



7th REPORT OF THE

JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON

SOCIAL SERVICES AND

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

**ON AN
INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TARGETED
CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME (TCCTP)**

Fourth SESSION (2018/2019) 11TH PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

SEVENTH REPORT

OF THE

**JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC
ADMINISTRATION**

ON AN

**INQUIRY INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE TARGETED CONDITIONAL
CASH TRANSFER PROGRAMME (TCCTP)**

Date Laid in the HoR:

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The Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

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THE COMMITTEE



Mr. Paul Richards
CHAIRMAN¹



Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
VICE-CHAIRMAN



Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP
MEMBER



Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
MP
MEMBER



Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein,
MEMBER



Mr. Rohan Sinanan
MEMBER



Ms. Khadijah Ameen
MEMBER



Ms. Allyson West
MEMBER

¹ Former Senator Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir served as chairman of the Committee from December 2015 to September 2018

Committee Mandate and Establishment

- 1.1.1 Section 66 of the Constitution of Trinidad and Tobago declares, that not later than three months after the first meeting of the House of Representatives, the Parliament shall appoint Joint Select Committees to inquire into and report to both Houses in respect of Government Ministries, Municipal Corporations, Statutory Authorities, State Enterprises and Service Commissions, in relation to their administration, the manner of exercise of their powers, their methods of functioning and any criteria adopted by them in the exercise of their powers and functions.
- 1.1.2 Motions related to this purpose were passed in the House of Representatives and Senate on November 13 and 17, 2015, respectively and thereby established, *inter alia*, the ***Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration***.
- 1.1.3 Standing Order 91 of the Senate and 101 of the House of Representatives outline the general functions of a Committee of this nature. They are as follows:
- a) “To examine Bills and review all legislation relating to the relevant Ministries, departments or bodies or as may be referred to it by the House;
 - b) To investigate, inquire into, and report on all matters relating to the mandate, management, activities, administration and operations of the assigned Ministries, departments or bodies;
 - c) To study the programme and policy objectives of Ministries, departments or bodies and the effectiveness of the implementation of such programmes and policy objectives;
 - d) To assess and monitor the performance of Ministries, Departments and bodies and the manner of the exercise of their powers;
 - e) To investigate and inquire into all matters relating to the assigned Ministries, Departments and bodies as they may deem necessary, or as may be referred to them by the House or a Minister; and
 - f) To make reports and recommendations to the House as often as possible, including recommendations for proposed legislation.”

Powers of the Joint Select Committee

1.1.4 Standing Orders 101 of the Senate and 111 of the House of Representatives outline the core powers of the Committee which include *inter alia*:

- to send for persons, papers and records;
- to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the Senate;
- to adjourn from place to place;
- to report from time to time;
- to appoint specialist advisers either to supply information which is not otherwise readily available or to elucidate matters of complexity within the Committee's or Sub-Committee's order of reference;
- to communicate with any Committee of Parliament on matters of common interest; and
- to meet concurrently with any other Committee for the purpose of deliberating, taking evidence or considering draft reports.

Membership

1.1.5 The Committee comprises the following members:

- | | |
|--|---------------|
| 1. Mr. Paul Richards ² | Chairman |
| 2. Mr. Esmond Forde, MP | Vice-Chairman |
| 3. Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP | Member |
| 4. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP | Member |
| 5. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP | Member |
| 6. Mr. Rohan Sinanan | Member |
| 7. Ms. Khadijah Ameen | Member |
| 8. Ms. Allyson West | Member |

Secretariat Support

1.1.6 The following officers were assigned to assist the Committee:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|-----------|
| 1. Mr. Julien Ogilvie | - | Secretary |
|-----------------------|---|-----------|

² Former Senator Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir served as chairman of the Committee from December 2015 to September 2018.

2. Mr. Johnson Greenidge - Assistant Secretary
3. Ms. Ashaki Alexis - Graduate Research Assistant

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Committee Mandate and Establishment.....	4
ABBREVIATIONS.....	9
LIST OF TABLES.....	10
TABLE OF APPENDICES	10
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	11
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	13
INTRODUCTION	17
Background.....	17
Conduct of the Inquiry.....	20
KEY ISSUES, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	22
OBJECTIVE 1: To assess the effectiveness of the programme since its inception, with reference to poverty reduction.....	22
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	29
Findings	29
Recommendations.....	31
OBJECTIVE 2: To examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems and organizational structure of the TCCTP	33
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	40
Findings	40
Recommendations.....	43
OBJECTIVE 3: To examine the financial status of the TCCTP and the procedures/policies in place to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money in the management of the programme	45
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	49
Findings	49
Recommendations.....	50
OBJECTIVE 4: To assess the systems in place to monitor and evaluate the success and impact of the TCCTP.....	50
FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	51
Findings	51
Recommendations.....	52

APPENDICES	54
Appendix I.....	55
Appendix II	56
Appendix III.....	72
Appendix IV	150
Appendix V.....	152
Appendix VI.....	153

ABBREVIATIONS

CDAP	Chronic Disease Assistance Programme
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
E-PASS	Electronic People's Access to Social Services
IADB	Inter-American Development Bank
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ISEMS	Integrated Social Enterprise Management System
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MSDFS	Ministry of the Social Development and Family Services
MTS	Means Test Score
MuST	Multi-Sector Skills Training
NFLP	National Financial Literacy Programme
PMU	Project Management System
RISE-UP	Rights of Individuals to Social and Economic Security-Universal Programme
SLC	Survey of Living Conditions
SHARE	Share Social Help and Rehabilitative Efforts
STEP-UP	Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme
TCCTP	Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme
TFC	Temporary Food Card
UNCEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Means Test Scores for Different Levels of Poverty	23
Table 2: MONTHLY Benefit Associated with Size of Family.....	28
Table 3: Breakdown of the number of persons exposed to the Life Skills programme for the period 2012-2014.....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Table 4: Job positions within the Social Welfare Division.....	35
Table 5: “Food Card” recipients for each fiscal year during the period 2014 to 2017	37
Table 6: Food Support 2011 to 2016	Error! Bookmark not defined.
Table 7: The operational costs of the “RISE-UP” component.....	47
Table 8: Number of Field Officers assigned to each Welfare District Office.....	152
Table 9: The number of staff retained following the dissolution of the Food Card Unit	152

TABLE OF APPENDICES

APPENDICES	PAGE NUMBER
Appendix I: Persons who appeared and provided oral evidence	56
Appendix II: Minutes of the seventeenth meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services And Public Administration	57- 72
Appendix III: Verbatim Notes of the Seventeenth Meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services And Public Administration	73- 151
Appendix IV: Regional and international definition of family and household	152- 153
Appendix V: Field Officers assigned to each Social Welfare District Office	154
Appendix VI: The procedure and benefits of utilizing the Biometric Smart Card System	155

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2.1.1 At its sixteenth (16th) meeting held on September 13, 2017, the Committee resolved to inquire into the management of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP). The Committee agreed on the following inquiry objectives:

1. **To assess the effectiveness of the programme since its inception, with reference to poverty reduction;**
2. **To examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems and structure of the TCCTP;**
3. **To examine the financial status of the TCCTP and the procedures /policies in place to ensure transparency, accountability, and value for money in the management of the programme; and**
4. **To access the systems in place to monitor and evaluate the success and impact of the TCCTP.**

2.1.2 The Committee acquired both oral and written evidence based on the objectives listed above. Oral evidence was received during a public hearing held with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) on November 01, 2017 **(See appendix I for the list of officials who appeared)**. Some of the significant issues that are addressed in this report include:

- i. The reassignment of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) from a dedicated Unit to the Social Welfare Division, MSDFS;
- ii. The challenges faced by the Ministry in preventing State programmes from encouraging a dependency syndrome among clients;
- iii. The rebranding of the Rights of Individuals to Social and Economic Security, Universal Prosperity (RISE-UP) programme to the Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme - Uplifting People (STEP-UP);
- iv. The reduction of the number of permanent and temporary card holders from approximately 65,000 in 2014 to 27,000 in 2017;

- v. Due to a re-evaluation exercise in the fiscal year 2016, 13,000 persons did not reapply for the programme and were subsequently removed;
 - vi. a short-term arrangement that was implemented in 2016 whereby cheques in lieu of the usual electronic card were given to 4,000 applicants who had not received any benefits from 2013;
 - vii. The Ministry's inability to monitor the types of items purchased by recipients especially by those who receive cheques;
 - viii. The technical and technological requirements for successfully executing the TCCTP;
 - ix. The halting of the proposed Biometric Card System in 2015;
 - x. The failure of the MSDFS to conduct a Cost/Benefit analysis of the TCCTP;
 - xi. Instances of discrimination against socially displaced persons seeking assistance under the programme at the various Food Support Offices; and
 - xii. The factors which contributed to the non-renewal of approximately 90 contract job positions under the discontinued Food Card programme.
- 2.1.2 Based on these findings and other matters which arose during the inquiry, the Committee has proffered recommendations which it believes will address the issues highlighted. A summary of these recommendations follows this Executive Summary.
- 2.1.3 The Committee looks forward to reviewing the Minister's response to this Report, which becomes due, sixty (60) days after it is presented to the Houses of Parliament.
- 2.1.4 The Committee wishes to acknowledge the service of former Chairman, Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir to the completion of this inquiry.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN THE SHORT-TERM

(To be implemented within 3 to 6 months of the presentation of the report)

- I. That a revision of the STEP-UP development component is completed and implemented by the mid-term of fiscal year 2019. The Ministry should develop comprehensive guidelines to facilitate the effective implementation of the development component of the Food Support Programme. There may be a need to analyse the pool of “food card” recipients in order to determine who may be most suitable for enrollment into a the STEP-UP Component;
- II. That as part of the new card system, scheduled for implementation in 2018, the MSDFS should:
 - a. develop a revised list of approved food items for purchase utilizing the debit card;
 - b. give consideration to the inclusion of locally produced goods as part of the list of approved goods;
 - c. provide that participating merchants be required to make locally produced goods reasonably available to cardholders; and
 - d. ensure that the monitoring of adherence to the revised list form part of the proposed monitoring framework to be featured in the draft National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS);
- III. In the Ministerial Response to this report the Ministry will provide the Parliament with an update on the implementation of the following initiatives:
 - i. The new/updated Survey of Living Conditions (SLC);
 - ii. National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS);
- IV. That the Ministry evaluate the process used for screening/reviewing applications with the aim of reducing the lag time between applications and the disbursement of food support. This evaluation should be completed by March 31st 2019. The Ministry must strive to more effectively balance improvements in service delivery while ensuring due diligence mechanisms are applied;

- V. Given that this programme has a high propensity for abuse and fraudulent activities, the Ministry must institute standing arrangements to ensure that:
- i. Middle managers such as Regional Coordinators are held accountable for their decisions; and
 - ii. Regular audits and reconciliations of the list of recipients are conducted;
- The Ministry's Responses to this report should apprise the Parliament on the measures and strategies the Ministry intends to pursue in fulfilment of this recommendation.
- VI. A cost-benefit analysis of the introduction of a National Biometric Registry/identification system should be undertaken by May 2019;
- VII. That the Ministry provide in its response an update on the implementation of a new card processing system (with accompanying IT system) which was expected to operationalised by the first quarter of the fiscal year 2018. In the event that the system has not yet been implemented, the Ministry should indicate the obstacles to such implementation;
- VIII. That in its response, the Ministry report the estimated total expenditure for food support as at the end of fiscal 2018. In addition the Ministry should include the costs envisaged for the reinvigoration of the development component of the programme to encourage self-sufficiency in clients; and
- IX. A mechanism should be developed to permit the allocation of multiple food cards to a single household. We recommend that this extraordinary measure be considered under the following circumstances:
- i. A relatively large household that has suffered significant material lost as a result of fire, flooding or other major disaster;
 - ii. A relatively large household whose sole bread winner has died;
 - iii. A household with multiple minors with 'special needs'.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION IN THE MEDIUM-TERM

(To be implemented within 7 months to 12 months of the presentation of the report)

- I. The MSDFS should undertake a social impact assessment of the TCCTP on poverty reduction by the end of fiscal year 2019. Furthermore, the Ministry should immediately reassess the needs of various regions based on identified levels of poverty;
- II. That a framework is established and implemented by the Ministry to capture the details of persons who graduated from the development component of the programme. This will ensure that accurate and comprehensive information on this component and the graduates of the programme is readily available for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation;
- III. That the MSDFS commence a series of community outreach/awareness initiatives specific to the TCCTP. These initiatives should mirror the approach and objectives of the 'Direct Impact' initiative while taking into consideration the financial constraints currently faced by the Public Service;
- IV. That the Ministry assess the need to fill the nineteen (19) contract positions for Social Welfare Field Officers and begin the process of filling these vacancies on a needs basis;
- V. We recommend that a holistic approach be adopted to managing the disbursement of food support. The soon to be modified system cannot simply capture items purchased; but should be designed to monitor the recipients from onset to actual empowerment and eventual detachment; and
- VI. That the Ministry's development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for its operations as well as for the programmes and initiatives under its purview be completed and fully implemented at the end of the fiscal year 2019.
- VII. We recommend that as an alternative approach to distributing temporary food cards to person affected by a natural disaster, food hampers can be distributed. In many instances a disaster would result in a disruption of access to locations and the destruction of official identification documents which are need to access funds credited to the debit card;

- X. That there be a standardized application process for the Food Support Programme across all Regional Offices;
- XI. That MSDFS conduct a Cost/Benefit analysis of the TCCTP;
- XII. That given the high costs incurred by food support and the possible operational costs envisaged for the reinvigoration of the development component of the programme, the Ministry should pursue with alacrity the implementation of:
 - i. a case flow management system to ensure the steady movement of clients that have attained self-sufficiency out of the programme; and
 - ii. a system to ensure the monitoring and evaluation of the Food support programme.
- XIII. The Ministry should consider implementing an appropriate IT system that would facilitate monitoring and evaluation through the capture and analysis of data;
- XIV. That the Ministry review the United Nations World Food Programme monitoring and evaluation guidelines to assist in the formulation and implementation of an effective monitoring and evaluation system for the TCCTP; and
- XV. The Terms of Reference and research framework to guide any further empirical/primary research projects to be executed on behalf of the Ministry must be subjected to careful review before it is approved. Given prevailing resource constraints, the Ministry must ensure that all necessary risk mitigation methods are applied when entering into contractual agreements.

