Sanka	-	Audit Examiner II, Pension Unit
Ms. Nicole Cockburn	-	Legal Officer

PERSONNEL DEPARTMENT

Ms. Angela Sinaswee- Gervias	-	Chief Personnel Officer
Ms. Juliette Gonzales	-	Director (Ag.) Human Resource Management

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Maurice Suite	-	Permanent Secretary

5.3 The Chairman welcomed the officials, members of the media and the public.

5.4 The Chairman outlined the mandate of the Committee and the purpose of the hearing. Introductions were then exchanged.

5.5 The following issues arose from the examination into the Processing of Payment of Pensions and Gratuity to retired Public Servants and Contracted Employees:

Processing of Payment of Pension and Gratuity to Retired Public Officers

1. The role of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications was to provide support to Ministries and Departments as a means of ensuring that they are efficient in their processes;

2. The role of the Ministry of the Ministry of Finance in processing the payment of pension and gratuity to retired public officers;
3. The role of the Office of the Prime Minister was to be a facilitator in the processing of payment of pension and gratuity to retired public officers;
4. The role of the Auditor General's Department was to be a pre-verification check in the processing of payment of pension and gratuity to retired public officers;
5. The role of the Treasury Division was to be a pre-verification check in the processing of payment of pension and gratuity to retired public officers;
6. All Ministries and Departments were charged with the responsibility for Section 33 (1) of the Civil Service Regulations;
7. The initiatives being undertaken by the Comptroller of Accounts to shorten the amount of time it takes to compute and verify pension and gratuity at Treasury Division;
8. The lack of compliance among Ministries and Departments in submitting pension and leave records to the Treasury Division in a timely manner;
9. The role of the Office of the Prime Minister in ensuring that there is compliance among Ministries and Departments;
10. The timeframe for the computation of pension and leave records was 4 – 6 months;
11. The ideal timeframe for the computation of pension and leave records should have been 2 – 4 weeks;
12. There were approximately 1900 retired Public Officers awaiting their pension and gratuity;
13. The feasibility in establishing an electronic system to track the progress of an individual's file within the process for the payment of pension and gratuity;
14. There were efforts made for Pension Reform in 2010, since then, no other efforts have been made;
15. The Ministry of Public Administration and Communication (MPAC) partnered with KPMG in 2015 to train Public Officers and Contracted Employees in Business Process Management (BPM) to increase efficiency in the Public Service;

16. MPAC intended to institutionalise BPM across the Public Service;
17. MPAC did not have any timelines for the institutionalisation of BPM across the Public Service;
18. The delay on the part of the Personnel Department in determining increments to Public Officers;
19. The MPAC's development of a comprehensive proposal for improving the administration of the Pension and Leave process;
20. The feasibility of implementing an interim pension; and
21. The collaboration between the Treasury Division and the Registrar General to eliminate the requirement of providing a life certificate to the Treasury Division in order to receive one's pension/gratuity.

Processing of Payment of Gratuity to Contract Employees

1. The role of the Personnel Department was to finalise the terms and conditions of all Contract Employees;
2. The existence of a Circulating Personal File;
3. The reasons for the delay in processing gratuity owed to Contract Employees;
4. The proposal to increase staffing at the Comptroller of Accounts;
5. There were approximately 1900 Contract Employees without approved terms and conditions;
6. The initiatives being undertaken by the personnel Department to clear the back log of persons without approved terms and conditions;
7. The number of instances in which the Personnel Department were brought before the Industrial Court concerning terms and conditions;
8. The proposed decentralization of paying gratuity; and
9. The impact of decentralization on the operations of the Treasury Division.

5.6 The Chairman thanked officials for attending and they were excused.

[Please see the verbatim notes for the detailed oral submission of the witnesses]

SUSPENSION

6.1 At 5:18 p.m., the Chairman suspended the *public* meeting to resume *in camera* for a post-hearing discussion *w*ith Members only.

RESUMPTION

7.1 At 5:19 p.m. the Chairman resumed the meeting *in camera*.

POST-HEARING DISCUSSION

8.1 The Chairman sought Members' views on the public hearing.

8.2 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to the Ministry of Finance, Personnel Department and the Ministry of Public Administration And Communication. [**Please see Appendix 1**]

ADJOURNMENT

9.1 The Chairman indicated that the Committee's next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday May 09, 2018 at 1:30 p.m., when the Committee would continue its inquiry into the Administration of Special Healthcare Programmes in Trinidad and Tobago.

9.2 There being no other business, the Chairman thanked Members for their attendance and the meeting was adjourned.

9.3 The adjournment was taken at 5:25 p.m.

We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

May 07, 2018

APPENDIX 1

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REQUESTED

RE PROCESSING OF PAYMENT OF PENSIONS AND GRATUITY TO RETIRED PUBLIC SERVANTS AND CONTRACTED EMPLOYEES

Ministry of Finance

1. Provide a breakdown by Ministry and Department, all Public Officers who are retiring by December 30, 2018 including but not limited to:
   (a) Teachers;
   (b) Police Officers;
   (c) Prison Service;
   (d) Fire Service; and
   (e) all other Members of the Defense Force.
2. Provide a status update on the interim pension initiative by May 31, 2018.
3. According to page 5 of the Ministry of Finance's response, several initiatives geared towards clearing the backlog were identified:
   (a) Where are the retired Treasury Officers who were hired on short-term contract assigned?
   (b) What is the status of the draft Note to Cabinet to increase the staffing in the Pensions Management Branch?
4. The Ministry of Finance indicated that the IHRIS system is being upgraded and is scheduled to be completed by September 2018.
   (a) Describe the upgrades being made to the IHRIS System?
   (b) How long has this initiative commenced?
5. The Ministry of Finance indicated on page 3 of their submission that Public Officers have the option to determine whether they would like to receive an unreduced pension or a reduced pension and gratuity.
   (a) If a Public Officer does not indicate which he would like to receive, does this hinder the processing of his file?
   (b) If yes, are Public Officers made aware of this?

6. In relation to the Ministry's initiative to decentralise the payment of gratuity to Contract Employees to the relevant Ministry/ Department, quantify how this initiative will affect the Treasury Division (eg. man hours gained, staff that can be reassigned).

Personnel Department

1. The Department indicated that as a matter of urgency, vacant positions such as the core technical positions of Human Resource Advisers must be filled so that the Department will be able to treat with complex matters related to the determination of increments in a timely manner.
    a. What is the status of the filling of the vacant core technical positions?

Ministry of Public Administration and Communications

1. Kindly submit the Ministry's plan (inclusive of timelines) for the implementation of the Business Process Management Model across the Public Service.

2. Provide the timelines for the approval and implementation of a comprehensive proposal to improve the administration of the pension process.

Appendix IV

Verbatim

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE TWENTY-SECOND PUBLIC MEETING OF THE PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE, HELD IN THE ARNOLD THOMASOS (EAST), (IN CAMERA), AND THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZZANINE FLOOR, (IN PUBLIC), OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, TOWER D, THE PORT OF SPAIN INTERNATIONAL WATERFRONT CENTRE, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON WEDNESDAY, APRIL 25, 2018, AT 2.59 P.M.

PRESENT

Mrs. Bridgid Annisette-George	Chairman
Mr. Daniel Dookie	Member
Mr. Wade Mark	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob	Secretary
Mr. Brian Lucio	Research Officer
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Research Officer

ABSENT

Mr. Clarence Rambharat	Member
Mr. Ronald Huggins	Member
Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Dr. Lackram Bodoe	Vice-Chairman
Ms. Jennifer Raffoul	Member
Ms. Nicole Olivierre	Member

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Ms. Michelle Durham-Kissoon	Permanent Secretary

COMPTROLLER OF ACCOUNTS

Ms. Catherine Laban	Comptroller of Accounts
Mrs. Vashti Maharaj	Treasury Director, Pensions

AUDITOR GENERAL

Ms. Lorelly Pujadas	Deputy Auditor General
Mrs. June Belle	Director, Human Resource Services

Ms. Kissundai Rampersad Audit Executive I, Pension Unit

Ms. Devika Sanka Audit Examiner II, Pension Unit

Ms. Nicole Cockburn Legal Officer

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Claudelle Mc Kellar Permanent Secretary (Ag.)

Mrs. Laura Daniel Human Resource Director

CHIEF PERSONNEL OFFICER

Ms. Angela Sinaswee-Gervais Chief Personnel Officer

Ms. Juliette Gonzales Director (Ag.) HR Management

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Maurice Suite Permanent Secretary

Madam Chairman: Good afternoon and welcome to the officials of the Ministry of Finance, the Auditor General's Department, the Personnel Department, the Office of the Prime Minister and the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. Welcome to the members of the media and to the listening and viewing audience.

I am Brigid Annisette-George, the Chairman of the Committee of the Public Administration and Appropriation of the Parliament.

The Committee of Public Administration and Appropriations has a 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 22nd public meeting of the Public Administration and Appropriation Committee for the Eleventh Parliament is to commence its enquiry into the processing of payment of pensions and gratuities to retired public servants and contracted employees.

The Committee is desirous of hearing from the relevant stakeholders to discover further challenges being faced by the agencies involved in the process and which have influenced the process. The Committee hopes that this meeting will be fruitful and shall provide workable solutions for the improvement of the processing of payment of pensions and gratuities.

This meeting is being held in public and is being broadcast live on the Parliament's Channel 11, radio 105.5 FM and the Parliament's YouTube channel, *ParlView*. Viewers and listeners can send their comments related to today's enquiry via email to parl101@ttparliament.org, facebook.com\ttparliament and twitter@ttparliament.

I will therefore now invite the representatives from the agencies and departments present here today to introduce themselves and maybe we could start with the Auditor General's Department.

[*Introductions made*]

Ms. Pujadas: I have walked today with my team. My team is Ms. Nicole Cockburn, Senior Legal Officer. Behind me I have my Director of HR, Mrs.June Belle. I also have two of our major officers that function in our pension unit that facilitates the computations and the verification of computation for retiring officers, and they are Ms. Devika Sanka and Ms. Kissundai Rampersad. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: If I may be forgiven, I did not mention the Comptroller of Accounts, and therefore to make up for that omission, may I invite the Comptroller of Accounts and the representatives from that department to introduce themselves.

[*Introductions made*]

Ms. Laban: Behind is Mrs. Vashti Maharaj, Director of Pensions.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Ministry of Public Administration and Communications.

[*Introduction made*]

Mr. Mc Kellar: I also have with me Mrs. Laura Daniel, our Director Human Resources. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: The Chief Personnel Officer.

[*Introductions made*]

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I have with me Ms. Juliette Gonzales, Director Benefits Management Division. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: The Ministry of Finance.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: And the Office of the Prime Minister.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Mr. Suite, I left you for last, because I figure if we put it in reverse order you would still be on top.

Therefore, can I invite the members of the Committee to introduce themselves starting at my right.

[*Introductions made*]

Madam Chairman: The Committee is today ably assisted by its Secretary, Ms. Keiba Jacob and by our Graduate Research Assistant, Mr. Brian Lucio.

What I think I would like to do to start off the conversation is to do some table setting, particularly for the Committee and the members of the public to get a sort of understanding of the role that each of the several Ministries or Departments play in the whole process of computation and payment of pensions.

So maybe we could start with the Chief Personnel Officer and then the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, and then we would then provide some further order.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: Thank you, Chair. The Personnel Department is responsible for determining and advising on pay and terms and conditions of employment for a wide range of persons in the public service. Through consultation and negotiation with the appropriate recognized associations and unions, the Department determines terms and conditions for monthly paid officers of the civil service, teaching, police, fire, prison services and statutory authorities subject to the Act.

The Department is also responsible for the determination of terms and conditions of employment for daily-rated workers and contract employees. So we are responsible, as I said, for determining the terms and our role would really be making sure everyone is aware of what their salaries and terms are, both for public officers and contract employees.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. And then therefore if I can ask the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications to let us know what their role is.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Thank you, Chair. The Ministry of Public Administration and Communications role, I might want to describe it as incidental, in the sense that our role as a Ministry has to do with public service transformation and reform, policy development and service delivery improvement. So that our input is one that would assist Ministries and Departments, general line Ministries and

Departments as well as those who play a more direct role in the pensions process, to improve their processes, to introduce policies that would facilitate improvement, to assist them in developing their systems so that they could be more efficient.

There is a bit of a more direct role that we play, in that, when Ministries and Departments are desirous of, should I say revisiting their structures, whether they want to introduce additional positions, staff, they must come through the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, its Public Management Consulting Division, the PMCD, for review and comment on those structures and new positions, before they are submitted to Cabinet for approval, particularly with respect to contract positions and also with respect to established positions.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. Could I then therefore ask the Ministry of Finance what their role is?

Mrs. Durham-Kissoon: Thank you, Chair. The Ministry of Finance is mainly responsible for policy development, as it relates to pensions, and provides support for projects and programmes that would improve pension administration, and of course the allocation of financial resources.

Madam Chairman: Okay, the Office of the Prime Minister.

3.10 p.m.

Mr. Suite: Thank you. Well, with respect to what we are currently discussing which is the contract gratuity and pension, the Office of the Prime Minister would really be a facilitative role, because the actual implementation would be the Ministry of Finance with, of course, the input of all the other Ministries and Departments. And the Ministry of Finance is the one that would really issue the circulars and the directions in terms of the preparation of the pension and leave records, et cetera, that would help in the computation of the pensions. So the Office of the Prime Minister is really there in terms of liaising with the different Ministries and Departments in terms of facilitating the process. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: And the Office of the Auditor General.

Ms. Pujadas: The role of the Auditor General, Madam Chair, is basically enshrined in the Civil Service Act, section 33(2), that is the regulation section 33(2), and in conjunction with the Comptroller of Accounts. Our role is basically that of a verification process of the computation that has been done. In this regard, it is being done before compensation has been determined and before compensation has been paid. So in a sense one can say that it is a pre-verification of the compensation to be disbursed.

Also, our additional roles have been enshrined in the Fire Service Act, the Education Act, the Police Service Act, which replicate the Civil Service Act almost word for word. That is basically our role. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: And Comptroller of Accounts.

Ms. Laban: Thank you. The pensions management branch of the Treasury Division is responsible for the administration of pensions and gratuities and all terminal benefits to the retired public officers and also to contract officers. It also includes the calculations in most instances and verification of these payments and the making of these payments.

Madam Chairman: All right. So thank you everyone. So this leads me to ask and the Auditor General had sort of positioned their role within a very specific regulation which is 33(2), and therefore, I would want to ask: Which agency is charged with the responsibility under regulation 33(1)? And for the purposes of keeping the listening public engaged in the conversation, regulation 33(1) says:

> "The computation and authorisation of pensions and gratuities of persons whose retirement from the Civil Service is known to be impending shall be treated as urgent matters of high priority."

Who is responsible for this?

Mr. Suite: It will be dispersed across Ministries and Departments because the calculation of the pensions would flow out of the management of your HR, and the management of the HR is really disbursed throughout the service in terms of the Service Commissions Department, the individual HR departments within Ministries, sorry, the HR divisions within Ministries and Departments, as well as in addition the accounting units that prepare the pension and leave records that are submitted to the Comptroller. So you have the Comptroller responsible for the actual preparation of the payments from processing, et cetera, but it is a very systemic process involving all the Ministries and Departments.

Madam Chairman: And therefore, Mr. Suite, you might be in a position to answer. Do all the Ministries and Departments and the HR units and the accounting units recognize that they all have a role in the discharge of this statutory obligation?

Mr. Suite: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes. Okay. So therefore, if all of them have this understanding that the obligation must be, it must be, what they say?—urgent and of high priority. Can you say that it is handled in such manner to reflect urgency and high priority?

Mr. Suite: I would say, yes, but there are constraints to implementing it, and I think a lot of it has to deal with, first to begin, the way that the system is designed. To begin with, it is complicated system in terms of the computation, the process by which the computation is done to determine your gratuity and pensions. Also, the fact that the system, it is dispersed in terms of you have to rely on so many different factors and it goes back to your very first question: Who is responsible?—and then the answer is the Service Commissions Department, the Comptroller of Accounts. You know, you cannot have three/four persons being technically responsible, and they all play a different part in it.

And you have the Auditor General would have referred to several different Acts that govern the various calculation of pensions when you have persons who in the course of their career may actually move from, let us say, the public service to the teaching service so they are crossing, so the system itself is complicated.

Madam Chairman: You know what the public will be asking when you say that? Right? Who is the system? Okay? But you would accept that any system that is designed for anything would have its kinks, its deficiencies. Okay? But the point I am trying to ask is: the agencies, the departments—is each of them aware that their role, regardless of what their deficiencies are, their role is to ensure that pensions are treated as a matter of urgency and high priority?

Mr. Suite: Yeah. I think the answer to that question I had indicated was, yes.

Madam Chairman: All right. Now, when I asked in terms of, and I am asking you this as Head of the Public Service. When I asked in terms of your role, I was a bit concerned with respect to the role of the Permanent Secretaries, all who come under you, and Heads of Departments who are charged with a responsibility of ensuring that particulars of service and of pay of all officers whose retirement is known and imminent are furnished accurately to the Comptroller of Accounts. And to really ask whether you are satisfied that Permanent Secretaries sufficiently understand that they are also charged with that duty and obligation?

Mr. Suite: I would, yes, again. There are circulars that come out of the Ministry of Finance indicating just that, and reminding of the setting deadlines for the specific parts of the process that need to be met. So, I would think that there is a general understanding and appreciation of the importance upon it and the impact that it has on the lives of individuals.

Madam Chairman: Is there compliance?

Mr. Suite: And the compliance, I would say, there is not complete compliance and, again, because of some of the challenges that you would have, I mean, I can go into some of them, but I do not know if you want to go into that part at this point in time.

Madam Chairman: But the point that I am trying to make is that you have an obligation by statute that three months prior to the retirement you are supposed to fulfil these obligations. Is there compliance with that?

Mr. Suite: Okay. And again, probably if I can give by way of example. In terms of determining someone's pension and gratuity, you have to look at the entire number of completed months of service, and for that you basically span the life of that public servant within the service. And that person may have moved through several Ministries and Departments over that 30 to 35-year period that they were employed.

And you as the final person, final Ministry where that person is retiring from, you would be responsible for their pension and leave record at that point in time. And let us say even if you are in compliance with it and you sent it forward to the Comptroller of Accounts, they are looking at parts that are predated before they even came in the Ministry and gaps may be missing in between.

So even though you may have compliance at today, you may not have had compliance 20 years ago and that impacts upon what is happening now. And that is why I said, it is because of the way the system is designed that it becomes complicated.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. But I understand that, but what I am saying is this. You have a duty to ensure, that is what the statute says, you have a duty to ensure that three months prior to the retirement date that the particulars of service and payment of the officer is sent to the Comptroller of Accounts.

Having regard to the fact that, okay, you may know, well I would expect that somewhere in your Ministry you have some record, even if it is the record of when the person first came to you, that informs you, if you know before that, listen to me, their retirement day is the 1st of August, 2018. If you start that process three months before then to acquire the information, you might really be out. Okay?—because, as you say, you may not have anticipated how much you would have to research in back records. So what prohibits a design?—because it is going to have to be particular to each Ministry and maybe even particular to each employee, from a Permanent Secretary knowing beforehand who is going to retire and what they need so that could meet this three-month deadline.

It is simple, like traffic. I may know at six o'clock in the morning it takes me 15 minutes to get to Port of Spain, so I leave home 15 minutes before the designated time, but if I know it is peak traffic time, I am not leaving 15 minutes. I might leave two hours earlier just to make sure I am there on time. So, we are talking about systems. System are designed for circumstances. What prohibits Permanent Secretaries from taking, even if you want to call it pre-emptive action, having regard to all that is required to be done to meet that three-month cut-off point?

Mr. Suite: Well, it actually begins long before that three-month period. I mean, I would probably leave the Comptroller to give more details, but there have been various initiatives, I would use for now, where they have targeted officers in different age groups where we are trying to bring the P&L records up to date and it is really looking like five years before for the first set of officers in that 55 to 60 age group, and then working back to the 50—54 then trying to bring the others. So it is not like you sit and wait until the final three months.

Madam Chairman: So having regard to what you said, I want to ask this of the Comptroller then. In terms of, I think also that there is a statutory duty for the Comptroller to almost, I would say like, have a duplicate copy of records with respect to each officer in the public service. Does that exist?

Ms. Laban: First of all, the preparation of pension and leave records should be a continuous effort. So we do ask Ministries and Departments to prepare the person's records and submit to us in a timely manner so that we can keep it on the officer's file. This is not always done promptly. So, close to the officer's retirement, they would prepare the records and then send it to us.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, might I ask: what a timely manner means?—in terms of if you were giving to me an instruction, what would a timely manner mean?

Ms. Laban: Possibly every year, prepare that person's record of service and submit.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So that is supposed to be for every public officer.

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Therefore, what has been the Comptroller's experience with respect to compliance with that? And what has the Comptroller done to ensure compliance that every year these, I will call them returns, are made?

Ms. Laban: Well, no. There has not been full compliance, but we have undertaken several efforts to ensure that there is. The last we issued a circular last year in December reminding Permanent

Secretaries and heads of departments of their responsibilities to ensure that these records are submitted on time. Additionally we met with Ministries, we had a training with Ministries and Departments in March this year to also stress, emphasize the point and train them also in certain areas that they need to prepare certain records and have it ready for us. Additionally, we are also intending to talk to the Permanent Secretaries in May as well to go through the processes as well to, again, encourage the timely preparation of these records.

Madam Chairman: Has there been any collaboration between the Comptroller of Accounts and the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister with respect to not just the sensitization, but ensuring compliance by the Permanent Secretaries and, I am just dealing with the particulars of service and therefore, the returns to you so that you could have up-to-date records, and this is all before you retire, because this is how I understand it. That you should have, and it is almost as if the regulations have a built-in fall-back, which is you.