INTRODUCTION

Background

- 3.1.1. According to the literature³, conditional cash transfer (CCT) programs aim to reduce poverty by making welfare programs conditional upon the receivers' actions. The government (or a charity) only transfers the money to persons who meet certain criteria. These criteria may include enrolling children into public schools, sustaining regular medical check-ups, receiving vaccinations and the like. CCTs seek to assist in breaking a cycle of poverty through the development of human capital.
- 3.1.2. The Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) is an initiative of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago aimed at reducing poverty by five per cent (over a unspecified period?) and completely eradicating indigence in Trinidad and Tobago. The TCCTP is administered through the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS). In essence, the Government provides an electronic cash transfer facility to beneficiaries through the use of a debit card (known as the “Food Card”) for the purchase of a predefined “basket of goods” that is representative of a nutritionally balanced diet. **The Committee noted that under the current system, save for the purchase of cigarettes and alcohol, there are no restrictions on the type of food items that may be purchased using a ‘Food card’.**
- 3.1.3. It was proposed that as a condition for the receipt of this social benefit at least one member of each benefitting household must undergo skills development training with the hope that the household would achieve self-sufficiency after a period of two years.⁴

Initial period of Operation and Modifications

- 3.1.4. Cabinet appointed a sub-committee in July 2005 to consider strategies and to develop recommendations to deal with the negative effects of escalating food prices in Trinidad and

³ A World Bank Policy Research Report. “Conditional Cash Transfers”. Accessed on September 17, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2QGywzd>

⁴ The Auditor General’s Department of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. 2010. “*A Special Report by the Auditor General of Trinidad And Tobago on the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) Self-Sufficiency or Dependency?*” Accessed on July 17, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2xltkII>

Tobago. The sub-committee made several recommendations in its report dated August 2005. One recommendation was the introduction of a targeted conditional cash transfer through the use of a smart card (“Food Card”) programme designed to target the most vulnerable families.

- 3.1.5. Modifications were made to the programme in 2014 following a review which found that the previous Smart Card programme was obsolete and susceptible to discrepancies. This resulted in the Food Card programme being replaced with the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP).
- 3.1.6. The TCCTP was modelled after the Chilean *Solidario* System, which seeks to address poverty in a holistic manner by providing social protection, in part, through the provision of nutrition and food security to vulnerable households.⁵
- 3.1.7. The Smart Card was intended to use biometric technology that is designed to host multiple applications for all the social programmes of the Government to enable better targeting and tracking of beneficiaries. The driver for the use of smart card technology is the need to bring together and co-ordinate all the health and social services benefits provided by the Government inclusive of the:
- i) Chronic Disease Assistance Programme (CDAP) for the distribution of free drugs to the chronically ill;
 - ii) Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP);
 - iii) Senior Citizens Pension;
 - iv) Disability Grant; and
 - v) Public Assistance Grant.

⁵ Trinidad and Tobago Social Sector Investment Programme 2011. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2NiGi4e>

The RISE -UP Component⁶

- 3.1.8. TCCTP programs aim to transfer cash, generally to poor households, on the condition that those households make pre-specified investments in the human capital of their families. In this regard, clients of the TCCTP are required to participate in the “RISE-UP” component of the Programme, which stands for **Rights of Individuals to Social and Economic Security Universal Prosperity**.
- 3.1.9. RISE-UP is the developmental component of the TCCTP and takes a holistic approach to poverty alleviation, giving consideration to the conditions that restrain a family's effort to move out of poverty. It provides families in extreme poverty with access to critical services and facilitates their benefitting from such services. Furthermore, it seeks to empower the household to improve its quality of life in eight dimensions. These include:
- i. Personal Identification;
 - ii. Income;
 - iii. Education;
 - iv. Employment;
 - v. Family Dynamics;
 - vi. Health;
 - vii. Housing; and
 - viii. Safety and Security.
- 3.1.10. RISE-UP was designed to implement the conditional component of the TCCTP and was intended to be executed through the Family Intervention Network (FIN).
- 3.1.11. According to the **Social Sector Investment Programme 2017**, in 2015 a situational analysis of the programme was undertaken, based on which a revised framework was developed. The new structure proposes revised programme objectives, revised minimum conditions linked to programme objectives, a rationale for the proposed minimum conditions, existing gaps and stakeholder involvement, a RISE-UP Client database and a number of other revisions geared toward a more effective and efficient delivery of the programme.⁷

⁶ Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Social Development and Family Services website. “*Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP)*”. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2PLGshj>

⁷ *ibid.* p.48. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <https://bit.ly/2OxkjmA>

Financial Allocations (As at 2018)

3.1.12. According to the Trinidad and Tobago Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure, the estimated allocations for the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme for the years 2013-2018 were as follows:

2013 - \$2,248,416⁸

2014 - \$1,915,301⁹

2015- \$2,052,314¹⁰

2016- \$ 3,025¹¹

2017- \$1,000,000¹²

2018- \$1,000,000¹³

Conduct of the Inquiry

3.1.13. Prior to the commencement of the public hearings, the Committee issued invitations to the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS) to present written submissions based on the subject of the inquiry and the following objectives:

- 1. To assess the effectiveness of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) since its inception, with reference to poverty reduction;**
- 2. To examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems and organizational structure of the TCCTP;**

⁸ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2015. Pg. 282. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

⁹ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2015. Pg. 282. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

¹⁰ ¹⁰ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2016. Pg. 355. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://www.finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Estimates-2017-Recurrent-Final-Book-Numbered.pdf>

¹¹ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2018. Pg. 417. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

¹² Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2018. Pg. 417. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

¹³ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2019. Pg. 399. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

3. To examine the financial status of the TCCTP and the procedures/policies in place to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money in the management of the programme; and
4. To assess the systems in place to monitor and evaluate the success and impact of the TCCTP.

3.1.14. On November 01, 2017, the Committee conducted a public hearing with Officials from the MSDFS. **(See appendix I for details)**

3.1.15. Subsequent to the public hearing on November 01, 2017, additional information requested was provided by the MSDFS.

3.1.16. Oral and written submissions received from the Ministry appearing before the Committee provided a frame of reference for the Committee's deliberations on the subject inquiry.

3.1.17. The **Minutes of the Meeting** during which the public hearing was held is attached as **Appendix II** and the **Verbatim Notes** as **Appendix III**.

KEY ISSUES, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

OBJECTIVE 1: To assess the effectiveness of the programme since its inception, with reference to poverty reduction.

Current poverty threshold/line in Trinidad and Tobago

- 4.1.1. According to the **2010 Special Report by the Auditor General of Trinidad and Tobago on the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) Self-Sufficiency or Dependency**¹⁴ that was laid in the Senate on September 20, 2010 and House of Representatives on October 01, 2010, the Ministry used the Trinidad and Tobago Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) 2005¹⁵ as a guide for the identification of poor and vulnerable groups in the country.
- 4.1.2. In a MSDFS submission dated December 18, 2017, it was indicated that Cabinet approved the conduct of the SLC in April 2011. The MSDFS commenced the SLC in 2011, however, the Survey was only completed in 2014. The time lag between the 2005 and 2014 surveys primarily resulted from the delays in obtaining relevant approvals and the lengthy procurement process, which is undertaken by the Central Tenders Board to get a consultant contracted for the exercise. However, in September 2014 the validity of the information contained in the Survey Reports was called into question by two internationally recognized bodies, ECLAC¹⁶ and UNDP¹⁷. A decision was then taken to reject the Survey Reports prepared based on the concerns raised and to commence a new survey in 2018.
- 4.1.3. The Committee was informed that the stakeholders involved in the execution of the SLC are the Ministry of Planning and Development (primarily the Central Statistical Office), the Ministries of Health, Ministry of Education and consultant firms which conduct the analysis of data.

¹⁴2010 Special Report by the Auditor General of Trinidad and Tobago on the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) Self-Sufficiency or Dependency. Accessed on July 17, 2018.

<http://www.auditorgeneral.gov.tt/sites/default/files/TCCTP%202010%20report.pdf>

¹⁵ THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SURVEY OF LIVING CONDITIONS ANALYSIS OF THE TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO SURVEY OF LIVING CONDITIONS 2005. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <https://www.economicwebinstitute.org/data/trinidadliving.pdf>

¹⁶ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean

¹⁷ United Nations Development Programme

4.1.4. As illustrated in **Table 1** below, the Ministry utilized a means test to identify scores representative of the different levels of poverty. The lowest scores (0-15 points) are representative of the ‘poorest’ people and those most eligible to qualify for the TCCTP. Persons scoring 30 points and less qualify for selection for the Debit Card, subject to the verification of the information provided.

TABLE 1: MEANS TEST SCORES FOR DIFFERENT LEVELS OF POVERTY

<u>LEVEL</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION</u>	<u>SCORE</u>
<u>Level 1</u>	<u>Poorest</u>	<u>0-15 points</u>
<u>Level 2</u>	<u>Poor</u>	<u>16-30 points</u>
<u>Level 3</u>	<u>Least Poor (vulnerable)</u>	<u>31-45 points</u>

4.1.5. MSDFS indicated that data provided by the Trinidad and Tobago Survey of Living Conditions (SLC) is mainly utilized to classify the poverty level of individuals and households. The classifications are:

- Indigence (Monetary value \$255 per month);
- Poor (Monetary value \$665 per month); and
- Vulnerable.

4.1.6. It was also indicated in a submission dated December 18, 2017, that there are two instruments currently utilized by the Ministry to assess the extremely poor/disadvantaged and determine their eligibility for services, namely the:

- Means Test for SEED; and
- Food Support.

4.1.7. The SLC estimated the size of the indigent, poor and vulnerable to be 25.7% of the population of Trinidad and Tobago. That equates to 334,100 people out of an estimated population of 1.3 million people.

- 4.1.8. During the public hearing held on November 1, 2017, the Ministry indicated that the region of Sangre Grande was identified as the poorest region in the country. However, the MSDFS is working with the Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago to establish an updated poverty line based on more current data. The Ministry revealed that the next SLC is expected to commence in fiscal 2018.
- 4.1.9. According to the submission of the MSDFS dated February 15, 2019, the current means test utilised post March 2018, is a Standardised Means Test which considers the following key factors:
- **Poverty Line;**
 - **Household Poverty Line;**
 - **Gross income; and**
 - **Net Income.**
- 4.1.10. The eligibility of a family is thus determined when the net income is less than or equal to the family poverty line. ie. $\text{Net Income} \leq \text{Poverty Line} = \text{Eligible Family}$.

Definition of Family and Household

- 4.1.11. According to its submission dated December 18, 2017, for the purposes of assessing eligibility for the Food Card, the MSDFS defines a “household” as the persons who share the same cooking and living arrangements (sharing groceries, cooking arrangements and appliances such as stove, refrigerator etc.). This includes one person households.
- 4.1.12. In addition, the basic definition of a family utilized by the National Family Services Division of the MSDFS is a group of people who share a legal bond or a blood bond.

Legal Bonds: Families are legally bound through marriages, adoptions and guardianships, including the rights, duties and obligations of those legal contracts. Legal bonds can be changed, expanded or dissolved to change the composition of a family.

Blood Bonds: Individuals who are directly related through a common ancestor are part of a family. This includes both close and distant relatives such as siblings, parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and cousins.

(See appendix IV for regional and international definition of ‘family’ and ‘household’)

National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS)

4.1.13. It was indicated to the Committee in a submission by the MSDFS dated December 18, 2017, that a NPRS is expected to be completed by the end of fiscal 2018. However in the **2019 Social Sector Investment Programme** it was indicated that the MSDFS, in collaboration with UNDP and UNICEF, commenced critical preparatory work for the development of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS). The NPRS would be based on a multi-dimensional definition of poverty. A multi-dimensional definition is critical to ensure that the most inclusive anti-poverty approaches to addressing poverty are developed and implemented. In this connection, during fiscal 2018 the Ministry continued to collaborate with UNDP and UNICEF on a research project to gather data to be used in determining the meaning and definition of poverty. Focus Group discussions were concluded in the fourteen (14) Municipal Regions in Trinidad and in Tobago. The results of the Focus Group discussions would be utilized as input to the development of the NPRS. The NPRS is expected to be completed in fiscal 2019.

The effectiveness and impact of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP)

4.1.14. According to 2010 Special Report by the Auditor General of Trinidad and Tobago on the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) Self-Sufficiency or Dependency, the initial aims of the TCCTP were to:

- i. reduce poverty by 5% by 2010 and thereafter by 2% annually; and

4.1.15. to eradicate indigence by 2010, via providing a cash subsidy to targeted families, which was calculated to be TT\$665 per month.

4.1.16. In her 2018 budget contribution (delivered on October 9, 2017) the Minister of Social Development and Family Services reiterated the purpose of the programme. She indicated that the programme aims to provide short-term assistance for the poor and vulnerable families who are unable to meet their nutritional requirements due to limited income.

Eligibility is determined by the administration of a means test that applies to four variables, i.e. net income, education, asset, and housing, with net income being the major variable.

- 4.1.17. Additionally, the programme provides an urgent response to not only the critical conditions of poverty, social and economic hardship, but also to other social and environmental disasters that deem citizens vulnerable.
- 4.1.18. **The Committee also sought clarification on the impact the educational attainment of members of a household has on that household's eligibility to obtain a 'Food card'. By submission dated February 15, 2019, the Ministry advised that based on the means test utilised prior to March 2018 (which used a weighted score system), persons with a higher level of education obtained a higher weighted score. The higher the weighted score received the less eligible the household. The current Standardized Means Test does not utilise a weighted score methodology.**

Life Skills Programme

- 4.1.19. A key requirement of the TCCTP is that beneficiaries of the Debit Card are expected to join one of Government's social programmes geared towards empowerment for self-sufficiency and the holistic development of the family. The objectives of the TCCTP include providing recipients with training in specific areas, such as:
- Budgetary Planning;
 - Family Planning;
 - Career Guidance; and
 - Life Skills.
- 4.1.20. In a subsequent submission dated January 28 2019, the Ministry reported that for the period 2009-2017 15,477 persons received training under the Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme (STEP-UP) Component of the TCCTP. The submission also stated that that 9441 persons graduated from the STEP-UP and the RISE-UP combined.
- 4.1.21. The following table provides a breakdown of the number of persons exposed to the life-skills programme over fiscal years 2009 to 2017.

TABLE 2: THE NUMBER OF PERSONS EXPOSED TO THE LIFE SKILLS PROGRAMME FOR THE PERIOD 2009-2017

STEP-UP INITIATIVES DURING THE PERIOD 2009-2017								
Fiscal Year	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014	2015/2016	2016/2017
Training								
Home Back Yard Gardening and Grow Box Technology	1000	1000			1500	1500		
Financial Literacy ¹⁸	2500	650	740					
Craft Skills ¹⁹	500	500						
Hydroponics ²⁰					30	45		
Life Skills Education					2500	2500		54
Entrepreneurship Training					208	250		
Total by Year	4000	2150	740	0	4,238	4,295	0	54
Jobs		34			216 ²¹			
Graduates off the Programme ²²				1079	4362	4000		

4.1.22. The Ministry designed an approach termed the Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme – Uplifting People “STEP-UP” to implement the TCCTP.

4.1.23. The life of the programme has been extended on six occasion since inception as follows:

- One year from August 2007 to July 2008;
- One year from August 2008 to July 2009;
- Two years from August 2009 to July 2011;

¹⁸ National Financial and Literacy Programme (NFLP) under the aegis of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁹ Export Centres Company Limited

²⁰ Ministry of Agriculture

²¹ Job opportunities were provided to two hundred (200) clients through the Amalgamated Security Services and Prestige Holdings Ltd. Anthony P. Scott provided sixteen (16) clients with training and subsequent job opportunities to become AVON representatives.

²² These persons successfully graduated off the programme by increasing the household income earning capacity as a result of gaining employment opportunities.

- Three years from August 2011 to July 2014;
- Three years from August 2014 to July 2017; and
- Three years from August 2017 to July 2020 (currently referred to as the Food Support Programme and administered by the Social Welfare Division)

4.1.24. The Ministry's initiative at reducing poverty through the TCCTP is aiming to reach 15.5 percent of the population (201,500 people) of Trinidad and Tobago who are poor and 1.2 per cent (15,600 people) who are deemed indigent. For the purposes of the TCCTP, Debit Card beneficiaries and their families are placed into one of three categories and receive the associated benefit (**See Table 2 below**). According to the 2018 Special (follow-up) Report of the Auditor of Trinidad and Tobago on the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP), there was only one increase in the monthly benefits which took effect in August 2008, since then there have been no further adjustments.

TABLE 3: MONTHLY BENEFIT ASSOCIATED WITH SIZE OF FAMILY

Category	Family size	Monthly benefit from inception (\$)	Increased monthly benefit from August 1, 2008 (\$)
1	1-3	300.00	410.00
2	4-5	400.00	550.00
3	6 plus	500.00	700.00

The STEP-UP programme as a component of the TCCTP

4.1.25. The STEP-UP component of the programme as (Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme-Uplifting People) was introduced in 2009. It was then rebranded to Rights of Individuals to Social and Economic Security-Universal (RISE-UP) on December 23rd 2010. There was limited implementation of the Programme at the time of the rebranding. The ministry advised the Committee that the programme was rebranded by the then administration as a means of highlighting “a renewed focus on the Programme’s objectives and to emphasize Government’s commitment to sustainable poverty reduction and overall improvement in the quality of life of all citizens”²³. In 2017, Cabinet agreed to return this component to its original name, STEP-UP.

²³ Written submission of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services dated January 28 2019 p 1.

- 4.1.26. Improvement in the quality of life of all citizens²⁴. In 2017, Cabinet agreed to return this component to its original name, STEP-UP.
- 4.1.27. According to the National Social Mitigation Plan (NSMP) 2017-2022 it was indicated that this aspect of the programme would seek to empower families by providing them with access to services that would allow them to holistically alleviate their socio-economic circumstances and improve their quality of life. Participants are therefore exposed to a suite of developmental programmes, life skills training, social protection programmes and employment opportunities all catered to the specific needs of the client.
- 4.1.28. The MSDFS indicated that the STEP-UP component is currently being reviewed, subsequent to which, it is expected to be implemented and integrated into all of the Ministry's social assistance programmes. However, the review of STEP-UP was expected to be completed by March 2018 and is ongoing.
- 4.1.29. STEP-UP has also been recommended for implementation across all social sector initiatives. Furthermore, the Ministry is expected to embark on a sector-wide awareness and sensitization campaign with a view to phased implementation across other social sector programmes, commencing from the fourth quarter of 2018. The Ministry submitted that this recommended expansion arose from consultations on the development of the National Social Mitigation Plan (NSMP). The National Social Mitigation Plan 2017-2022 was approved by Cabinet in August 2017. The implementation of the sector-wide awareness and sensitisation campaign has been delayed and will be undertaken in fiscal 2019.
- 4.1.30. According to the Ministry's Achievements Report for 2017, 27,435 persons were in receipt of food support as at September 2017.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- 4.1.31. Based on the preceding evidence/information, the Committee made the following observations:

²⁴ Written submission of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services dated January 28 2019 p 1.

- i. The most current statistics of living conditions were published by the Ministry in the Trinidad and Tobago Survey of Living Conditions 2005. This indicates the absence of up-to-date poverty statistics necessary to inform policy development, policy implementation and resource allocation;
- ii. The time lag between the 2005 and 2014 surveys primarily resulted from the delays in obtaining relevant approvals and a lengthy procurement process to contract a consultant for the exercise. It was also noted with concern that in September 2014 the validity of the information contained in the Survey Reports was called into question and a decision was then taken to reject the Survey Reports;
- iii. The Ministry has failed to conduct a social impact assessment of the impact of TCCTP on poverty reduction. The Committee noted that this failure is mainly due to the fact that no monitoring and evaluation framework exists to inform an impact assessment. The Ministry committed to addressing this anomaly in part through the execution of a NPRS²⁵ design;
- iv. The Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme, Uplifting People or ‘STEP-UP’, is the TCCTP component intended to develop the self-sufficiency of its participants. In the **2018 Special Report by the Auditor General on the TCCTP**²⁶, one of the findings indicated that the TCCTP did not make significant progress toward achieving its target of successfully exiting 60% of beneficiaries within two years. Unfortunately, for the period 2010 to 2014, only an estimated 7.4% of beneficiaries exited the Programme for each two-year period. Although the predominant focus on the “Food support” element of the programme is understandable, the low enrollment or participation rate in the “Life skills” component of this social intervention is indicative of what this Committee has noted is a gap in the implementation capacity of the MSDFS;

²⁵ National Poverty Reduction Survey

²⁶ 2018 Special Report by the Auditor General of Trinidad and Tobago on the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (Follow up).

- v. The Committee noted that the Ministry is unable to provide a report on the impact of the TCCTP on poverty reduction. However, Ministry anticipated/deduced that the dispensation of the programme would have an impact on hunger, food security, and nutrition within benefiting households;
- vi. It appears that over the years, the STEP-UP component of the TCCTP received very little focus in favor of the food support component;
- vii. It appears that a robust system to capture the details of persons who graduated from the development component of the programme was not put in place. Accordingly, accurate and comprehensive information on this component is not available; and
- viii. The Committee noted that the MSDFS does not conduct any community outreach/awareness initiatives specifically for the TCCTP and is of the view that the absence of such initiatives has negatively impacted public perception of the value and importance of the programme.

Recommendations

4.1.32. **Given the foregoing, the Committee recommends the following:**

- A. The MSDFS should undertake a social impact assessment of the TCCTP on poverty reduction by the end of fiscal year 2019. Furthermore, the Ministry should immediately reassess the needs of various regions based on identified levels of poverty;**
- B. The Terms of Reference and research framework to guide any further empirical/primary research projects to be executed on behalf of the Ministry must be subjected to careful review before it is approved. Given prevailing resource constraints, the Ministry must ensure that all necessary risk mitigation methods are applied when entering into contractual agreements;**
- C. That a revision of the STEP-UP development component is completed and implemented by the mid-term of fiscal year 2019. The Ministry should develop comprehensive guidelines to facilitate the effective implementation of the development component of the Food Support Programme. There may be a need**

to analyse the pool of “food card” recipients in order to determine who may be most suitable for enrollment into a the STEP-UP Component;

- D. That a framework is established and implemented by the Ministry to capture the details of persons who graduated from the development component of the programme. This will ensure that accurate and comprehensive information on this component and the graduates of the programme is readily available for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation;
- E. That as part of the new card system, scheduled for implementation in 2018, the MSDFS should:
- a) develop a revised list of approved food items for purchase utilizing the debit card;
 - b) give consideration to the inclusion of locally produced goods as part of the list of approved goods;
 - c) provide that participating merchants be required to make locally produced goods reasonably available to cardholders; and
 - d) ensure that the monitoring of adherence to the revised list form part of the proposed monitoring framework to be featured in the draft National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS).
- F. That the MSDFS commence a series of community outreach/awareness initiatives specific to the TCCTP. These initiatives should mirror the approach and objectives of the ‘Direct Impact’ initiative while taking into consideration the financial constraints currently faced by the Public Service.
- G. In the Ministerial Response to this report the Ministry will provide the Parliament with an update on the implementation of the following initiatives:
- i. The new/updated Survey of Living Conditions (SLC);
 - ii. National Poverty Reduction Strategy (NPRS).