Ms. Laban: We have held some discussions, but not on the compliance part with the PSs.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And would you say, if there was full compliance and you had your own reliable separate records, would that help the process?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So that what then is the responsibility of the Comptroller of Accounts in ensuring that some proactive steps are taken?

Ms. Laban: Well just that, we need to ensure, we try, we train the Ministries, send out the circulars, make calls, send memos. When there are outstanding documents, we call the Ministries as well as send out memos to ensure that there is compliance.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. Have you seen that working? Have you seen results in that?

Ms. Laban: We have to a certain extent.

Madam Chairman: Is that a satisfactory extent?

Ms. Laban: No.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So I guess maybe you will want to think of other things that you could try?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. And I just want to ask, let me switch a bit to the Auditor General. In terms of from your perspective I think you have an initiative to have dedicated staff update pension and leave records of all officers within a two-year period.

Ms. Pujadas: I am not quite understanding your question.

Madam Chairman: Okay. When we had looked at your submission, I believe you spoke about there being an initiative where you would have dedicated staff to update the pension and leave records for all officers who would be within two years of their retirement date. Is that so?

Ms. Pujadas: Within our own department, within our own HR processes?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Pujadas: Yes.

Madam Chairman: So let me ask you: Where would be your source of getting that information?

Ms. Pujadas: Well, okay. As indicated here, there are issues in terms of if the officer belongs to you and have always belonged to you, like in your audit department, of course, your source of information would be when they come to you from Service Commissions and that sort of thing. If the officer has come external from you, they are supposed to walk what is known in the circular as a circulating file which is supposed to have all their data and records of information on that file. Often, the officer comes with a file, but the file is incomplete, and I think our HR unit has recognized that, and so they are looking at corresponding with the relevant Ministries to get that sort of information.

But I think our HR officer has also indicated that she felt that officers themselves need to take a personal account, because you are walking with a file that is supposed to represent your record, and perhaps if you take note that your record is incomplete, you could also take that opportunity to try to ensure that your record is complete by the time you reach the Ministry. So that is basically what I have to say at this point in time.

Madam Chairman: So, I just want to—for a little clarification. When you say an officer walks with the file, does that mean that the officer actually brings the file or file is supposed to be sent by the HR from one to one?

Ms. Pujadas: Either way.

Madam Chairman: Either way. So I am not sure, because I am shocked to hear that. I did not know that officers could walk with their own files.

Ms. Pujadas: It is a circulating file.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. I know it is a circulating file. And I understood the circulating file to mean the file follows the officer. From the little that the Committee has been exposed to, we understand that the file sometimes does not follow the officer.

Ms. Pujadas: That is correct.

Madam Chairman: And therefore, the question would have arisen: What could the officer do to ensure that his file follows him? So that I am surprised to hear that the officer could actually demand his file and walk with his file. So, he demands his file from whom?

Ms. Pujadas: HR office from where he is coming from.

Madam Chairman: HR office from where he comes. Okay. And therefore, Permanent Secretary in the office of the OPM, based on what the Auditor General has said, is there a role for you in ensuring that the Permanent Secretaries comply with this initiative?—that the Auditor General has created which I think helps solve some of the absence of information.

Mr. Suite: Once we have compliance, of course, it will solve the absence of the information. But like I said, the problem is when compliance had not taken place in the past, because there are some things that happened or would have contributed to it; I mean, apart from the persons in the, let us say, the pension and leave department not doing what they was supposed to do on time.

There are other things like, for instance, it may not be that persons alone move from one Ministry to next, but that Ministries themselves are reconfigured and whole departments move from one Ministry to the next, and sometimes when you go back to try to find where that person was at a particular point in time on their records, that particular Ministry may cease to exist, because it may just have been, the different parts may have just been distributed to other Ministries. And this is the problem in terms of going back through those records over that extended period of time.

Now, if things had taken place correctly at that point in time you would not have that problem, but you do and some of it may be that you may form a new Ministry with new staff and person is not sufficiently competent to carry out their duties, and then soon after that Ministry no longer exists, and the records are not there, and then how do you?—and that is what contributes to a lot of the backlog particularly in there are certain Ministries and Departments like gender affairs or Sport and Youth Affairs that are very portable and move from one Ministry to the next, as opposed to if you worked in finance or Auditor General, and that is really—and because you are insisting on that 35 to 40-year record day by day—is the crux of the problem really.

Madam Chairman: So let me ask, assuming all is in order, all the pension and leave records, the particulars, terms and conditions of a particular officer, what would be the process time for the computation and authorization for the payment?

Ms. Laban: Assuming that everything is in order and the information and documents were sent up to three months or before time, it would take up to between four to six months.

Madam Chairman: Four to six months. And is that considered urgent and of high priority?

Ms. Laban: Yes, it is, but we have to look at the steps in the process. The steps take a while, Auditor General takes some time because of the volume, it takes about two months at the Auditor General's Department, and at the various areas a few weeks are taken.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Is that process much more complicated than paying salaries?

Ms. Laban: Yes. As PS Suite said, there could be complications in the calculations of the pensions.

Madam Chairman: Yeah. That is what I am saying. All things being equal you told me four to six months.

Ms. Laban: Yes. Four to six months. It could be paid on time, four to six months providing also that all the information was sent before.

Madam Chairman: And I have asked you, do you consider that high priority and urgent?

Ms. Laban: Yes. It is considered high priority.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Is it during the four to six months and let us say that the retired officer has other forms of income, do you still consider four to six months urgent and of high priority?

Ms. Laban: No.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member Mark.

Mr. Mark: Thank you very much. I would like to ask the Comptroller, but I have some questions that I want to direct to public administration. Could you share with us at this time what are the outstanding number of pension payments that the Comptroller needs to satisfy at this time as you speak? How many? What is the state of the backlog?—if there is a backlog.

Ms. Laban: Currently we have approximately 884 payments being processed in the system at various stages, but there are approximately 934 payments requiring outstanding documents from Ministries and Departments.

Mr. Mark: So you are talking about 800 that, in terms of computations and authorization, would be at an advanced stage?

Ms. Laban: And those will be paid.

Mr. Mark: And those will be paid.

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Mark: And then, is it another 900 that you have some complications in?

Ms. Laban: Yes. Another 900 with various documents outstanding from Ministries.

Mr. Mark: And how long that has been there, the 900?

Ms. Laban: At various times. It could be one month to possibly a year depending on the nature of problem from the Ministries or the responses from the Ministries.

Mr. Mark: Yeah. In a well-oiled modern public service and a well-oiled and organized Comptroller of Accounts department, a modern electronic platform, what would you say in a modern world the average time it should take if you had the necessary software to speed up this process for the ordinary public officer who would have reached his retirement age and you have gotten all the data in accordance with regulation 33(1) three months in advance? All the data is sent to you three months in advance, what is the ideal that your department would like to have those pension cheques issued?

Ms. Laban: Well, if all the documents are submitted on time and they are accurate, a reasonable time is one to four weeks with automation and complete information.

Mr. Mark: Are you working towards the realization of that noble and wonderful objective in terms of between two to four weeks, max?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Mark: And how is that being, what steps, what measures are being taken to realize that objective? What equipment you would require and have you made the approach to the appropriate authorities to realize that?

Ms. Laban: One of the initiatives that we have undertaken with the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications—who have acquired a pension administration software—we are looking right now at sending out an RFI, a request for information, for the pensions administration software which would be used for the calculation of pension benefits and the computation of the pensions. So that is one of the initiatives that we are undertaking right now towards computerization.

Mr. Mark: You know, Madam Comptroller, you know it is a nightmare for the ordinary public officer to seek information out of the Comptroller of Accounts' office just to determine where his or her pension is at? You know, it is like pulling teeth. I myself had my own round of difficulty in that, and I am not no ordinary, you know, public officer, so I could well imagine what ordinary public officers, you know, have to undergo. So that is why I am interested and we are interested in determining how can we assist you and the other agencies to modernize your operation so that we can realize that objective of two to four weeks.

3.40 p.m.

Do you have—I may put this question to Mr. Suite, is it possible for us to establish an electronic platform which is designed to facilitate public officers and contract officers in tracking the progress of their pensions and gratuities? Is there the possibility that we can establish such an electronic platform? So I do not have to be calling Comptroller of Accounts to find out where are we with my cheque, and then you have challenges because of the difficulty in achieving that. Can we move towards establishing some electronic platform to track where people's pensions are at and gratuities?

Mr. Suite: Well, the answer, yes, you could always design an electronic platform to deal with something like that. I do not know if that was envisaged in the request information that the Comptroller is looking at in terms of their system. But, yes, it is possible, but it involves the resources in term of, well, apart from hardware and the software and reengineering your process, I think one of the things we really need to look at in terms of the way our pension system is currently structured, based on the legislation, if we do not really go back to the core, which is the legislation, and the way you go about calculating your pension, and probably start looking at that and addressing your pension reform, you may end up just computerizing a system that is less than ideal. So, yes you can computerize it to facilitate those sort of request like what you are proposing, as well as your company reports in terms of tracking your efficiencies and where things are lagging, and flag, et cetera. But, I think you really—the larger problem that would provide the quicker fix is really that reform of your pension, and that is an issue that at some point in time you would have to address.

Mr. Mark: But, are you aware of any efforts at this time aimed at achieving that objective, pension reform in the system? Where are we with that? Do you have any idea, as Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister? And maybe the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance can also help us?

Mr. Suite: I will probably defer to her. I know probably in about late 2005 to 2010 there were some initiatives on it, and I remember the World Bank, et cetera, doing several reports and looking at pieces of legislation. It is in terms of really defining your policy, and of course you would appreciate you have a lot of stakeholders in the various bargaining units, et cetera, that you will have to deal with, as well as the legacy of those who are currently in the system, how do you treat with it. But, in terms of where we are currently, in terms of pension reform, I will have to defer to the Ministry of Finance.

Ms. Kissoon: The head of the public service is correct. The initiative had started with the World Bank. However, that has not continued within recent time, and we may look at revisiting it, but it is not a current policy measure. So, some work had been done on pension reform a few years ago.

Mr. Mark: So, there is no initiative at this material time to deal with pension reform in Trinidad and Tobago as far as you are aware?

Ms. Kissoon: Not pension reform. No, not at this time.

Mr. Mark: Okay. May I ask for the representative from Public Administration, I know for a fact that there was some partnership with KPMG to conduct training involving Ministries, Departments, and other agencies of the Government, and one of the objectives would have been to work towards improving the efficiency in the processing of pension in their system, could you indicate to us as it relates to preparation of pension and leave records? Is there any attempt to embark upon any training programme in that area for 2018, as far as you are aware?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Member, you are correct. There was a consultancy that took place between the then Ministry of Public Administration and KPMG back in 2015, I believe, 2015 to 2016, to work on what we call a business process management approach to service delivery, and one of the focal points of the consultancy was looking at improving the pensions processing process. There was training conducted during the period. We have over 190 officers across the service who were trained in the BPM methodology. Even though the consultancy ended, we would like to continue training in business process management as an approach to service delivery improvement. We do not have it on our calendar of events for the current fiscal, but it is something that we would like to do. As I indicated, we have a number of officers who were trained in the methodology, who can serve as facilitators. But, again, no, it is not on our programme of training for the current fiscal.

Mr. Mark: Now, I am also aware that the business process management methodology is designed to be institutionalized across the entire public service. That is what we got from your submission, and that is to be used as a tool aimed in addressing challenges in the delivery of quality services to customers. Would you be able to shed some light with us on this business process management initiative?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Okay, so I hinted to the consultancy that took place back in 2015/16, just for clarification what business process management of BPM is. It is essentially those activities which an organization may embarked upon to optimize existing business processes, or to improve those processes according to current needs. So, I guess if we were to apply it to the current discussion on the pensions' administration process, you could apply BPM methodology to improving the processing of terminal benefits. As you indicated, it was/is the intention/desire of the Ministry to have BPM institutionalized across the service, and it is something we would like to see happen. As you understand, the service is large, and it will take time to have that kind of roll out and have the methodology institutionalized across all Ministries. And, of course, it is not just for one process, it is for as many processes as possible.

Mr. Mark: Is there any time line for this initiative to be rolled out, seeing that the consultancy has come to an end? Are we going to re-employ KPMG?

Mr. Mc Kellar: No, KPMG, there is no intention to reengage KPMG. As I said, we had over 190 officers across the public service trained in the methodology, who can serve, one, as facilitators for subsequent training, and as project leads in their own Ministries. But as you would appreciate, even though the training ended as recently as 2016, if you would call that recently, given the natural flow of things in the service, those officers may have moved on from where they were at the time to other agencies in different capacities. Some may even be no longer within the public service, because the trainees included both public officers, established persons, as well as contract employees. So, we may have lost some of them from some of the aforementioned reasons.

Mr. Mark: Yeah, but given the potential for doing good in the public service by employing this new methodology, and I am sure it cost taxpayers some money to bring KPMG here, that had trained the 192 officers, are you saying that the goal of institutionalizing this process across the public service is now lost?

Mr. Mc Kellar: I would not say so. The goal remains. There are the challenges that I mentioned just now in terms of where are those officers now. It is not impossible to establish what is the remaining number, and their availability to assist in the process. We did develop a bit of a plan for the roll out throughout the wider public service, which we need to revisit. Because, even though there would be no cost in the sense of reengaging a KPMG or some other firm, there will be a cost to mounting training programme, doing orientation sessions, preparing training materials, and so on. So, it would really mean at this point in time, developing a more formal programme for roll out. But it remains something that we desire to do, because of its potential.

Mr. Mark: Yes, but is there any time line?

Mr. Mc Kellar: No, we do not have a specific time line at this point in time.

Mr. Mark: So, we do not know, after all this training, with 192 officers being trained, millions of dollars being spent, I would imagine, for this exercise, or hundreds of thousands, and the drivers of this process is supposed to be the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, and you are saying to us that we do not have a plan to roll out this even in one or two Ministries to see how it is going to work, because we are in 2018, it ended in 2016. When are we going to get that plan, that process, engaged within the public service? At least the Ministry ought to be letting us know what their plans are to have this thing roll out. It cannot be business as usual, and it is open ended, and we do not know when it is going to start. So, that is what I am asking you. What is the Ministry doing to ensure that this very important initiative is not lost?

Mr. Mc Kellar: But, Member, what I would say, again, it remains our desire. I know that a proposal has been prepared or is being prepared for the roll out. I can submit at a subsequent date further details in terms of the time lines and the details, for example, which agencies we probably see as being priority to apply in the short term, the medium term.

Mr. Mark: How soon you would be able to supply that to the Secretariat, in terms of a written proposal as to when this plan is to be rolled out?

Mr. Mc Kellar: If by the end of May is not too long, that should be reasonable.

Mr. Mark: I would leave that up to the Chairperson. You also indicated in your submission to us that the Ministry has developed a comprehensive proposal for improving the administration of pension and leave process in T&T. Would you want to provide us with some insight on this proposal for improving the administration of pension and leave process in the public service of T&T?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Yes, the proposal that we mentioned in our response is one that is basically an internal document that has not be shared with the rest of the public service. It is something that we have looked at. As I indicated at the start, one of the remits of the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications is about process and system improvement. So, it is a document that has been developed in-house. It seeks to address a number of issues, and colleagues here have touched on some of them. Issues relating, one, to the preparation of P&L records within Ministries. We would appreciate that the human resource management process is a key contributor to preparing the P&L to addressing officers' terminal benefits. There are a number of issues relating, and I think the head of the public service mentioned some of them earlier, with regard to the challenges that realignment of Ministries present in the preparation of terminal benefits, securing officers records. So, the proposals sought to identify all of the major shortcomings challenges within the system right now, and propose possible solutions, which even includes the items mentioned by the Comptroller of Accounts in terms of improving the electronic processing. So, it is wide based.

Mr. Mark: And finally, for this rounds, could you advise us, this draft proposal, is it the intention of the Ministry to translate that into a Note to be submitted to the Cabinet for approval, and ultimate through the Ministry implementation? Or is it going to remain a draft for some period of time? I am just seeking some clarification from you. Because it seem to have some very rich ideas in that draft. So, where are we going with the draft? Are we going to the Cabinet with a Note for approval, and then implementation? Share with us.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Okay, I think ultimately once we are serious about implementation and moving forward with this much needed project, it would need funding, and funding would therefore require Cabinet approval. So, once the project is shared with the brother and sister Ministries, I would want to say, because it would involve contribution from a number of the parties represented here today, and others, the relevant stakeholder consultation and agreement is obtained, it would be necessary to take it forward to Cabinet for consideration.

Mr. Mark: Do you have a road map as it relates to consultation with your various fellow Ministries and agencies? Is there a time line, a roll out plan for this very important exercise to commence so that we can move towards getting Cabinet approval?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Well, I cannot give you a specific time line. The document was fairly recently completed. We have basically shared—well, mentioned it. This had some initial discussions with only one agency thus far, but we would certainly, again, given the discussion today and the need to treat terminal benefits as urgent, there is definitely a need to move with some alacrity on this.

Mr. Mark: So, would you be kind enough to submit to us a written proposal, or time line as to the way forward in terms of consultation with the various Ministries? Is that possible?

Mr. Mc Kellar: It is possible once back at home we develop the time line and so, so we could submit.

Mr. Mark: Could I suggest the end of May? Because, remember this is a very urgent matter.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Yes.

Mr. Mark: Okay, thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member Dookie.

Mr. Dookie: Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to pose this question to the Acting PS, Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. In your opening submission I believe you mentioned the Ministry's role in terms of transformation and reform, and assisting the Ministries and Departments in improving their service delivery. But prior to that if I heard you correctly, you indicated that your roll is an incidental one. I want you to explain that to me?

Mr. Mc Kellar: All right. There is an extent to which the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications is a still fairly young Ministry. We have not been around as long as a Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Health, or Education. And whereas the Auditor General's Department and maybe even the Personnel Department can cite their role in the process in statute. I do not believe that the Ministry of Public Administration, well its current nomenclature is Ministry of Public Administration and Communications, is referenced in statute. So that is why I said it is incidental.

Mr. Dookie: So that is what you meant?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Yes.

Mr. Dookie: We do not pay incidental.

Mr. Mc Kellar: P&L records do not come to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications for calculation of terminal benefits. As a regular line Ministry or agency, we have a remit to prepare records for our retiring officers, but we do not play a role in the processing per se of the terminal benefits. Hence the incidental comment.

Mr. Dookie: And just to follow up on something Sen. Mark alluded to in terms of his questions, this BPM intervention, this took place in 2015?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Yes.

Mr. Dookie: So, from 2015 to now I want to assume that you would have been able to make some sort of assessment in terms of the impact this intervention would have had on the process regarding pensions and gratuity, so tell me how significant this intervention was regarding improving this process, to say to us that the intervention of training in this regard is working?

Mr. Mc Kellar: I think what I would have to say is that based on review of what was done, accomplished during the period of training, we realized that BPM business process management has the potential to contribute to system process improvement.

Mr. Dookie: But that is based on what? What have you seen to come to that conclusion?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Okay, it is what we saw at the time. We did do an internal assessment of the project.

Mr. Dookie: So, what did you measure? You did say you did an internal assessment, what did you measure?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Now, the BPM project as a whole, the consultancy as a whole, had some specific objectives. And if you do not mind I would just run through them quickly:

- to increase the level of sensitization amongst stakeholders of the potential contribution of BPM, and its usefulness to agencies within the public service.

Let me just say that hither to the project BPM was not something that was widespread or pretty well known within the system. So the initiative sought to introduce BPM to the public service:

- to increase the knowledge of BPM concepts, methodologies and tools;
- to increase competencies in modelling existing systems and processes;
- to enhance the ability to propose appropriate process changes, enhance the ability to develop BPM implementation plans.

So, for example, those were the objectives. So, to the extent that during the life of the project we were able to improve participants or persons' knowledge and awareness of BPM methodology, we would say, yes, the assessment evaluation indicated that that did happen.

Mr. Dookie: In terms of the objectives you mentioned, I cannot repeat it verbatim, but you indicated something which deals with improving the business process.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Right.

Mr. Dookie: Okay, so if I am to focus on that one, would you say that this intervention impacted or contributed to the attainment of that specific objective, which is improving the process?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Again, out of the 192 persons who were trained throughout the life of the project, there were 30 persons drawn from around five or six agencies who dealt specifically with the issue of pensions improvement. Some of the things that the evaluation, the review indicated is that participants were able to identify areas in which improvements could have been made.

Mr. Dookie: Could have been made.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Could have been made. One of the things about BPM is that it advocates an integrated or collaborative approach to system process improvements. So, for example, in the preparation of P&L records, human resource management units and financing account units need to work closely. So there would have been a recognition that, yes, there is a need for greater collaboration working together between those two units within a Ministry. I would highlight those as two of the key outcomes.

Mr. Dookie: So you are confident that the intervention is adding value?

Mr. Mc Kellar: That it can add value.

Mr. Dookie: And in your response to one of the questions posed by member Mark regarding the 30 or so employees who were exposed to this specific intervention, I think you said some or a significant amount would have left the service. So, that brings me to this question, what are we doing about retention? Because if you are spending significant sums in equipping, well, employees, to improve service delivery and they are leaving, I think it begs the question, if you think that the training is adding value, but the servants are leaving? What are you doing to improve employee retention?

Mr. Mc Kellar: That is a challenging question member. So, for example, in making the response that you just quoted, as it is right now the public service—well, when we speak of the public service, sometimes we convey the impression that it may be a single entity that we are referring to.

Mr. Dookie: Right.