OBJECTIVE 2: To examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems and organizational structure of the TCCTP

The Role of MSDFS

4.2.1. The Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, formerly the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of the People and Social Development has the overall responsibility for the management of the SMART Card Programme.

The Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) Unit

4.2.2. According to the **Trinidad and Tobago Gazette**²⁷ published on September 12th, 2013 the core functions of the former Unit were to:

- Give TCCTP recipients the ability to purchase food items they need to meet the daily nutritional and other requirements of their households;
- Ensure all employable beneficiaries are registered with an employment agency to actively seek employment;
- Provide conditional cash transfers to eligible recipients;
- To engage a minimum of 80% of recipients in life skills training programmes such as family and budgetary planning;
- Engage a minimum of 50% of recipients in employment training programmes;
- Enhance the income earning capacity of vulnerable households;
- Reduce the psychosocial barriers to development for vulnerable households;
- Move vulnerable households from social exclusion to social inclusion; and
- Transform households into self-sustaining entities with improved quality of life for all its members.

²⁷ Trinidad and Tobago Gazette p1300. Accessed on August 29, 2018. <http://www.news.gov.tt/archive/E-Gazette/Gazette%202013/Gazette/Gazette%20No.%20119%20of%202013.pdf>

The reassignment of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) to the Social Welfare Division

- 4.2.3. During its appearance on November 01, 2017, the Ministry revealed that the programme and contracts of the majority of the staff of the TCCTP came to an end on July 31st, 2017. Additionally, in a submission dated October 26, 2017, it was indicated by the Ministry that the food support programme was transitioned to the Social Welfare Division and additional staffing was assigned to that Division to administer this component.
- 4.2.4. According to the 2018 Special Follow-up Report by the Auditor General on the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) during the period 2011 to 2016, TCCTP did not operate with its full complement of 308 contract employees. As at December 2016, TCCTP was staffed with 115 officers, comprising 96 contracted and 19 short-term employees.
- 4.2.5. It was also indicated that the transition of the TCCTP is part of an overall restructuring exercise by the Ministry to achieve greater efficiency and effectiveness. The MSDFS has noted that the target population serviced by the Social Welfare Division is generally the same as the Food Support programme. The data at the Ministry suggests that more than 50% of Public Assistance Grant clients are in receipt of food support. This statistic becomes greater when the numbers collecting Senior Citizens' Pension/Disability Assistance and other Grants are matched with the Food Support clients. In this regard, the Ministry has noted that the provision of food support along with other services to the poor and vulnerable, will best be delivered in an integrated manner instead of a silo-approach.

Staff assigned to TCCTP

- 4.2.6. The MSDFS indicated that there are no officers specifically assigned to the Food Card Programme. As at November 2017 the Social Welfare Division had 216 public service positions. The table below illustrates the staffing complement of the Division:

TABLE 4: JOB POSITIONS WITHIN THE SOCIAL WELFARE DIVISION

<u>Position</u>	<u>Number of employees</u>
Director	1
Deputy Director	1
Supervisors	13
Social Welfare Advisers II	26
Social Welfare Adviser I	59

4.2.7. The Division also has nineteen (19) contract positions for Social Welfare Field Officers which are all vacant. Furthermore, there are currently fifty-five (55) Field Officers employed on short-term contract arrangements.

4.2.8. According to a submission by the MSDFS dated December 18, 2017, the post of Social Welfare Field Officer was advertised in late 2017. The other substantive positions in the Division are primarily clerical, secretarial and manipulative. **(Please see appendix V for the Distribution of Field Officers assigned to each Welfare District Office)**

The criteria used to select certain members of staff of the TCCTP for reassignment to the Social Welfare Division

4.2.9. The qualifications for the position of Social Welfare Field Officer is:

- A Minimum of five (5) O' Level subjects including English Language;
- Computer Literate; and
- A Certificate in Social Work is an asset.

4.2.10. A total of twenty-three (23) persons were selected for re-assignment to the Social Welfare Division as follows:

- Seventeen (17) persons were selected based on their length of service in the TCCTP and their possession of qualifications as detailed below:
 - Fourteen (14) Persons possessed the qualifications as stated above; and

- Three (3) Persons possessed a degree in the related fields of Psychology or Sociology with five (5) CXC O' level subjects including English Language.

4.2.11. All six (6) persons who were employed on contract in the Tobago Office were re-assigned to the Social Welfare Division upon the expiration of their contracts. Moreover, three (3) persons have since resigned from their employment.

Training provided to staff assigned to the Food Support Programme

4.2.12. In a MSDFS submission dated November 01, 2017 the MSDFS indicated that the entire staff of the Ministry (just over 700 members of staff) was engaged in a Premium Client Care Workshop in an attempt to enhance the quality of services provided to both internal and external clientele. This initiative was an interim and short-term intervention until, pending the establishment of an Oversight Client Care Unit to address the issue of Customer Service on a sustained basis.

The process of application for the "Food Card"

4.2.13. The Committee was informed that as part of the application process applicants are required to apply at the Regional Office which services the area in which they reside. Subsequently, representatives of the Social Welfare Division, MSDFS visit the homes of applicants to determine their eligibility for the card. The Home visit is part of a Means Test which comprises a four variable index; The variables include:

- Net Income;
- Education;
- Assets; and
- Housing.

4.2.14. It was noted that persons who receive other forms of public assistance may be eligible for food support.

4.2.15. Applicants are required to submit evidence of all statements contained in their application, such as information from other agencies (Employment history, bank statements, birth

certificates, self-employment declaration etc.). A report is prepared and submitted to the Regional Coordinator for vetting. Cases are then passed on to a Regional Manager for approval.

4.2.16. Notwithstanding the above, the net income index is the main variable used to determine eligibility for food support. A person qualifies for food support where his score after administering the means test is equal to or less than 30.9 points. A temporary food card is issued where the person's score is less than or equal to 15 points. These are usually persons who may be considered indigent and are in immediate need of assistance.

“Food Card” Recipients

4.2.17. **Table 5** below provides information on the number of "Food Card" recipients for each fiscal year during the period 2014 to 2017.

TABLE 5: “FOOD CARD” RECIPIENTS FOR EACH FISCAL YEAR DURING THE PERIOD 2014 TO 2017

Fiscal	Permanent Card	Temporary Card	Total
2014	54,602 (Sept.)	10,518	65,120
2015	52,005 (January)	4,037	56,042
2016	27,260 (Sept.)	5,355	32,615
2017	27,435 (Sept.)	1,268	28,706

4.2.18. In the Minister's Budget debate contribution on October 09, 2017, it was indicated that in 2017, there were 6,810 new beneficiaries that were in receipt of food support, and as at September 2017, a total 27,435 individuals and families were receiving food support.

Issuance of Temporary Food Cards

4.2.19. The three (3) conditions under which a temporary food card may be issued are as follows:

- i. Disaster relief;
- ii. In situations where Officers have identified an extreme absence of food due to duress or economic circumstance (e.g. socially displaced persons); and
- iii. If reasonable facts are provided by a client regarding their failure to produce the required documents to complete registration for a permanent food card.

Urgent response to victims of natural disasters/accidents

4.2.20. The Committee was informed that in addition to families experiencing social and economic hardship, the programme seeks to provide an urgent response to victims of natural disasters and major, unforeseen accidents. Temporary Food Cards are issued to victims of disasters on a same-day basis as a matter of urgency.

4.2.21. During the public hearing on November 01, 2017, it was indicated that the \$410.00 card is usually issued to temporary recipients, however, the Ministry took a policy decision to utilize the \$550.00 cards to assist in its disaster response in lieu of the \$410.00 cards. The Permanent Secretary, MSDFS reflected on issues with the unavailability of physical cards due to a limited stock at Food Support Offices. Individuals were asked to return at specific dates which would allow supervisors to retrieve temporary cards at the Head Office and replenish stock.

4.2.22. In a submission dated January 28 2019, informed the Committee that it did not retrieve temporary food cards from recipients for further use by supervisors of the various regional offices. The existing temporary food card is a one-off card and is non-reusable. The Ministry also advised that the re-use of temporary cards is being explored.

Collection of benefit cheques in lieu of the “Food Card”

4.2.23. The Committee was informed during the Ministry’s appearance on November 01, 2017 that approximately 27,000 people currently possess a Food Card and other persons receive their benefits from cheques which are distributed on a monthly basis.

4.2.24. Furthermore, a short-term arrangement was instituted in 2016 for approximately 4,000 persons who applied for Food Cards since 2013 and had not received any benefits. As a remedy to this, the benefit was provided through cheques in lieu of the electronic debit card.

4.2.25. The Ministry was aware that it would be unable to monitor the types of items purchased by recipients in receipt of cheques. Notwithstanding, cheques were issued owing to the thinking that families were disadvantaged by not receiving a benefit that they were eligible for and as a proviso to the Ministry's plans to implement a new card system in the near future.

Accessibility of the TCCTP to individuals living with beneficiaries

4.2.26. During the public hearing on November 01, 2017, the Committee inquired whether disadvantaged individuals belonging to households with higher-income earning individuals may be denied a food card owing to the collective income of the household.

4.2.27. It was indicated that the TCCTP was implemented as a family-oriented benefit programme. The policy of the programme was created to discourage the practice of multiple cards being assigned to one 'household' as a means of managing the cost of the programme. It was indicated that multiple, separate "households" may reside within one "house". Cards may be issued to these separate "households". However, individuals may not be able to access the Programme if another person in their household is a beneficiary.

Incidences of theft and unauthorized use of food cards recorded in fiscals 2016 and 2017

4.2.28. In a submission dated October 26, 2017, the Ministry indicated that in fiscal 2016 there was one reported incident of theft/unauthorized use of cards. Furthermore, in fiscal 2017 there were 6 incidences of theft/ unauthorized use of cards. It was further indicated that the Fraud Squad of the TTPS is conducting investigations into the theft/ unauthorized use of food cards.

The deactivation of Temporary Food Cards

4.2.29. A Temporary Food Card (TFC) is a one-off, pre-paid, disposable food card designed to meet the immediate food needs of persons living in extreme poverty as determined by a means test and to respond to emergency cases with respect to victims of natural disasters or man-made disasters. In light of the preceding, TFCs are not required to be retrieved or deactivated by the Ministry upon the issuance of a permanent card or any change in the circumstances of beneficiaries.

Implementation of a new card processing system

4.2.30. MSDFS officials indicated that the system to process Food Card transactions has become obsolete owing to outdated technology. Participating commercial banks highlighted a risk to both themselves and the Ministry and discontinued the practice of adding new recipients to the system. The Ministry is preparing a new card processing system to be fully implemented by the end of the first quarter of the fiscal year 2018. This new system was expected to be facilitated through First Citizens Bank. The new card processing system will cost the Ministry approximately \$1 million annually to maintain.

4.2.31. Risk mitigation measures (including a new IT system) will be implemented to prevent the abuse of State funds, fraud, and duplication in the delivery of grants to any one person.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

4.2.32. Based on the preceding evidence/information, the Committee made the following observations:

- i. The Committee noted that the Social Welfare Division of the Ministry currently has nineteen (19) vacant contract positions for Social Welfare Field Officers;

- ii. There was a notable reduction in the number of food card beneficiaries over the period 2014 to 2017. It was acknowledged that this was primarily attributed to certain audits and reevaluations of the programme which were undertaken by the Ministry;
- iii. The dissolution of the “food card unit” and the consequential absorbing of personnel into the social welfare division ought to have resulted in some cost savings for the Ministry. It is still to be determined whether this arrangement has resulted in greater efficiency in the administration of the food card programme. The Ministry needs to undertake the necessary client satisfaction surveys to determine whether there has been an improvement or regress in the standard of service which is being dispense by the Social Welfare Division in relation to the food support programme;
- iv. Given the occurrence of discrepancies and unscrupulous activities associated with this programme, the Committee believes that the Ministry must ensure that appropriate oversight systems are implemented to monitor the dispensation and management of this social benefit. The Committee was particularly concerned with the distribution of cheques in lieu of cards as this system appeared to have a high potential for abuse and discrepancies;
- v. There also appears to be a continued delay in the processing of new applications and the dispensing of cards to eligible recipients. According to the findings of the **2018 Special Report by the Auditor General on the TCCTP**, an audit of files at sampled Regional Offices revealed that clients continue to endure lengthy delays to receive food support (on average, between six to twelve (6-12) months). A decentralized system ought to facilitate greater efficiency in the delivery of a public good or service. The Ministry must explain this may be attributed to the Ministry applying greater due diligence in assessing applications to determine eligibility;
- vi. The absence of systems to ensure that recipients utilize their food card to purchase foods that would contribute to satisfying their daily nutritional requirements. Additionally, the issuing of “food support” via cheques has further diminished the ‘nutritional aim’ of this programme since moneys derived from these cheques can be

used for any purpose in contrast with card holders who are required to use their card at the supermarket.