Mr. Mc Kellar: The public service right now is made up of 23 Ministries and Departments, plus sundry other agencies. None of those agencies are closed shops in that you do not enter one unless your particular career stream—let us say you are a medical doctor—that you stay in one shop for the lifetime, you are 30 to 35 years. People move, whether promotion, transfers, as the case might be. So, it is near difficult or impossible to prevent officers from moving from agency to agency, or even entrained-agency. So, someone may move from an accounts department, to an HR, to a registry, as the case might be. So, invariably, there is going to be some loss.

Mr. Dookie: I do not know if I misinterpreted your response when you responded to member Mark. I was of the impression that they would have left the service totally.

Mr. Mc Kellar: Right. Yes. So, it is possible, for example, someone who might have been on the training programme at the time, let us say the person was 58 years old, they may have been heading a P&L unit, but they were 58 years old. It is possible that the person could have retired by now. I indicated that some of the persons trained were contract officers. A contract may have ended. So, that is where I pointed to the fact that persons may have left the service. And in those cases there is nothing that we could do to prevent their movement out.

Mr. Dookie: Okay. And finally I do not know if to pose this question to the Comptroller of Accounts or the PS, OPM, but, Madam Chair, would guide me. This entire process involves a lot of connectivity among various functions, Ministries and the Departments as well, is there inter-functional team that meets with the specific mandate to examine the whole process of the payment of pension and gratuity, as key stakeholders in the entire process? Because, and I am posing this question in the context of the amount of connection and involvement, because the output of one process becomes the input of another process. And even if a delay in what might seem a small process of a day, the multiplier effect it will have on the entire process, my thinking, is, maybe if a team is together working on the process continuously, there may be value. So, the question really is, is there such an inter-functional team?

Mr. Suite: I think I will take that question. Well, no, in that there is not a standing committee or a standing team dedicated to this specific exercise. But at the same time it does take place, and part of it is—well, the Comptroller in their normal duties—the Comptroller of Accounts that is—in liaising with individuals and issuing circulars and guidelines, et cetera, over different periods of time they would have, well, training or briefing sessions where they would fall in, whether it is Permanent Secretaries and their various heads of the relevant section, whether it is HR, et cetera, to have discussions with them, in guiding them through if they are issuing new processes, or if it is current processes where they see deficiencies in terms of highlighting these deficiencies and flagging it for Permanent Secretary and the relevant section heads. On occasion, the Comptroller of Accounts does meet with the board of Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments, again, and do presentations, whether it is related to this or other matters. There is a forum of the HR—sorry, the DPSs, Deputy Permanent Secretaries as well as Director of HR, who meet on a monthly basis and discuss this and other matters. But in terms of the dedicated team dealing with this exercise alone, no.

4.10 p.m.

Mr. Dookie: Madam Chair, that is it for now.

Madam Chairman: PS, maybe I could just pick up where you ended. In terms of, what you are saying is that there is some sort of ongoing discussion across the agencies. Have you seen any sort of improvement in the delivery of pensions as urgent and of high priority as a result of this informal but continuous discussion as you have described?

Mr. Suite: Well, from some discussions that I would have had as well as looking at some of the documents coming out of the Comptroller of Accounts, I would say, yes, there have been some improvements but it would be like specific Ministries probably when they set up their liaison officers, et cetera, and depending on the competency of the person and who is carrying out that function. So you are seeing different areas of improvement.

In terms of an overall—and I know from working in the Ministry of Finance previously that the Comptroller has put in some systems within her own shop trying to deal with some of the bottlenecks, et cetera. So you are seeing some things and some improvement in how it is processing but, again, we have to keep working at it and finding other ways to address some of the other issues. But there have been some incremental improvements.

Madam Chairman: Let me just ask the Comptroller. Comptroller, you said that if I as a public officer had everything in order it would take four to six months. Would you say that in your experience you would aim or is there any initiative to get that time shortened?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: That processing time?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: And what sort of, what you would consider, not necessarily ideal, but let us say for the initiatives you have put in place for 2018 and let us say we are in December 2018 and you look back, what sort of period, shortened period you would think is a satisfactory improvement for 2018?

Ms. Laban: Up to three months.

Madam Chairman: Three months. And let me ask you, how close you think you are to that?

Ms. Laban: I cannot say offhand.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So could you look and give us an idea? All right. Now, in terms of the person who we had, the hypothetical person who said look, they have retired, they have no savings, they have to wait four to six months. I had asked you if you felt that that was urgent and high priority and you said, no. In a case like that, would you think that some sort of interim payment may help?

Ms. Laban: Yes. I think that—

Madam Chairman: PS, you want to assist in that?

Mr. Suite: All right. Well, I do not want to go into the Comptroller's shop in terms of the actual processing time, but I wanted to flag that the three months in the legislation should be looked at, not as the time, but as the minimum period of time to give notice. And therefore, for instance, if you are able to, you have your records and you do your notice earlier, let us say six months per se—that is six months before the time you indicate that you are retiring—because like I said before, we started targeting persons in the 55 to 60 age group, et cetera. It means therefore, let us say it takes six months to process but if you gave a six-month notice then it is possible that the month following when you stop receiving salary, you can receive your pension. So that is another way of also looking at addressing the same problem.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So I guess the Comptroller of Accounts is on the same page with you with respect to that. Because I did not hear that, coming from the Comptroller of Accounts. So that is what I am trying to find out. From the Comptroller's perspective, what initiative she sees that will get her looking back, December '18, to three months and I take the three months to mean, not three months' notice, I thought you were saying three months to process and authorize for payment. I think that is what we are about, right? So that I am trying to find out what she thinks that she is doing now as initiatives to get her at December 2018 to a three-month timeline for processing, computation, authorization for payment if I had everything in my file in order.

Ms. Laban: Going back to the three months, I also meant providing we did everything before time, up to six months before time, then it would be possible to get it paid on time.

Madam Chairman: You mean that was the underlying assumption.

Ms. Laban: That was the underlying assumption.

Madam Chairman: So that we have already begun to put things in place to get Ministries to not use the three months as the moving factor but to say a minimum of three months.

Ms. Laban: Yes. We always tell Ministries between six months to a year.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so let me ask something. In any of the Ministries or Departments, does anybody undertake to say as of December, or let us just say January 1st, whatever year, 2018, advise the Comptroller of Accounts, all the people you expect to retire within this year and the dates of retirement? Anybody does that?

Ms. Laban: Well, we have in our circular that we issued, we gave that undertaking to the Ministries.

Madam Chairman: If maybe you could expand a little more so that I could understand.

Ms. Laban: Oh sorry, meaning we had given some timelines to the Ministries and Departments to collate information pertaining to persons who were retiring, to collate that information and get the information pertaining to the officers to the Treasury Division.

Madam Chairman: Would that be the same information that you would require to compute their gratuity and pension?

Ms. Laban: It would be information pertaining to pension and leave records.

Madam Chairman: Okay, but what I am trying to find out is and it is really acting as an alert, right, not so much sending in the information, but acting as an alert. If anybody is saying as of the 1st of January, 2018, submit to me all the names and positions of employees in your Ministry who will be retiring in this fiscal year or this calendar year or the next two calendar years. That is what I am trying to find out. And who does that?

Ms. Laban: That will be the responsibilities of the Permanent Secretaries of the Ministries.

Madam Chairman: Right. And the Permanent Secretaries are expected to do that in their Ministry, to send the information to whom, you? Is that what is in the circular?

Ms. Laban: To send the information, yes, to us.

Madam Chairman: And you said that would have gone on in your circular in December last year?

Ms. Laban: "Um-hmm."

Madam Chairman: What kind of response have you got?

Ms. Laban: I am not sure, but I do not think the responses are forthcoming.

Madam Chairman: You do not think your responses were forthcoming?

Ms. Laban: No.

Madam Chairman: So, if I were to say to you that by December 31st of this year, in 32 of the 39 Ministries and Departments, 865 people were retiring. Would that be so or would that not be so or it sounds likely or you do not know?

Ms. Laban: Yes, that is likely.

Madam Chairman: That is likely. So that, could you within a week from today send me what your figures say to see if it tallies with this hypothetical figure that I have said or if it is close to that and which Ministries?

Ms. Laban: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. Now, in terms of the hypothetical person who we said, who is retired and has nothing and has to wait four to six months and that is the one who we are assuming everything is in order and which you conceded that would not be urgent, that would not be high priority and, of course, the conclusion of that is, that is in breach of the regulation. Would you think interim payments would assist in that kind of scenario?

Ms. Laban: Well, there were some initial discussions on interim payments, but we still need to engage all the relevant stakeholders, look at the implications, any legal implications and the pros and cons of undertaking that initiative.

Madam Chairman: So, how long ago was this initiative considered or conceptualized?

Ms. Laban: Well, I understand it was undertaken before my time. Sorry, I understand it was something that came up, there were discussions but—

Madam Chairman: And without disclosing your age, before your time will be before what?

Ms. Laban: Sorry, before probably 2014.

Madam Chairman: Before 2014. What has happened to it between 2014 and 2018, as a discussion, as a consideration to explore?

Ms. Laban: It has not but it would have to be a policy decision from the Ministry of Finance.

Madam Chairman: Has to be a policy decision from the Ministry of Finance. Okay. So that is it, being actively considered, or is it just lying dormant? I do not know. Maybe the acting Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance could help us with that.

Ms. Durham-Kissoon: Chair, we will have to follow up on that with you. We will have to check with our internal legal and see if that matter has reached them. If not, we would have to develop a sort of policy paper so that all the implications may be taken into consideration.

Madam Chairman: So let me just ask you then, acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Finance, without committing you to anything, does that sound as something that is plausible?

Ms. Durham-Kissoon: Yes, Chair. It sounds feasible once the interim payment does not result in an overpayment. But yes, that is something that would provide a lot of relief to public servants who have been waiting a significant amount of time for their pensions.

Madam Chairman: So, could I therefore and I understand that as a big con, right, the overpayment must be the most obvious big con. Could I therefore, maybe get some sort of, I do not want to put as much as, an obligation as an undertaking. But could I get some sort of, I guess I cannot use another word, "undertaking", from you all. But this is something that you all could actively explore and let us know and I would say, if we are in the month of April, I would say certainly by the end of June some sort of framework could be considered to see if this is something we could go forward on or no, this is something we cannot go forward on, and let us know, so that this is not something that will take another four years lying there as maybe something that could be done, but cannot even be explored.

Ms. Durham-Kissoon: Of course, Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. So I want to therefore just shift some of the discussion to the CPO. I do not know if you could shed some light for me on this circulating file. And if not you, anybody. The circulating file only has, as a public servant my information regarding where I worked and my salary and increments? Would it only have that?

Okay, let me ask, Head of the Public Service, do you have a circulating file?

Mr. Suite: I have never seen my circulating file.

Madam Chairman: How come? Have you not moved? I think I have last seen you in the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Suite: Yes. Well, I assumed that it went from my HR to the other—

Madam Chairman: You did not take it with you?

Mr. Suite: No, I never took it.

Madam Chairman: Why?

Mr. Suite: Well, part of the problem—

Madam Chairman: No, I am sure you have a good reason. I do not want to know the problem, I want to know why you did not take it with you?

Mr. Suite: No, I am going to explain why I would not take it with me.

Madam Chairman: No. Why did not take it with you?

Mr. Suite: Because I am not aware of a circulating file and the need for—I as a public officer to take it.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much.

Mr. Suite: And I just wanted to say—

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Just now, everybody will get a chance. Ms. Laban, have you always been at the Treasury?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Yes. You have always been at Comptroller of Accounts?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so your circulating file, you have seen it?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: You have access to it?

Ms. Laban: Yes, from HR.

Madam Chairman: Ms. CPO, because in the little time I am here I have seen you in every place.

[*Laughter*] Do you have a circulating file?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I would assume so, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: All right. Did you take it with you to CPO?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: No, I did not.

Madam Chairman: Are you aware you could have taken it with you to CPO?

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: No.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Ms. Sinaswee-Gervais: I thought it was an HR function and that would happen.

Madam Chairman: Okay, all right. So let me ask, Mr. Acting Permanent Secretary, do you have a circulating file?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Cautiously, I expect so, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So based on your caution I would think that you did not take it with you to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications?

Mr. Mc Kellar: No, I did not.

Madam Chairman: All right. So, have you all learnt today that you can go and get it from the last place you have gone and taken it with you to where you go?

Mr. Suite: Verify that. [*Laughter*]

Madam Chairman: No, no, I am serious, because if you all do not know, who knows.

Mr. Suite: And that is what I wanted to intimate, that the HR system is so complicated that you would expect—I remember when the Auditor General was talking about officers ought to do this and my initial thought hearing that discussion was how many officers would be aware especially you have a wide range of officers and—

Madam Chairman: And you mean you did not express that thought until I extracted it from you. [*Crosstalk*] No, no, I am serious. In terms of this, what does a circulating file have on it? Who knows? Who knows? And could you all allow the person who knows to speak.

Mrs. Belle: Madam Chair, the circulating personnel file would have—

Madam Chairman: If you would just, because we are in the back here so we cannot see. I know you were introduced, but maybe if you could say your name and your position so that it will help us.

Mrs. Belle: Madam Chair, good afternoon. I am June Belle, Director of Human Resource Services of the Auditor General's Department. A circulating personnel file has the history of that officer from the time they would have started in the service to the time they would have left that Ministry or Department. It would also include information with respect to promotions, increments—

Madam Chairman: Infractions. [*Laughter*] Infractions?

Mrs. Belle: Correct, and what else? No-pay leave, whatever leave, maternity leave, extended sick leave, all that information is incorporated in a circulating personnel file.

Madam Chairman: So that my circulating file that may have a record of my infractions, et cetera, is made available to me and put in my hand?

Mrs. Belle: Yes, it can be, because speaking from a personnel point of view, I assumed at the Auditor General's Department from the Attorney General's Department and when I left, just as they give you the salaries and leave particulars, I did not get it in my hand at that time, but within about a week they contacted me and it was forwarded.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Can I ask how common is that practice?

Mrs. Belle: It is not as common as it is supposed to be, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: And might I also ask, with respect to how common it is supposed to be, is there not a possibility of some sort of, [*Interruption*] I do not want to use such a lovely word, but reorganization of my file. Could that not possibly happen?

Mrs. Belle: Yes.

Ms. Pujadas: Madam Chair, might I add that the circulating file is going with you for inputting into the Ministry in which you are going or the Department in which you are going. But the information that is inputted in the circulating file is, it is a copy of what is in your personal file, your PDF file and those confidential files. And those files are not circulated with you when you go.

Madam Chairman: So therefore, what is the problem if you say that I can have my own copy done by you, going with me, but you cannot as an HR send it on, with, alongside me? What is the difficulty?

Ms. Pujadas: I think the reasons sometimes, I mean I am just speaking out of turn here, but I believe sometimes what happens is the information may not be totally up to date in your circulating file and therefore it needs to be updated and fixed prior to your departure in going to another Ministry, in transferring.

I would also want to add, I am old in the service, so my circulating file would have information from me from when I started pre the IHRIS system coming on board. But a lot of the information for an officer who has come into the service when the IHRIS system came into being, a lot of that same information would be imbedded in the IHRIS system because you have inputted that data. The IHRIS system inputs the data of your promotions, all of those sorts of things are in the IHRIS system. But it is more complicated in this era for officers like myself, because our system was a manual system at that point in time and the circulating file is really supposed to have all the records of our whole history of work service that we have in the public service to go with us.

Madam Chairman: Let me ask the Comptroller this. If I were one of those people who kept my records, so I have my own personal records. So I have my own personal file on me and I were ready to retire. Would you act on my file?

Ms. Laban: I would need to verify the information.

Madam Chairman: And if the information were missing in the various Ministries, then what happens?

Ms. Laban: Then they will still have to go back to the Ministries to get those periods. But as far as I am aware the circulating personnel file is a confidential document which—

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much.

Ms. Laban:—which should be sent to the Ministry and not walked with the persons.

Madam Chairman: I thought that is what happens, but it seems that even among us we are not agreed and that is why I ask Ms. Belle how common it is. Because the information we have is that your circulating file is a confidential file.

Ms. Laban: Yes, it is.

Madam Chairman: So maybe among you all the discussion needs to start from all those very simple things. Now, what I am saying is if I have my own circulating file, not what anybody did for me, I am doing it for myself, because everywhere I go I take a copy and I have every pay record, every payslip I ever got and all my TD forms, I have copies of everything, in the 33⅓ years I work there and the Ministries do not have it, then what?

Ms. Laban: Well, once the information has been certified, such as the P&L records, we can—

Madam Chairman: What happens if six months pass and it is not certified?

Ms. Laban: Well, we will have to get it certified by the internal audit.

Madam Chairman: What you are getting certified, my records?

Ms. Laban: If it is the pension and leave records.

Madam Chairman: The personal ones I have or the ones you cannot find? What are we waiting on to be certified? That is what I want to know.

Ms. Laban: Okay, well if they cannot find it and you have a copy, it still needs some sort of verification on that record.

Madam Chairman: Who verifies it? You take it from me and get it verified?

Ms. Laban: We can ask the Ministry to verify the information.

Madam Chairman: But we have been asking the Ministries and they cannot produce. So what are you asking them to verify, the copies that I have or to continue digging to find it? That is what I want to know.

Ms. Laban: No, if they can verify the copies at least stamp or sign—

Madam Chairman: So you will take the copies from me or I go to the Ministries with it? I want to know because they have somebody out there that have all their suitcase with their, everything. So I want to know what to tell them, I want them to hear.

Ms. Laban: Okay. We can take the information—the person is from the particular Ministry?

Madam Chairman: I am a public servant, I worked 33⅓ years in all the Ministries. I am retiring. You are missing some of my pension and leave information and so on. I have copies of everything. First, I ask you, can you work on my copies? You said they have to be verified. You go back to the Ministry, the Ministry has to verify. What I want to know is, would you work on what I have to have it verified?

Ms. Laban: Yes, we could have it verified.

Madam Chairman: So that I could give you copies and you will have it verified.

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: How long is that likely to take?

Ms. Laban: It would vary depending on—well, how long—

Madam Chairman: So it could be indefinite, right? Would there therefore be a cut-off period? You know like how in law we have statute bar and that kind of thing, would there be a period when you say, look, six months passed, 18 months passed, I did not hear from the Ministry I am going on what Ms. George says she has?

Ms. Laban: We would try to get the information from the Ministry.

Madam Chairman: You would not. You would not. So if it takes 10 years I will have to wait. I might be being ridiculous but it will have to wait till such time.

Ms. Laban: No, but there are instances where if a period of service is missing and the employee agrees we would make the payment minus that period of service interim.

Madam Chairman: Okay, all right. So you would make it minus that period of service and therefore again, what cut-off period then that you either surrender to my records or and you say, well, I will pay on your records or you say well look, you just wait till whenever.

Ms. Laban: As far as I am aware there is no cut-off period.

Madam Chairman: There is no cut-off period. Okay. Thank you. Member Mark.

Mr. Mark: Thank you. I wanted to ask my colleague from public administration, this people's soft enterprise pension administration software module. You have stated that it will facilitate the automation of the calculation and processing of pension and gratuities. You want to shed some light on this particular software for us?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Member, I think that information came from the Comptroller of Accounts in her response to an earlier question.

Mr. Mark: Oh, that is the Comptroller it came from. Comptroller?

Mr. Mc Kellar: Yes.

Mr. Mark: Comptroller, could you share with us?

Ms. Laban: I would not have details on the software but that is what we are looking to do, to implement.

Mr. Mark: That is separate from the MP, business process—

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Mark: It is a new software?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Mark: Any idea when that will come on stream? Or it is just an idea that you all are exploring?

Ms. Laban: We are undertaking the initiative right now. We are sending out a request for information for costing, for the implementation of the software. After which we need to do a Note to Cabinet for the approval of the costing and the project and that should take place in June this year.

Mr. Mark: Any ideas as to what are the benefits we will derive from this, the application of this and implementation of this software ultimately?

Ms. Laban: It would speed up the processing of the pensions calculations, providing all the information is on the system.

Mr. Mark: Okay. All right. Comptroller, you said that your ideal number of personnel in that section of your division that deals with pensions, supposed to be about 112. Am I wrong?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Mark: And at the moment you have about 87? Is that correct?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Mark: So if you get the balance, would that reduce the time in terms of the four to six months that you had given us earlier or would that be included if you have your ideal number?

Ms. Laban: It is expected to also reduce the time frame.

Mr. Mark: And what efforts are we making to kind of speed up that—

Ms. Laban: We have completed a Draft Note which we are reviewing right now and we would submit it to the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications. We are looking at May to submit and then onward to Cabinet.

4.40 p.m.

Mr. Mark: And the Auditor General, may I ask—I realize that based on your submission, you do have some challenges because that section of the Auditor General's department that would deal with pension and leave records and to verify same, you are saying that you only have about 12 persons—

Ms. Pujadas: That is correct.

Mr. Mark:—in that department or unit. And therefore, you suffer from staff storages. Right?

Ms. Pujadas: That is correct.

Mr. Mark: Now, could you tell us what the ideal staff complement is if you are to really address the amount of applications that you get for verification and ultimate approval?

Ms. Pujadas: We are the second verification process that comes to us. So, basically, for us, we would verify what has already been looked at by the internal auditors and then looked at by the Comptroller of Accounts staff. So, invariably, a number of the queries that may come to us would already be addressed. But, for us, we have a significant amount of files, mainly from National Security, that come directly to us, and that actually has impacted on our timeframe. So with the resource, I cannot give you an exact number, because I am not an HR specialist. But I am just looking at the challenges in terms of the volume of things that come to us direct from certain entities. Because if you saw in my submission, at least almost 2,000 files come to us directly for us, which therefore would not have gone through the verification process from the other entities. I would wish to say that in some instances we are not quite clear as to why those files come to us directly without going through the Comptroller of Accounts. We have sought to try to ascertain where that practice has—and we have not been able to ascertain that to date. But that also has impacted on our capabilities as well.