- vii. Managing a programme with a strong technology component demanded that the Ministry adopt a proactive approach to ensure that the necessary technological upgrades are implemented when necessary. It appears that the Ministry did not adopt a proactive approach in this regard;
- viii. The Committee noted that successive attempts were made by the Ministry in 2005, 2007, 2010 and 2015 to implement a biometric smart card system and replace the debit card system. However, these attempts failed due to various challenges;
- ix. A list of approved food items for purchase was provided to all participating merchants at the commencement of the “Food Card” programme. However, the programme devolved over years of operation and the list was not honored;
- ix. Due to the absence of a monitoring framework, it appears that the Ministry is unable to monitor the types of items purchased by recipients especially of those who receive cheques. However, the Committee noted the Ministry’s plans to implement a new card system in the near future that will allow effective monitoring of items being purchased by recipients;
- x. The Committee noted with concern that the system to process Food Cards has become obsolete owing to outdated technology. However, the Committee was encouraged to note the Ministry’s intention to fully implement a new card processing system by the end of the first quarter of the fiscal year 2018, facilitated through First Citizens Bank.

Recommendations

Given the foregoing, the Committee recommends the following:

- A. That the Ministry assess the need to fill the nineteen (19) contract positions for Social Welfare Field Officers and begin the process of filling these vacancies on a needs basis;
- B. That the Ministry evaluate the process used for screening/reviewing applications with the aim of reducing the lag time between applications and the disbursement of food support. This evaluation should be completed by March 31st 2019. The Ministry must strive to more effectively balance improvements in service delivery while ensuring due diligence mechanisms are applied;
- C. Given that this programme has a high propensity for abuse and fraudulent activities, the Ministry must institute standing arrangements to ensure that:
 - i. Middle managers such as Regional Coordinators are held accountable for their decisions; and
 - ii. Regular audits and reconciliations of the list of recipients are conducted;

The Ministry's Responses to this report should apprise the Parliament on the measures and strategies the Ministry intends to pursue in fulfilment of this recommendation.

- D. We recommend that a holistic approach be adopted to managing the disbursement of food support. The soon to be modified system cannot simply capture items purchased; but should be designed to monitor the recipients from onset to actual empowerment and eventual detachment?
- E. That there be a standardized application process for the Food Support Programme across all Regional Offices;
- F. A cost-benefit analysis of the introduction of a National Biometric Registry/identification system should be undertaken by May 2019.

- H. A mechanism should be developed to permit the allocation of multiple food cards to a single household. We recommend that this extraordinary measure be considered under the following circumstances:
- i. A relatively large household that has suffered significant material lost as a result of fire, flooding or other major disaster;
 - ii. A relatively large household whose sole bread winner has died;
 - iii. A household with multiple minors with 'special needs'.
- I. That the Ministry provide in its response an update on the implementation of a new card processing system (with accompanying IT system) which was expected to operationalised by the first quarter of the fiscal year 2018. In the event that the system has not yet been implemented, the Ministry should indicate the obstacles to such implementation.
- J. We recommend that as an alternative approach to distributing temporary food cards to person affected by a natural disaster, food hampers can be distributed. In many instances a disaster would result in a disruption of access to locations and the destruction of official identification documents which are need to access funds credited to the debit card.

OBJECTIVE 3: To examine the financial status of the TCCTP and the procedures/policies in place to ensure transparency, accountability and value for money in the management of the programme

Total cost of the TCCTP

4.3.1. The the estimated allocations for the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme for the period 2013 to 2018 were as follows:

- 2013 - \$2,248,416²⁸
- 2014 - \$1,915,301²⁹
- 2015- \$2,052,314³⁰
- 2016- \$ 3,025³¹
- 2017- \$1,000,000³²
- 2018- \$1,000,000³³

4.3.2. In the **2018 Special Report by the Auditor General on the TCCTP³⁴**, it was indicated that the Ministry of Finance (MoF) allocated \$1.46 Billion to food support over and the MSDFS spent \$8.5 million on the administration of the Programme (excluding personal emoluments), over the period 2011 to 2016.

²⁸ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2015. Pg. 282. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

²⁹ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2015. Pg. 282. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

³⁰ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2016. Pg. 355. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://www.finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Estimates-2017-Recurrent-Final-Book-Numbered.pdf>

³¹ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2018. Pg. 417. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

³² Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2018. Pg. 417. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

³³ Details of Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure for the financial year 2019. Pg. 399. Accessed on July 17, 2018. <http://finance.gov.tt/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Recurrent-Expenditure-2015.pdf>

³⁴ *ibid.* Pgs. 6-7.

4.3.3. In an appearance before the Committee on November 01, 2017, the MSDFS reported that approximately 27,000 beneficiaries of the TCCTP were recorded as at September 30, 2017. Since the commencement of the programme in 2006 to the fiscal year ended 2016, the Ministry estimated a total expenditure of \$1.981 billion for the food support component of the programme. This estimate excludes administrative and additional costs.

Financial implications of reduction in permanent and temporary card holders

4.3.4. During the Ministry's appearance on November 01, 2017, the Committee was advised that there has been a significant reduction in the number of permanent and temporary card holders from approximately 65,000 in 2014 to 27,000 in 2017.

4.3.5. It was advised that the reduction was due to a review exercise in the 2016. Cardholders were asked to re-register on the biometric system. 480 persons were placed onto the system after reapplying and having been certified as of July 2017. Furthermore, approximately, 13,000 persons did not reapply for the programme during the exercise and were subsequently removed. It was noted that the Ministry has saved approximately \$110 Million since this reconciliation.

4.3.6. It was also indicated in the Minister's 2017-2018 Budget debate contribution on October 09, 2017, that the reduced number of cardholders was also due to continuous deactivations by the Ministry. These deactivations resulted in the removal of approximately 18,900 clients and were based on monthly reviews performed by officers, which highlighted the ineligibility of persons due to; death, migration, failure to provide requested information or an improved income situation beyond qualifying standards.

4.3.7. The **2018 Special Report by the Auditor General on the TCCTP** indicates that the MSDFS reported to Cabinet that the number of clients had reduced to 28,067, a decrease of 20,594 as at June 2017.

The operational costs of the "RISE-UP" component

4.3.8. **Table 7** below outlines the operational costs of the development component of the TCCTP under the branding "RISE-UP", from the commencement of the food card programme to the suspension of the component in 2014.

TABLE 6: THE OPERATIONAL COSTS OF THE “RISE-UP” COMPONENT

Year	Expenditure
2006/2007	0
2007/2008	\$1219,205
2008/2009	\$526,358
2009/2010	\$500,000
2010/2011	\$856,672
2011/2012	\$936,864
2012/2013	\$2,248,416
2013/2014	\$1,915,301

4.3.9. This cost does not include the cost of staffing and rent. It should also be noted that the “STEP UP” version of this component was not implemented in its entirety over the period of its operations.

Costs associated with the proposed Biometric Smart Card system

4.3.10. It was also indicated that the capital expenditure on the biometric smart card system was \$30,975,000; the capital expenditure on the financial platform development for the system was \$3.8 million. The recurrent expenditure for the biometric platform was \$2.8 million annually, and the financial platform which included an SMS text messaging module and bank charges was \$29 million annually.

4.3.11. It was further indicated that the Ministry formerly expended \$2.8 million every month to provide \$1.7 million worth of cards to 3,100 beneficiaries. The Ministry took note of this and took a decision to put a hold on the implementation of the use of the biometric smart card. Notwithstanding the lack of a cost/benefit analysis, the Ministry is satisfied that new card processing system scheduled for 2018 is the prudent choice as:

- i. annual bank charges in relation to the processing of the cards have been reduced from approximately \$3 Million to \$1 Million; and
- ii. the biometric registry system which belongs to the Ministry may be maintained and the investment made to develop the system is not lost.

Challenges of implementing the Biometric Smart Card System in lieu of the Food Support System

4.3.12. According to the Ministry's submission the Biometric System was intended to facilitate the administration of **both the cash and non-cash grants** of the Ministry of Social Development. It also highlighted the following main challenges to implement the Biometric Smart Card system in lieu of the food support system:

- From the initial 61,348 clients enrolled in the Biometric System only 3,412 beneficiaries of Food Support were transitioned to the Biometric Payment System;
- The Financial Platform did not have the requisite approval of the Central Bank of Trinidad and Tobago which is the Regulator, to facilitate payments to beneficiaries of cash based services;
- The Biometric Point-of Sales coverage was limited and was not distributed to beneficiaries from the Sangre Grande Region since merchants from the region did not enroll in the new system; and
- The monthly fees to provide transitioned persons on the Biometric Payment System was \$2.5 million as opposed to the monthly cost of the current system of \$62,500 for administrative fees and \$0.34 cents for transaction fees.

The policies and procedures in place to ensure accountability and transparency in the allocation and distribution of Food Cards.

4.3.13. In a submission dated October 26, 2017, it was indicated that the programme is via regional offices located throughout the country. Entry into the programme is via an established means test administered by Field Officers assigned to the Division. Applicants must submit supporting documents to substantiate their claim (Pay-slip, Utility Bills, etc.) A house visit forms part of the validation and eligibility determination process. These completed applications are vetted for accuracy and completeness in accordance with the requirements of the programme by a senior officer before they are sent to a supervisor for another level of vetting and approval.

- 4.3.14. The National Identification Card Number is utilized as the primary identifier. A payment file is prepared and submitted to the Head Office where the data is compiled, checked for errors and completeness and submitted to the Bank for card processing. Cards are then batched by Regional Offices and after validating each card against a computer generated card listing, cards are signed for and returned to the Central Office where they are distributed to the Regional Offices for delivery to beneficiaries.
- 4.3.15. Temporary (One-off) Cards are also issued to Regional Offices. These cards are issued to families who are considered to be extremely poor and for families who lost foodstuff during man-made or natural disasters. Once an assessment for the permanent card is processed and the family is deemed to be extremely poor, the temporary food card is utilized to support this family until a permanent food card is issued. Families can receive up to three temporary food cards (One per month) during this period. A fourth card may be issued under the authority of a Supervisor or other senior officer assigned to the Regional Office.
- 4.3.16. Regional Officers collect and sign for all cards received and then ensure that all cards are accounted for once they reach the Regional Offices. Cards are stored in a fireproof safe with assigned persons having access to same. Beneficiaries must sign for having received their cards.
- 4.3.17. The Internal Audit of the Ministry audits the case files of applicants to ensure compliance with the policy as well as the management of all cards to ensure that they are properly accounted for at the Head Office and Regional Offices.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- 4.3.18. Based on the preceding evidence/information, the Committee concluded as follows:
- i. There was a significant reduction of permanent and temporary card holders from approximately 65,000 in 2014 to 27,000 in 2017;
 - ii. The Committee noted the failure of the MSDFS to conduct a Cost/Benefit analysis of the TCCTP; and

- iii. The Committee took particular note of the auditing and reconciliation activities of the Ministry that resulted in the removal and or withdrawal of approximately 18,900 recipients and translated in savings of approximately \$159.6 million.

Recommendations

Given the foregoing, the Committee recommends the following:

- A. That MSDFS conduct a Cost/Benefit analysis of the TCCTP;
- B. That in its response, the Ministry report the estimated total expenditure for food support as at the end of fiscal 2018. In addition the Ministry should include the costs envisaged for the reinvigoration of the development component of the programme to encourage self-sufficiency in clients; and
- C. That given the high costs incurred by food support and the possible operational costs envisaged for the reinvigoration of the development component of the programme, the Ministry should pursue with alacrity the implementation of:
 - a case flow management system to ensure the steady movement of clients that have attained self-sufficiency out of the programme; and
 - system to ensure the monitoring and evaluation of the Food support programme.

OBJECTIVE 4: To assess the systems in place to monitor and evaluate the success and impact of the TCCTP

The main technical and administrative flaws in the Programme

- 4.4.1. In a submission dated October 26, 2017, the Ministry admitted that the programme has technical and administrative flaws:
 - though the programme used the Survey of Living Conditions as a guide to identifying beneficiaries, the Ministry did not use the data to inform the size and configuration of its regional offices;
 - Regional Offices were not networked for efficiency and effectiveness;

- The TCCTP database did not capture relevant data for all household members. As such, identifying households with more than one card was difficult;
- A customer-service mechanism for responding to queries from the public is non-existent; and
- The programme design did not include a monitoring and evaluation framework.

The development of a Monitoring and Evaluation framework

4.4.2. The Ministry indicated that there was no specific monitoring and evaluation arrangements for the TCCTP. By submission dated October 26, 2017, theMSDFS indicated is working towards the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for its operations as well as for the programmes and initiatives under its purview, in keeping with the VISION 2030 National Development Strategy and the National Performance Framework (NPF) 2017-2020. The latter framework will allow the Ministry to monitor activities at the programme level as well as undertake impact evaluations of its interventions.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings

- 4.4.3. Based on the preceding evidence/information, the Committee concluded as follows:
- i. It was concerned by the absence of a specific or customised monitoring and evaluation framework for this programme. Measuring the performance or impact of social interventions in an important facet of policy evaluation and also fosters greater transparency in the use of public funds;
 - ii. Even without a formal and ongoing evaluation of the programme, there was some anecdotal evidence which suggested that there were flaws in the management of this social intervention. This was evident by the remedial measures taken by the line Ministry to eradicate ineligible recipients from the programme; and
 - iii. Based on research conducted by the Committee, it was indicated in a Humanitarian

Policy Group document entitled *“Food aid and food assistance in emergency and transitional contexts: a review of current thinking”*³⁵ that evaluations and studies of food aid consistently note poor monitoring as an issue. Furthermore, an important example is the Tripartite Evaluation of WFP³⁶ by Canada, Netherlands and Norway, note that ‘the lack of good monitoring makes it extremely difficult to assess impact of the programme on food and nutrition security.

Recommendations

Given the foregoing, the Committee recommends the following:

- A. That the Ministry’s development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for its operations as well as for the programmes and initiatives under its purview be completed and fully implemented at the end of the fiscal year 2019;
- B. The Ministry should consider implementing an appropriate IT system that would facilitate monitoring and evaluation through the capture and analysis of data; and
- C. That the Ministry review the United Nations World Food Programme monitoring and evaluation guidelines to assist in the formulation and implementation of an effective monitoring and evaluation system for the TCCTP.

³⁵ Paul Harvey, Karen Proudlock, Edward Clay, Barry Riley and Susanne Jaspars. 2010. *“Food aid and food assistance in emergency and transitional contexts: a review of current thinking”*. Humanitarian Policy Group Overseas Development Institute. Accessed on September 11, 2018. <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6038.pdf>

³⁶ World Food Programme.

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

Mr. Paul Richards
Chairman

Mr. Esmond Forde, MP
Vice-Chairman

Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP
Member

Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
Member

Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
Member

Ms. Khadijah Ameen
Member

Mr. Rohan Sinanan
Member

Ms. Allyson West
Member

March 12, 2019

APPENDICES

Appendix I

Persons who appeared and provided oral evidence

Name of Official	Portfolio	Organization
Public Hearing Held on November 01, 2017		
Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers	Permanent Secretary	Ministry of Social Development and Family Services
Ms. Natasha Barrow	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)	
Mr. Asif Ali	Deputy Permanent Secretary	
Mr. Vijay Gangerparsad	Chief Technical Officer (Ag.)	
Ms. Taramati Samaroo	Director, Human Resource (Ag.)	
Mrs. Cheryl Layne-Pereira	Director (Ag.), Social Welfare Division	
Ms. Carla Mckie	Auditor II	

Appendix II

MINUTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENT APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO AND REPORT ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, HELD IN THE ARNOLD THOMASOS ROOM (EAST), LEVEL 6, AND THE J. HAMILTON MAURICE ROOM, MEZANINE FLOOR, OFFICE OF THE PARLIAMENT, TOWER D, #1A WRIGHTSON ROAD, PORT OF SPAIN, ON
WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 01, 2017

PRESENT

Members

Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Chairman
Mr. Esmond Forde, MP	Vice-Chairman
Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP	Member
Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP	Member
Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP	Member
Mr. Rohan Sinanan	Member
Ms. Khadijah Ameen	Member

Secretariat

Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Mr. Johnson Greenidge	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Ashaki Alexis	Research Assistant

CALL TO ORDER AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

1.1 The Chairman called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m. and welcomed those present.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF THE SIXTEENTH MEETING HELD ON SEPTEMBER 13, 2017

2.1 The Chairman invited Members to examine page-by-page, the Minutes of the Meeting held on June 07, 2017.

2.2 The Committee approved the following amendments:

- i. Item 3.2(d)(iv) - in the last line remove the word “**of**” after the word “treat”; and
- ii. Item 3.2(d)(v) – insert the word “**of**” after the word “treatment”.

2.3 The Minutes were confirmed with amendments on a motion moved by Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP and seconded by Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

3.1 With reference to:

The inquiry into the adverse health effects of fireworks:

- a. Item 3.1(b) (on page 2), the Committee agreed that the follow-up site visits to fireworks storage facilities and retail depots should be conducted in December when these facilities are frequented for the Christmas period.
- b. Item 3.1(c)(ii) (on page 2), the Chairman advised that the Secretariat completed and circulated to Members, research on the *international standards that are adhered to regarding the storage of fireworks and on the laws that govern the use of fireworks*. Members agreed to review the research in furtherance of the Committee’s deliberations.
- c. The Secretariat was instructed to:
 - i. send a follow-up email reminding the CoP of the Committee’s advance request for information regarding the number of reports submitted to the TTPS in relation to Divali Celebrations during the period October 16 to 20, 2017;
 - ii. request statistical data from the TTPS regarding the number of requests by individuals to use fireworks in relation to the Independence Day and Divali Celebrations. The request should quote the legislation which stipulates that such a request should be made.
 - iii. examine the evidence received pursuant to the Committee’s inquiry into the adverse health effects of fireworks and identify any existing gaps or inconsistencies in the evidence.
- d. Statistical data on the reports submitted to the TTPS during the independence and Divali periods was circulated to members on November 13th.

3.2 **The inquiry into mental health and wellness services and facilities in Trinidad and Tobago:**

- a. Item 3.2(c) (on page 2), the Committee agreed that a follow-up site visit to the St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital was not necessary to its deliberations on mental health issues in Trinidad and Tobago.
- b. The Committee agreed to conduct a public hearing with officials from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Children's Authority, Association of Psychologists and Association of Psychiatrists on the matter of *mental health services and facilities provided for children and adolescents*.
- c. The Committee also agreed to consider conducting a site visit to the Child Psychology Ward at the Mt. Hope Hospital to access and evaluate the needs of the hospital to effectively and efficiently address the psychiatric and psychological needs of children and adolescents.
- d. Item 3.2(b) (on page 2), the Chairman committed to draft a letter to the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences expressing the Committee's deep concern regarding the University's response. It was also agreed that the letter would mention that the Department of Behavioural Sciences ought to have presented itself to be interviewed by the Committee and thereafter the Committee would have determined whether its submissions were relevant to its deliberations.
- e. The Secretariat was instructed to:
 - i. draft an Issues Paper on the mental health services and facilities provided for children and adolescents;
 - ii. complete a review of the Children's Act, Chap. 46.01 and the Children's Authority Act, Chap. 46.10 to determine whether the provisions of these Acts require separate locations/institutions to treat children with mental illnesses;
 - iii. request a status report from the Ministry of Health on the initiatives which have commenced to address the treatment of children and adolescents with mental illnesses;
 - iv. conduct research into international best practices with regard to the treatment of persons with Alzheimer's disease; and

3.3 **The 1st Report on the inquiry into current level of violence among students in schools with particular focus on physical and cyber bullying:**

- a. The Committee agreed that a follow-up hearing should be conducted with the Ministry of Education re: the status of the implementation of the recommendations made in the Committee's First Report on the inquiry into the current level of violence among students in schools with particular focus on physical and cyber bullying.

- b. The date for the follow-up hearing will be determined at a later meeting of the Committee but is tentatively scheduled for January, 2018.

3.4 **The inquiry into issues affecting the indigenous peoples in Trinidad and Tobago:**

- c. Item 5.2(e) (on page 5), the Committee agreed to defer the *inquiry into issues affecting the indigenous peoples in Trinidad and Tobago* to a date to be determined. By letter dated October 24, 2017, the First Peoples Community was informed of the Committee's decision.

CONSIDERATION OF DRAFT 4TH REPORT ON THE PREVALENCE OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (STDs) AMONGST SCHOOL STUDENTS

4.1 The Chairman reminded Members that the Draft 4th Report was circulated for the consideration of Members and comment by Wednesday September 20, 2017. It was agreed that Members will be given additional time to provide feedback on the draft. As such Members were asked to submit feedback by Monday November 06, 2017.

4.2 The Chairman advised that Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith, MP and Ms. Khadijah Ameen will present the Report in the House of Representatives and in the Senate respectively as agreed.

4.3 The Committee agreed that the following procedure should be followed with respect to the consideration of draft Committee reports going forward:

- i. Members should forward any comments/adjustments no later than two (2) weeks after the circulation of the first draft.
- ii. The Chairman reviews comments and a final draft is circulated.
- iii. Members are afforded one (1) week to consider the final draft and forward any comments/adjustments.
- iv. Presentation of the completed Committee report.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSIONS

5.1 The Chairman informed Members that representatives from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services were expected to participate in the day's hearing.

5.2 The Chairman informed Members that an *Issues Paper* was prepared by the Secretariat based on the submission received. The *Issues Paper* was circulated to Members by email on Tuesday October 31, 2017.

5.3 Members discussed and agreed on the approach to questioning to be adopted during the hearing.

OTHER BUSINESS

Proposed Date and Agenda for Next Meeting

6.1 The Committee agreed that its next meeting will be held on November 15, 2017. At this meeting the Committee will conduct a public hearing with officials from the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health, Children's Authority, Association of Psychologists and Association of Psychiatrists on the matter of *mental health services and facilities provided for children and adolescents*.

The Work Schedule for the Third Session

6.2 The Committee agreed to proceed with its deliberation as follows:

- i. Public hearing on the mental health of children and adolescents be held on November 15, 2017;
- ii. follow-up site visit be conducted to a firework retail outlet and a fireworks storage facility in December 2017; and
- iii. follow up inquiry be conducted on the 1st Report on School Violence in January 2018.

SUSPENSION

7.1 The Chairman suspended the meeting at 10:23 a.m.

PUBLIC HEARING WITH OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND FAMILY SERVICES (MSDFS)

8.1 The meeting resumed in public at 10:33 a.m. in the J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor.

8.2 The following persons joined the meeting:

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers Permanent Secretary

Ms. Natasha Barrow Permanent Secretary (Ag.)

Mr. Asif Ali	Deputy Permanent Secretary
Mr. Vijay Gangerparsad	Chief Technical Officer (Ag.)
Ms. Taramati Samaroo	Director, Human Resource (Ag.)
Mrs. Cheryl Layne-Pereira	Director (Ag.), Social Welfare Division
Ms. Carla Mckie	Auditor II

8.3 The Chairman welcomed the officials and introductions were exchanged.

8.4 The Chairman informed those concerned of the objectives of the inquiry.

8.5 Detailed below are the issues/concerns raised and the responses which were proffered during the hearing:

The strategic direction of the MSDFS

b. Permanent Secretary, Bailey-Sobers remarked briefly on the strategic direction of the MSDFS, including:

- A. that the MSDFS is the lead Ministry charged with the responsibility of providing social protection to the most vulnerable and combating the scourge of poverty in Trinidad and Tobago;
- B. the recent significant changes in the organizational structure and mandate of the Ministry;
- C. the reassignment of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme (TCCTP) to the Social Welfare Division, MSDFS;
- D. the plans to improve service delivery through implementation of an integrated social service delivery approach; and
- E. the completion of the National Social Mitigation Plan 2017-2022 by the MSDFS, in collaboration with the Health and Economics Unit of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustus Campus. The implementation of this plan will be the priority of the Ministry for fiscal 2018;

c. Permanent Secretary, Barrow gave an overview of the purpose and objectives of the TCCTP in the context of regional and international best practice. She identified the following issues:

- A. The TCCTP as a potentially effective approach to food security and alleviating poverty, whereby the Programme was identified as a means to

address food insecurity via cash transfer while facilitating rehabilitative and developmental activities through another module which is currently under review;

- B. Over 30,000 households access the Programme monthly;
- C. The objectives of the TCCTP, which includes providing recipients with training in specific areas, such as:
 - Budgetary Planning;
 - Family Planning;
 - Career Guidance; and
 - Life Skills.
- D. The relabeling of the developmental component of the food support programme from the Rights of Individuals to Social and Economic Security, Universal Prosperity (RISE-UP) programme to its former name, Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme - Uplifting People (STEP-UP). It was confirmed that little progress was made in relation to the RISE-UP component.
- E. the initiative to make STEP-UP a critical part of not only the food support programme, but the entire suite of programmes offered by the Ministry in fiscal 2018.