Mr. Mark: But what would you want to suggest be done to end this practice? Because the Comptroller of Accounts Pension Management branch is supposed to be the centralized agency within the broad Ministry of Finance framework that would do the processing once the computation has been done.

Ms. Pujadas: Sen. Mark, if you will look at the legislation under which this is being done, we are auditors and we are supposed to be auditing in accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Act and the Constitution. You will note that our responsibility is defined for us in the Civil Service Act and is replicated, as I said, in those other Acts. Therefore, what they have done is position the audit office in basically what is ostensibly an HR function. We have been advocating, and we have spoken at times.

We have spoken to the then Director of Public Administration, Ms. Creed. We have had discussions with the Attorney General's Office as to how we can be removed from this process and let us be what we are supposed to be, and that is auditors, and that would alleviate a level that may not necessarily need to be there. That is a discussion that we have been having and we have not reached—I do not know if our legal after—because we are looking at it from that legal point of view. Ms. Cockburn, you want to add anything at this point in time?

Ms. Cockburn: No, not at this time.

Ms. Pujadas: But, basically, that is a level that has to be looked at as to whether or not the Auditor General needs to be intimately involved in what is ostensibly an HR function, or let us do what we are supposed to do and audit in accordance with the Exchequer and Audit Act. So that is a discussion that also needs to be had. So when you ask me about the number of personnel that should be involved, I would respond with: Do we really need to be involved? But if we are at present need to be involved, then at least we would need to have at least 10 more officers than what we have at present. We utilize audit officers, and that takes away from our resources that we need to do our normal work under the Constitution and under the Exchequer and Audit Act in order to do that. We also utilize temporary clerical staff in order to facilitate the processing of some of these pension and leave records and computations, and we also utilize retirees. That is what we have had to do in order to advance the process forward. I hope I have answered your question to some degree.

Mr. Mark: Yes. This is clearly an anomaly because I am seeing from the data that you have provided for us, in the short space of a year you have almost 1,549 applications coming from the defence force, police, fire and the prison service. All of those people come directly to you?

Ms. Pujadas: That is correct. Yes, Sir.

Mr. Mark: But how long this practice has been going on, Madam?

Ms. Pujadas: I cannot answer you that, but I know it was before my time and I am old.

Mr. Mark: Wow, wow, it is a long time.

Ms. Pujadas: Yes, it is a long time. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Mark: Yeah, it is a long time. But, clearly, and so on—so the Auditor General works closely with the Comptroller on this matter?

Ms. Pujadas: Yes, we do. We work close. We work together. One of the questions that was raised before as to the liaison relationship that exists. So there is an informal relationship between the Comptroller of Accounts and the Auditor General's department. We liaise with the Director of Pensions very closely. When we have issues, we have had meetings to resolve certain differences and to come to an agreement as to how we would approach certain things. So yes, there is that communication between the Auditor General's Department and the Comptroller of Accounts.

Mr. Mark: But have you all discussed this anomaly to see how it could be addressed, either legislatively or otherwise?

Ms. Pujadas: You are speaking about the anomaly with the police department—

Mr. Mark: Yes, the defence force and police and—

Ms. Pujadas: We have not taken it forward in a formalized manner. No, Sir.

Mr. Mark: So you all are happy with it?

Ms. Pujadas: No, we are not.

Mr. Mark: Well, then, something has to be done. So what would you like to recommend to this Committee that be done? Because it is, in fact, affecting your core duty and responsibility as the Auditor General's Department with the responsibility of auditing.

Ms. Pujadas: I know the Auditor General himself has always advocated that we would like not to be part of the HR process in any of these matters, and so we would have liked to have had discussions in how we could go about in approaching in amending the legislation, which is basically regulations, in most instances, to allow us not to be part of the verification process and to tie us in with the Comptroller of Accounts. Because if you read 33(2), in the same breath that they mentioned the Comptroller of Accounts, they are also mentioning the Auditor General's department. So, basically, this is the approach that the Auditor General would love to have support, and I do not know if the Committee would be able to facilitate us in that area.

Mr. Mark: It is a very—I was not aware of that until you brought it to our attention, that you were dealing directly, or the defence force came directly to you.

Ms. Pujadas: The National Security: the defence force, the fire services department, the police service department, the prisons department, all theirs come directly to us, yes. And I also believe the municipal corporations as well, they also come directly to us as well, that is Arima, San Fernando, Port of Spain, Point Fortin. They come directly to us.

Mr. Mark: And what about the daily-rated workers, they come to you as well?

Ms. Pujadas: Yes, they do.

Mr. Mark: So daily-rated workers—

Ms. Pujadas: But they come through the Comptroller of Accounts.

Mr. Mark: The daily-rated workers come through you?

Ms. Pujadas: They come to us but through the Comptroller of Accounts.

Mr. Mark: Okay. I just wanted to ask the Ministry of Finance, the Permanent Secretary, the formulas or formulae that would be used to address pensions, either on reduced or reduced pension and gratuity. On the question of the formulas, acting Permanent Secretary, how reasonable would you say these formulas are in computing pension and gratuity in the public service, the current formulas that they have for pensions and gratuity?

Ms. Durham-Kissoon: Member, I can ask the Comptroller to look at that question, please.

Mr. Mark: Yes, thank you.

Ms. Laban: These formulas would have been in accordance with the relevant Act, the Pensions Act.

Mr. Mark: But has the Ministry ever thought of revising, or looking at this—revisiting the formulas? I am asking that even though it is in the Act, is there any intention on your part to revisit or revise for consideration by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, the formulas?

Ms. Laban: No, there was no intention there.

Mr. Mark: Okay. All right. I will pause at this time.

Madam Chairman: Member Dookie?

Mr. Dookie: Thank you, Madam Chair. Regarding the formula that Member Mark alluded to, in terms of computing the pension figure, two pieces of information required would be the months of service and the last three years' salary. Am I correct?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Dookie: So what other pieces of information are needed to compute the pension figure for an employee? This is all you need.

Ms. Laban: Well, this is one of the most commonly used formulas, but you have different pieces of legislation affecting pensions, such as legislators, judges, ambassadors and each of those would require a different calculation.

Mr. Dookie: But this formula—well if I am to interpret your submission correctly—is the most commonly-used formula. So my interpretation of this is that it applies to most of the employees.

Ms. Laban: Yes, but it would depend on the information from the pension and leave records and that is where the problem lies. Sometimes the information is incomplete. It would require the work—

Mr. Dookie: And that resides where, in the Ministries?

Ms. Laban: With the relevant Ministries.

Mr. Dookie: So the traffic jam is really in the Ministries and Departments.

Ms. Laban: Yes, for the pension and leave records.

Mr. Dookie: So therefore in solving this problem, the focus has to be on the operations which take place there?

Ms. Laban: Yes, in the pension and leave units. Yes.

Mr. Dookie: So you are saying that once this information is available, the outcome of calculating the pensions and ensuring payments are made, is a simple process after that?

Ms. Laban: Yes, once all the information is there. There are also other problems, such as wrong incremental dates, unutilized leave. Those are the things that would have to be amended on a pension and leave record.

Mr. Dookie: But that has to deal with documentation at the level of the Ministry?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Dookie: So, therefore, if you get the process of documentation right at the level of the Ministry, is it fair to assume that the outcome of that would reduce significantly the time it takes to deliver pension cheques to pensioners?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Dookie: So having regard to that, if we assume that we have identified a problem regarding documentation at a particular source, then what are the interventions necessary now to bring relief to this particular situation? Because if I am hearing you correct, we have identified the problem, we know where the problem exists, then the next discussion, in my mind, has to be what are the solutions. So I do not know if some thoughts could be shared on that.

Ms. Laban: Again, it would lie with the Permanent Secretary—the responsibility of the Permanent Secretary of the relevant Ministries to ensure that those things are taken into consideration. There is timely and accurate preparation of the pension and leave records for submission to the Comptroller of Accounts.

Mr. Suite: If I may, the issues in terms of processing the pensions and the timely processing, really, as you identified, stem from the HR record-keeping throughout the service. The thing that—and it sounds like it is a simple-fix. If it was simple it would have been done already, but—

Mr. Dookie: Well, I am not at all saying it is simple. I am saying that—

Mr. Suite: No, no, that is the crux of the matter and I just wanted to probably put some of the things as to why it continues to linger. One, it is the persons who have to do the job and whether they are familiar with the different processes, on what they need to actually do. Then when you train those persons, then they themselves are transferred and go to another department and you have to retrain them. So you have personnel issues.

The other thing that impacts upon it is, you have a central agency, the Service Commissions Department, dealing with when persons are appointed, when they are promoted, whether they are acting in a position, when they are incremental, and all these—well, little things, for want of a better word—impact upon the accuracy of the records and that is what is causing the problem. And then when you go back into ministries, that persons moved or the Ministries themselves move or re-configured, and you are also on a manual record-keeping problem. That is the issue.

I think we had talked about the IHRIS system which was meant to address some of these. There are some challenges in terms of the system but, again, that only addresses the issue with when it was implemented, but you still have persons who predated the introduction of the IHRIS. So, yes, you are correct. The computations of the pensions stem from the record-keeping coming out of the various HR units in different ministries and departments.

Mr. Dookie: All I am saying is that, having identified that, and you would have just alluded to some of the challenges, therefore the next step in the discussion—I am not talking about for here—has to do with how do we address those issues. Because it seems to me that if those issues are addressed successfully, it would significantly reduce the amount of time it takes to give the pensioner something he or she would have worked for and would need at a specific point in time, with urgency. That is it, Madam Chair, for me.

Mr. Mark: Madam Chair, I just want to ask a final question. Madam CPO, the issue of increments and how that could impact on one's benefits in terms of pensions and gratuity, I know that is a major challenge. Could you share with us what is the process and how long should it take to determine increments in the public service? You can share that with us?

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: I can share as much as I am aware of. In the regulations it is clearly stated when you should get an increment, when you will qualify for an increment, and if everything goes well, that should not be an issue. Issues may come up if you are acting in different positions and your incremental date for each position is a different thing. And, basically, the ministries and departments can work it out. If they have issues they would write to the Personnel Department to request assistance in determining the incremental date. So our role, yes, it is in the legislation, but it is clear in the legislation what you are supposed to do. So if you have an issue you would come. So we would only deal with requests for clarification on determination on incremental dates and that kind of thing, from ministries and departments.

Mr. Mark: So like the Comptroller of Accounts, do you find that is a major problem impacting upon, let us say, public officers from receiving their pensions on a timely basis, that matter of increments being outstanding, and therefore they have to await approval, calculation, determination, before they can finalize what their terminal benefits ought to be, ultimately? Do you find that to be a challenge that you are faced with, as the Comptroller?