Preliminary information on the past “Food Card” Programme

- a. Permanent Secretary, Bailey-Sobers provided background information on the “Food Card” Programme as follows:
 - i. The three (3) denominations of temporary and permanent “Food Cards” are as follows:
 - 1 to 3 person per household - \$410.00
 - 4 to 5 person per households - \$550.00
 - 6 and over per household - \$700.00;
 - ii. As part of the process of application for a “Food Card”, representatives of the Social Welfare Division, MSDFS visit the homes of applicants to determine their eligibility for the card via a Means Test. It was noted that persons who receive other forms of public assistance may be eligible;
 - iii. A list of approved food items for purchase was provided to all participating merchants at the commencement of the “Food Card” programme. However,

the programme devolved over years of operation and the list was not honoured;

Collection of benefit cheques in lieu of the “Food Card”

- a. Permanent Secretary, Bailey-Sobers indicated that approximately 27,000 people currently possess a food card and other persons receive their benefits from cheques which must be collected each month.
- b. A short-term arrangement was made in 2016 for approximately 4,000 persons who applied for food cards since 2013 and had not received any benefits. As a remedy to this, the benefit was provided through cheques in lieu of the electronic card.
- c. The Ministry was aware that it would be unable to monitor the types of items purchased by recipients in receipt of cheques. Notwithstanding, cheques were issued owing to the thinking that families were disadvantaged by not receiving a benefit they were eligible for and the Ministry’s plans to implement a new card system in the near future.
- d. The Committee noted the Ministry’s inability to monitor the types of items purchased by recipients especially those who receive cheques.

Implementation of a new card processing system

- a. The debit-card system of processing Food Cards has become obsolete owing to outdated technology (since 2006) which has rendered the cards useless as banks highlighted a risk to both themselves and the Ministry and discontinued the practice of adding new recipients to the system.
- b. The Ministry is preparing a new card processing system to be fully implemented by the end of the first quarter of the fiscal year 2018 and facilitated through First Citizens Bank. The new card processing system will cost the Ministry approximately \$1 million annually to maintain;
- c. Supporting measures (including a new IT system) will be implemented to prevent the abuse of State funds, fraud and duplication of grants to any one person.

Costs associated with the proposed Biometric Smart Card system

5. The Chief Technical Officer (Ag.) indicated that successive attempts were made in 2005, 2007, 2010 and 2015 to implement a biometric smart card system to replace the debit card system. These attempts failed due to various challenges.
6. It was on the assumption that the biometric system would be introduced that the Ministry never set about upgrading the debit card system.

7. It was also indicated that the capital expenditure on the biometric smart card system was \$30,975,000; the capital expenditure on the financial platform development for the system was \$3.8 million. The recurrent expenditure for the biometric platform was \$2.8 million annually, and the financial platform which included an SMS text messaging module and bank charges was \$29 million annually.
8. The Committee noted the failure of the MSDFS to conduct a Cost/Benefit analysis of the TCCTP.
9. Permanent Secretary, Bailey-Sobers indicated that the Ministry formerly expended \$2.8 million every month to provide \$1.7 million worth of cards to 3,100 beneficiaries. The Ministry took note of this and took a decision to put a hold on the implementation of the use of the biometric smart card.
10. Notwithstanding the lack of a cost/benefit analysis, the Ministry is satisfied that new card processing system scheduled for 2018 is the prudent choice as:
 - iii. annual bank charges in relation to the processing of the cards has been reduced from approximately \$3 Million to \$1 Million;
 - iv. the biometric registry system which belongs to the Ministry may be maintained and the investment made to develop the system is not lost.

Accessibility of the TCCTP to individuals living with beneficiaries

- a. The Committee inquired whether disadvantaged individuals belonging to households with higher-income earning individuals may be denied a food card owing to the collective income of the household.
- b. Permanent Secretary, Bailey-Sobers indicated that the TCCTP commenced as a family-oriented benefit programme. The policy of the programme was created to discourage the practice of multiple cards being assigned to one household as a means of managing the cost of the programme. Individuals may not be able to access the Programme if another person in their household is a beneficiary.
- c. The Chief Technical Officer (Ag.) indicated that multiple, separate “households” may reside within one “house”. Cards may be issued to these separate “households”.

Total cost of the TCCTP to the Government

- a. The Ministry recorded approximately 27,000 beneficiaries of the TCCTP as at September 30th 2017.

- b. In fiscal year ended 2016 the total expenditure on the programme was approximately \$260 million. Since the commencement of the programme in 2006 to the fiscal year ended 2016 the Ministry estimated a total expenditure of \$1.981 billion for simply the food support component of the programme. This estimate excludes administrative and additional costs.
- c. The Committee suggested that efforts be made to encourage the purchase of locally produced goods by “Food card” recipients. The Ministry committed to consider the suggestion in view of its aim to implement a new system in 2018.

Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme - Uplifting People (STEP-UP)

- a. It was indicated that the Ministry is currently assessing the STEP-UP development component of the TCCTP for full implementation within the next three (3) months. Recipients of food cards and benefit cheques are targeted for this component.
- b. The Committee noted that beneficiaries of the TCCTP have not participated in its development component since 2014. This was as a result of the non-implementation of RISE-UP by the Ministry. The lack of personnel was proposed as the main reason for the failed in implementation.
- c. It was indicated that the module of STEP-UP to empower and educate the recipient to meet the nutritional needs of the family will continue to be part of the programme as one of eight conditions that the family will be required to meet. The *Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute* is involved in the programme. Family sessions will include family planning and nutrition education. The following are two (2) new areas to be evaluated and addressed through the STEP-UP component:
 - i. Issues of values and attitude behaviour; and
 - ii. Issues of psycho-social development;
- d. The Ministry proposes to introduce an element of STEP-UP addressing challenges the emergence of a “welfare syndrome” or dependency syndrome in recipients.

The urgent response to victims of natural disasters/accidents

- a. The programme seeks to provide an urgent response to families experiencing poverty and social and economic hardship, as well as, to victims of natural disasters who are considered vulnerable. Temporary food cards are issued to victims of disasters on a same-day basis as a matter of urgency.

- b. It was noted that in some areas only 5 cards were distributed to families affected by recent flooding as the Ministry is a second responder. First responders issued many hampers containing food items. Therefore clients actually indicated that they no longer needed foodstuff. The Ministry also indicated that the figures on the number of cards issued are outstanding due to ongoing assessment exercises scheduled for completion on Friday November 03, 2017.
- c. It was indicated that the \$410.00 card is issued to temporary recipients. Permanent Secretary Bailey-Sobers reflected on recent issues with the unavailability of these cards due to a lack of stock at Food Support Offices. Individuals were asked to return at specific dates which would allow supervisors to retrieve temporary cards at the Head Office to replenish stock.
- d. As most of the \$410.00 cards have been depleted, the Ministry has taken the policy decision to utilise the \$550.00 cards to assist in its disaster response.
- e. A maximum grant of up to \$10,000 is offered to victims of natural disasters for particular household items (such as beds, stoves, washing machines, fridges, wardrobes, etc.). A maximum grant of \$20,000 is also offered for house repairs. The Ministry noted the Government's allocation of \$35,000,000.00 to provide assistance to persons affected by the floods in October.

Customer Service and Client-Care training for MSDFS staff

- a. Permanent Secretary Barrow indicated that all staff members of the MSDFS have undergone internal Client-Care training to improve the services rendered to clients. The content of the training was approved by the Public Service Academy.
- b. The Committee noted instances of discrimination against socially displaced persons seeking assistance under the programme at the various Food Support Offices. It was indicated that customer service deficiencies were identified in the 2010 Special Report of the Auditor General on the programme. The Ministry introduced a temporary customer service response to address this deficiency. In addition, a premium customer service response is a priority for implementation of the new processing system in 2018.

Benefits of the Biometric registry system

- a. The Chief Technical Officer (Ag.) advised that the biometric registry system has replaced the paper-based, central beneficiary registry as the platform for any payment of benefits to be made.

- b. Benefits are paid using the recipients' biometric data stored on the system instead of a National ID card number or a file number which can be compromised.
- c. In response to the question of the loss of recipient files owing to movement between regional offices, it was indicated that:
 - i. both the Public Assistance Act and the Senior Citizens Pension Act require that if a person moves from one address to another one which is outside of the regional office that they belong to, their file must be transferred; and
 - ii. neither the biometric payment platform nor the central beneficiary registry can prevent the loss of files. Adequate measures must be introduced to prevent such loss.

Elimination of Life Certificates for pensioners

- a. Permanent Secretary Bailey-Sobers advised that a MOU was signed with the Registrar General's Department with a view to eliminating the regular submission of Life Certificates for pensioners by January 2018. This will be replaced by a one-time submission of a Death Certificate.
- b. A MOU has to be signed between the Immigration Division and the MSDFS prior to operationalization of this initiative.

Administration of the Food Support programme

It was advised that the TCCTP was reassigned to the Social Welfare Division, MSDFS. All Field Officers within Social Welfare Districts administer the Food Support programme.

The reduction of permanent and temporary card holders

- a. The Committee noted the significant reduction of permanent and temporary card holders from approximately 65,000 in 2014 to 27,000 in 2017;
- b. Permanent Secretary Bailey-Sobers advised that the reduction was due to a review exercise in the fiscal year 2016. Card holders were asked to re-register on the biometric system:
 - i. 480 persons were placed onto the system after reapplying and having been certified as at July 2017;
 - ii. Approximately, 13,000 persons did not reapply for the programme during the exercise and were subsequently removed;
 - iii. The Ministry advised that based on phone calls made, card holders did not register as some had died and others could not be located;

- iv. It was noted that the Ministry has saved approximately \$110 Million since this reconciliation.
- c. The reduced number of card holders was also due to the continuous deactivations by the Ministry based on monthly reviews performed by officers which highlighted the persons who were no longer being eligible for the programme.

Non-renewal of contracts at the MSDFS

It was indicated that 91 contract positions under the discontinued Food Card programme were not renewed. However, some persons were retained and transferred to the Social Welfare Division.

Issuance of Temporary Food Cards

- a. The three (3) conditions under which a temporary food card may be issued are as follows:
 - i. Disaster relief;
 - ii. If reasonable facts are provided by a client regarding their failure to produce the required documents to complete registration for a permanent food card;
 - iii. In situations where Officers have identified an extreme absence of food due to duress or economic circumstance (eg. socially displaced persons).
- b. It was noted that the region of Sangre Grande has been identified as the poorest region in the country.

Implementation of a harmonized registration system across public agencies

- a. The Committee was advised that the Ministry has engaged in discussion with the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC), Immigration Division, National Insurance Board (NIB) and the Registrar General regarding a collaborative effort for the implementation of a harmonized registration system for information sharing regarding persons receiving public assistance.
- b. The Ministry is at the stage of reviewing the cost of signing a MOU with the NIB primarily for a collaborative effort toward retrieving the applicants' information pertaining to their contributions payable at NIB.
- c. It was noted that the introduction of a biometric National ID card will assist the Ministry in data collection and service delivery.

Recommendations proffered during the Public Hearing

8.6 The following recommendations emanated from the discussions:

- i. Commercial banks should update their system to accommodate the new card technology platform;
- ii. As part of the implementation of the new card system scheduled for implementation in 2018, consideration should be given to the inclusion of locally produced goods as part of the list of approved goods to be purchased and consumed by recipients. Furthermore, that participating merchants be required to make locally produced goods reasonably available to card holders;
- iii. Decentralizing the approval process;
- iv. That arrangements be made with merchants/groceries to allow cheques or vouchers to be distributed through them to ensure that persons use the cards to purchase food items;
- v. That sensitization sessions be offered to staff assigned to Food Support Offices to reduce instances of poor customer service. Furthermore, that the Ministry export the outsourcing of the sensitization training;
- vi. That the Client Care training programme offered to MSDFS staff be re-evaluate;
- vii. That consideration be given to the reintroduction of the biometric system;
- viii. That the Ministry pursue the signing of a MOU with the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC) to acquire specific information on households throughout Trinidad and Tobago;
- ix. That the Ministry pursue the signing of a MOU with the National Insurance Board (NIB) which will allow the Ministry to access specific information on recipients;
- x. That the Ministry engage all relevant state agencies to implement a biometric ID card system which will seek to harmonize information on citizens of Trinidad and Tobago; and
- xi. A review of what recipients are allowed to purchase with the card as a necessity besides food and nutrition items.