Ms. Laban: It is one of the factors, but in addition to that, the Ministry may have calculated the person at a wrong incremental date, at a wrong incremental point and that would have meant a wrong salary going forward, so then you would have to go back to adjust the salaries for those back years for increments.

Mr. Mark: And how many people you would say would be impacted upon with those kinds of errors or difficulties? Do you think it is a large number?

Ms. Laban: I would not be able to say.

Mr. Mark: You would not be able to say. But I have here where you said about 1,900 persons are awaiting pensions. Of course, you told me earlier it was about just under 900 and another 900 and something outstanding, because you have a number of issues to be resolved. That 900, or close to 1,000, among them would be persons who are experiencing challenges in the area that I have mentioned?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Mark: Incremental?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Mr. Mark: And you would not have worked out in a matrix format what are the key issues that would be impacted upon the 1,000 persons, so you could say, well, look, out of the 1,000, 50 of them have outstanding increments still to be calculated and it is taking, maybe a year that could be done, or it is outstanding for the last, you know, eight to 10 months as the case may be?

Ms. Laban: No. And this is mainly because our system is a manual system where all the information is on a person's file. We would have memos that we would have written to the ministries requesting those lists of information.

Mr. Mark: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. CPO, I think, having regard to the discussion with the increments, I just really wanted to focus on the contract officers. But looking at what was said with the increments, I think I would want to say it is beyond challenge that CPO has an important role in the processing, maybe not in the computation, but to the processing of pensions. I also would want to say when it comes to contract employment that CPO also has an important role, and I really wanted to discuss—open the discussion with respect to the settlement of terms and conditions of contracted officers. And I have seen that there are about some 1,900 people contracted officers still awaiting settlement of their terms and conditions, and I am wondering what is being done to address this.

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: That 1,900 is a figure from '15 to current. So what the department has done, going back to 2013, is we try to standardize some positions. We have a listing of those positions, which would be like communications, legal, clerical positions like business operation assistants, where it will be set what the salary is. So the Ministries and Departments who have persons employed on contract in those positions will no longer have to come to the Personnel Department to get those terms determined. So having set aside those, we are now in a position where we are looking at some other positions where we would standardize those as well. But basically, every other position will have to come to the Personnel Department with a request for terms. Even if a salary is fixed for a position, when a person is hired in the position, the Ministry still has to come back for the terms for that particular person. And we have been getting, based on the information I have, requests where Ministries are now sending in requests for persons who are nearing the end of their contract. Now, we are dealing with contract employees throughout the entire public service, so as you see, the number is large.

So we have also put into place a contract unit where they will look at all the terms, not just salary or terms and conditions. They will look at all the terms, salary and other terms, and when that is finalized in that contract unit, it can be signed off by the appropriate levels in the organization, that will be issued. So that should speed up the process. As I say, we are looking at some other positions to standardize which would also assist, but we also have our staffing challenges. I think that was made very public recently. So we are looking at how we can try and get some more technical persons on board and maybe increase the size of the contracts unit to see how we can speed up the process.

Madam Chairman: Let me ask you. In terms of this standardization—and this is a very pointed question—I see some of the common positions are like Clerk/Secretariat. Would the Clerks at the table for the Parliament be under the standardized position for Clerk/Secretariat? And if you do not have that, you could always send that to me in writing.

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: I was just confirming. The answer is no.

Madam Chairman: The answer is no. Okay, thank you. Now, in terms of—I see that there are—you all have certain trade disputes coming out of challenges to your rulings on terms and conditions. I see that there should be about five that exist currently. At what stage are they?

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Can I ask my Director of Benefits to see if she can assist in this, please?

Madam Chairman: Sure.

Ms. Gonzales: That matter is with our Legal Services Division and I do not have that information at this point in time.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So that could you undertake to supply that to us in writing?

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: And lastly, I wanted to ask about—I see there was consideration of an initiative for the payment of gratuities for contract workers by their departments. Where is that initiative? What stage has that reached?

Mrs. Sinaswee-Gervais: Can I ask my colleague, Comptroller of Accounts to—

Ms. Laban: This is an initiative that we have undertaken to decentralize the payment of contract gratuities to the Ministries and Departments, because we are looking to volumes. We get approximately 3,000 contract payments to process every year and we just check the calculations and send it back, and make the payments. That is what we normally do.

Madam Chairman: So the whole processing will be done by the particular Department or Ministry, and what you all would do is just a verification and then authorization? Is that what I am hearing?

Ms. Laban: What happens currently is their HR units would prepare the contract payments. They would do the calculation, send it to the pensions branch for checking and for payment.

Madam Chairman: Right. So this initiative eliminates what?

Ms. Laban: It eliminates time taken to check a contract payment and to pay. If you decentralize it to all the various ministries, then they would be allowed to make their own payments.

Madam Chairman: Yeah, but they would do the checking?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Because, basically, what you do is checking and payment?

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: What happens then to that sort of oversight which will not be done if it is decentralized?

Ms. Laban: Well, we would be doing it in phases. First of all we would issue a circular with guidelines for the Ministries. We also have our officers who would be in contact with the Ministries on the various issues. But the contract payments, it is a simple calculation, 20 per cent of the gross amount for the years that they have worked. Additionally, some of the errors are very simple errors, for example a stamp is missing; a signature is missing. Apart from that, there is sometimes non-adherence to CPO guidelines, which is in the CPO circular. So those are some of the errors that the ministries make and we would be liaising with them on those issues.

Madam Chairman: But it would not be an issue if you do not know about it. Currently, what exists is as if you have an oversight function. Okay? So that I do not know what the CPO errors are, but the mere idea that you have said non-adherence to CPO directives, and you have distinguished that from the simple ones like a stamp missing and a signature missing, I would then want to assume that those are important errors. If you remove your oversight over that, then who takes the responsibility? Because if I am doing it and I do not know I have committed an error, then there is nothing for you to liaise with me on. So what happens to that function?

Ms. Laban: Well, we also had discussions with the Auditor General's Department where we discussed also at some point the Auditor General conducting audits on these contract payments.

Madam Chairman: That is after the fact, real-time? When would that happen? That would be after the fact.

Ms. Laban: Yes.

Madam Chairman: So it still, in my respectful view, does not replace the function that you are currently undertaking. Now, let me ask one other thing—

5.10 p.m.

Ms. Durham-Kissoon: Sorry. That is an important point. We really do need to take that into consideration. That is an important internal control that we need to build into this new initiative that we are working on, and we really—

Madam Chairman: And therefore, that is why the initiative has not been as yet?

Ms. Durham-Kissoon: Yes. I think we really do need to work out the system of internal control for the Ministry and see what will the role be for the Comptroller of Accounts.

Madam Chairman: Thanks. Might I just ask something to the Comptroller of Accounts? How much does that free you up if that control role is removed from you? How much does that free you up?

Ms. Laban: As I mentioned before, we do have about 3,000 to process, to pay every year. So that would reduce the work—

Madam Chairman: Yeah, but in terms of number of employees, in terms of man-hours, how much will that free you up?

Ms. Laban: As I said, it would reduce the time taken.

Madam Chairman: And I really want, if you could, and maybe you cannot do it yet because I guess you all a mapping process, if you could say to us that will provide us with 10 more man-hours a month, that will therefore translate in something that I think somebody could grapple with and understand. But to say it will give you more time I am not sure it communicates something to us real and it may give you more time, but I think unless you could quantify that time—I might have more time but it does not necessarily mean I produce more. But if I know you have 10 more hours in the day you can then calculate how much more you can do in that 10 hours.

So I would suggest that you know maybe while the Ministry of Finance is looking at the internal controls, Comptroller of Accounts could also be looking to tell us the impact, in a real tangible sense, the decentralization will bring to the processing of not just the gratuity, but will also free you up to do your other functions. Okay? And one more question to member Mark.

Mr. Mark: I just want to consolidate what the Chairman is saying. Madam PS of Finance, and Comptroller, remember the end result or the objective that we are after is ensuring that public officers, when they leave the system they are able to collect their gratuities and their pensions within a reasonable time frame. Not what we are hearing today, some people are taking a year, some eight months, some 12 months, some 15 months. People should get theirs within a two-week to four-week period max once things remain equal and we put systems in place.

So, if we are going to have an initiative to decentralize the payment of contract gratuities, then the Ministry should be able to submit to us how will that translate, as the Chairman is saying, in the reduction in the waiting time for the public officer to receive his or her pension at the end of the day.

I think we ought to get that in some documented form if that is to make sense, and apart from the internal controls that you have mentioned that you have to put in place. So you do not have a slush fund being established, or you do not have people taking advantage of the system because we do not have the necessary oversight that the Comptroller used to once have.

And secondly, I would like to ask you and the Comptroller, we still have this archaic outdated system where a retired public officer has to present to the Comptroller of Accounts a life certificate to indicate that I am not dead, I am alive. I mean to say, that is outdated and we are at the level of a joint select committee, we have introduced, and the Minister of Finance has agreed, that in the case of the NIS system you have a linkage with the Registrar General's Department death certificate area so you would be able to link with them to determine who is alive and who has passed on, rather than somebody having to come to the Comptroller every so often, six months, to announce to the Comptroller, through a certificate, that I am alive.

I believe that something has to be done to address that system, and I think that Comptroller should take a page out of the book of the NIS, or NIB, and see if you could get the Minister of Finance to agree to a similar system for retirees within the public service. Those are the two areas I would like to put to you and, the second one in particular if I could have your input on.

Ms. Laban: We have already undertaken that initiative and we are liaising with the Registrar General's Department and the National Insurance Board on making this happen.

Mr. Mark: You have any idea, Madam Comptroller, when that initiative could bear fruits, or fruit rather, at the end of the day; or would be successful?

Ms. Laban: The next life certificate cycle is in October this year. It was in April already, so we are looking at having it—we are hoping that it is ready by then, the system.

Mr. Mark: By October?

Ms. Laban: By October.

Mr. Mark: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: It is now quarter past five and I want to thank the officers of the Ministry of Finance, Auditor General, the Personnel Department, the Office of the Prime Minister, the Ministry of Public Administration and Communications—and I am not going to commit the same mistake twice—and the Comptroller of Accounts, for coming and participating in this very interesting conversation. It is an issue that you all know better than us, a lot of retired public servants really feel the brunt of what may appear to be delays, and because time is a moving thing, some of us will reach there. So I guess we have to fix it even if it is just for selfish reasons in anticipation of us getting there.

So I thank you for the conversation. There are some other questions that time has not permitted that we explore with you all today, but the Secretary of the Committee will forward those questions for written response. The matters that we have asked you all to give us some further assistance with, the Secretary would also remind you all in writing.

Again, I say thank you. I wish you all a successful conversation among yourselves in terms of seeing how you all collaborate more with your limited resources, human money and everything, because we all know that the world is not perfect, but I think the world demands that we do better through the imperfection.

So I want to thank you all again. Safe journey home. I want to thank the listening public and the members of the media who followed this discussion with us today. Pleasant evening. Good night. I now bring this meeting to an end.

5.18 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned*. .