Requested information

8.7 The Committee requested that the Ministry of Social Development provide the following information in writing:

- a. the Ministry's interpretation/definition of "family" and "household" and the implications for the accessibility of the TCCTP to individuals living with beneficiaries. The Ministry should also submit how these definitions conform to international best practice;
- b. the operational costs of the RISE-UP development component from the commencement of the programme to its suspension in 2014;
- c. Confirmation of the number of cards issued as a result of the major flooding which occurred in October, 2017;
- c. details on the nature of the temporary customer service response currently utilised by the Ministry and the proposed premium customer service response to implemented in 2018;
- d. the number of Field Officers assigned to each District Office;
- e. the number of staff who were previously assigned to the TCCTP Unit that was retained per district office. The Ministry should provide reasons for the retention and non-renewal of contracts.
- f. the number of job positions terminated at the Ministry in the last 12 months;
- g. the number of temporary food cards issued to the Sangre Grande Regional Office, Social Welfare Division for the period 2016 to 2017;
- h. the criteria used to classify persons as "extremely poor/disadvantaged";
- i. the criteria used to measure the value of goods lost due to natural disaster;
- j. information regarding what steps should be taken over the next three (3) years to ensure the full implementation of a harmonized registration system for information sharing regarding persons receiving public assistance. The information should include monitoring and evaluation measures for the system to prevent corruption.

ADJOURNMENT

9.1 Closing remarks were made by Permanent Secretary Bailey Sobers and Permanent Secretary (Ag.) Barrow.

9.2 The Chairman thanked Members and gave closing statements.

9.3 The meeting was adjourned at 12:34 p.m.

I certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

Chairman

Secretary

November 14, 2017

Appendix III

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, HELD IN THE ARNOLD THOMASOS ROOM (EAST), LEVEL 6, (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, NOVEMBER 01, 2017 AT 9.30 A.M.

PRESENT

Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir	Chairman
Mr. Esmond Forde	Vice-Chairman
Brig. Gen. Ancil Antoine	Member
Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein	Member
Mrs. Glenda Jennings-Smith	Member
Mr. Rohan Sinanan	Member
Miss Khadijah Ameen	Member
Mr. Julien Ogilvie	Secretary
Mr. Johnson Greenidge	Assistant Secretary

Mr. Chairman: I call this 17th meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration to order. We are now fully quorate and I welcome colleagues who have been here. This I think is our earliest start, so we should have enough time to undertake the preliminaries before we, of course, pursue the matter downstairs with respect to the public hearing. As of now I did not receive any leave of absence or excuses, so I expect that other members will come in as the meeting progresses.

I would like to turn our attention to the Minutes of our meeting, the 16th meeting held on Wednesday, September 13th. That was our first meeting just on the cusp of the new session. This is our first formal meeting in the new session of Parliament. So the last meeting of the old session that was the meeting of Wednesday, September 13th. I imagine you all have copies of the Minutes and you were able to peruse the Minutes prior. I would like to go through the Minutes page by page and determine whether there are any amendments or corrections.

Page 1, any corrections? Page 2? Are we missing a member?

Mr. Ogilvie: Yes, we have a vacancy.

Mr. Chairman: We have a vacancy, yes; I thought I would bring it to the attention of the Committee. We do have a vacancy and that vacancy is Ayanna, and we have not yet had a replacement.

The procedure normally is that the Leader of the House would move a Motion to make the necessary announcement, so we are waiting for a replacement. The Secretariat would have notified them. Normally it is done on a timely manner, but because of the break and the budget debate, we are running with one short on the Committee. It is a Government member, so the Government I am sure will ensure that we do have that. Do we have to write a reminder or they know they should put a replacement?

Mr. Ogilvie: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Very well; so we are waiting for our replacement, but as it stands we are not expecting any member to be absent this morning who is duly constituted on the Committee.

Any change then on page 1? Page 2? Any change on page 2? Any amendment on page 2? I trust that page 2 is acceptable. Page 3, I have two. You have concerns on page 3 as well? Okay we could hear your concerns.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. The item I would seek clarification on

is that I remember the Chair was to write—(I) down to the bottom. We are on 3.2 coming down, F(1). Chair, you had indicated that you would either write or speak with your colleague concerning the letter that they had forwarded.

Mr. Chairman: Under “Matters Arising” I will address that, yes.

On page 3 there are two typos that I think we need to look at. Under item 4.1(v), that is 4, on the last sentence on 4 it says that:

Separate locations instituted to treat off children with mental illness”

So you need to take off that “off”, and then in “5” you need to put in “off”:

Request a status report from the Ministry of Health or the initiative which has commenced to address the treatment of children and adolescence with mental illness.

So we need to put in an “of”. Take off one “off” and add an “of” there, and then we are in order. Any other recommended changes with respect to page 3 of the Minutes? I take it that page 3 is then accepted? Page 4? [*Interruption*] Good morning, Member. We are on the Minutes on page 4. I trust you have reviewed the Minutes. Although I have gone through pages 1, 2 and 3, if there are any concerns you have with those three pages, please, you can raise them and we will address them.

Page 4 is accepted. [*Interruption*] Good morning, MP. We are just always welcome to see you this morning. We are making such good time this morning. So I think we have our full—we are just waiting for member Sinanan.

Any other change on page 4? I have seen nothing on page 4 to query. Page 5? We are all good with page 5? Page 6, nothing substantive. May I then ask that someone moves that these Minutes be confirmed?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Chair, I move that the Minutes be confirmed.

Mr. Chairman: And seconded? Is there a seconder?

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Seconded.

Mr. Chairman: Seconded by MP Antoine. Thank you very much.

We are on the point of “Matters Arising”. There are a number of matters arising on the Minutes. Under item 3.1(a) on page 2, by way of letter dated September 26, 2017, a submission was received from the Ministry of Health in response to the Committee’s request and circulated to members via email on October 10th. I will just want to pause here to ask the Secretariat if they could just remind us as to the contents of that letter.

Mr. Ogilvie: Mr. Chairman, the correspondence referenced here was in relation to the Committee’s request for confirmation as to whether an expert was engaged to provide the Committee with advice on the contents of a sample of fireworks. I think it was the black powder—the composition of black powder.

Mr. Chairman: And it did not refer to a query we had with respect to the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries with respect to animal welfare?

Mr. Ogilvie: That is another one.

Mr. Chairman: Item 3.1(b) on page 2. We need to determine a proposed date to conduct a site visit. Not a follow-up, but a site visit to the storage facilities at the retail depots for fireworks. Very good. I leave that for consideration of members, and I think that we may want to schedule that one closer to the Christmas break when we have a lot more retail outlets opened for business. Divali was a period when the retail outlets were opened and they were everywhere, mushrooming everywhere. So I think we may want to wait at a time when we can observe the storage facilities together with the retail outlets in actual operation, and actually make enquiries as to whether, in fact, they have the necessary licences and so on to do that.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Chair, I do not know if it was me, but I found that there were not as many explosions for Divali. I do not know if it was as a result of the

enquiry or if it was a lack of funds, or it was rain or if it was a combination of all three, but I did observe that there was a reduced number.

Mr. Chairman: I am happy to hear that because in my neighbourhood there was an escalation. I was advised that we had requested from the Commissioner of Police the reports of complaints during the Divali period, of people who were using or abusing fireworks, and we are awaiting the Commissioner's response on that. It would, of course, require people to actually call the police. I do not know how many people actually called to complain.

Miss Ameen: Chair, users are also required to send requests for permission to use fireworks, but that of course would be on a larger scale. So I want to suggest that maybe we could ask for the report of the number of requests, and it may reflect the usage.

Mr. Chairman: Very well, I think that is an excellent query. We could have a follow-up query to the Commissioner of Police with respect to requests for the use of fireworks. And may I recommend further that we look at the necessary legislation and quote the legislation which stipulates that there should be a request. There is a legislation with respect to requests. We want to know whether, in fact, in relation to the use whether the requests for use, in fact, is coterminous with the use of the fireworks. I think it would be beneficial to quote the legislation for the Commissioner of Police as well. Thank you very much, member.

Item 3.1:

The Secretariat completed research on the international standards that are adhered to regarding the storage of fireworks and on the laws that govern the use of fireworks. This was circulated to members yesterday.

I have not had an opportunity to study it yet, but I will. I would like to see what the international standards are in a number of jurisdictions. From my own research I have seen some interesting developments in places like Ireland and so on, where

they are very strict with respect to the regulation.

Under item 3.2(c) there is the view that we should conduct a follow-up site visit to the St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital. We need to determine the reason for the follow-up. Is it to examine again if there were improvements to the facilities housing the insane, the mentally challenged, insane individuals, if that is a name for them, that facility. For children, okay, yes. You see, I am wondering whether, in fact, we do need to have a site visit again, because we know that the St. Ann's Hospital was not geared for the treatment of children, so I do not think we need to go back to find out that they are not doing it.

What we may want to do, I recommend to the Committee, is look at the necessary legislation. If I can ask the Secretariat to look at the necessary legislation governing the mental health aspect of children. I know we do have the Children Authority legislation which would cover that, the Children Act, and we would then make a decision at the level of the Committee with respect to whether we call in the Children's Authority or any other agency to find out what, in fact, they are doing, because the remit of St. Ann's is not children. It is not. It was clearly indicated to us that they were not geared for adolescents and child mental health problems.

Miss Ameen: Chair, remember we had a lady, she was a child psychiatrist, and she was from the RHA. I think from her testimony, from her evidence, we could glean a lot because she also spoke about the shortage in the schools, not only the hospitals, where children may be actually taken, that that is at the late stage. But in terms of detection of mental health illnesses in children, what role the schools play. So I want to suggest that someone from the Ministry of Education, the relevant department, be contacted. They have social support services, but the person who coordinates it at the Ministry of Education may be useful, because you know if there is a shortage in all the schools.

Mr. Chairman: I really think now that the follow-up to the St. Ann's is not going to be beneficial. We have been there, we have seen it. The only concern I had with the St. Ann's, and I think members may share that, is with respect to facilities for those charged with criminal offences. But in the area of treating people I did not see much to take issue with. The concern was with children, and I am really of the view that we need to talk to the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health, because the children are all in educational institutions.

What I recall as well, what the Director at St. Ann's said is that in a General Hospital like Mount Hope, just as you have a paediatric facility, you may have an adolescent mental health facility as a separate dedicated facility in the country. We need to get the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, maybe again the same researcher at Mount Hope to determine the feasibility of them dedicating a ward in Mount Hope. We could write, because we do need to get—you are right, Senator—the numbers, whether it would justify having a dedicated ward at a general hospital.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: In addition, Chair, I do believe that you need to incorporate the Children's Authority because we must not recreate or reinvent the wheel, and therefore we must in fact have the best practice guidelines for children's ward for psychiatric help, that the Act must reflect that. So when they are establishing policies and different infrastructure, that this is, in fact, within the remit of the institution.

Mr. Chairman: Excellent, and may I recommend then for the consideration of the Committee the following: in a follow-up hearing, with respect, coming out of our enquiry into mental health we focus—*[Interruption]* good morning, Senator.

[Mr. Sinanan enters the Committee room]

We focus on children's mental health issues, and there we can have a public enquiry now with respect to the Ministry of Education, to get the numbers, the

Children's Authority to determine what are the impediments that they are with respect to treating with this problem, any impediments, any legislative change that they may require we can control the legislative agenda. We can recommend legislative changes.

The third, we will need to get the Ministry of Health to indicate what some of the impediments are with respect to having a dedicated ward, if it is determined that such a dedicated ward is necessary. And fourth, we make our recommendations on the matter.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Let us not neglect the police.

Mr. Chairman: It would have to be the Community Police though.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes, it does not matter, but the point of the fact that when you deal with mental health they always work with the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service.

Mr. Chairman: Even for adolescents?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Well, you do not know what type of—

Mr. Chairman: Okay, let us give it some thought, because on this follow up enquiry what I think we should focus on, there is a clear problem in the country. The problem is because, of the separate Republics this issue of child mental health seems to have fallen through the cracks, and I think if we could get the relevant authorities. The police may have had to be called in, but I do not know if the police on this one is as important as say the Children's Authority.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Chair, remember you do not know. When someone goes in, a report goes out, maybe to the police or whoever it is, one does not know it is a mental issue until they have been evaluated.

Mr. Chairman: Very well, okay. So could we then say in the follow-up visit, and this is for the benefit of the Secretariat, we do need to get the Children's Authority—a follow-up hearing—we do need to get the Ministry of Health,

because if a dedicated ward is to be implemented and operationalized the Ministry of Health would have to be the doing arm of the State for that. We absolutely need to get again the child psychologist, the professional who addressed us, and the police. If there is any other agency which has an interest in this matter of child care, child mental health, I do not know—we need the Ministry of Education, yes. So this is going to be a follow-up hearing, arising out of our examination of mental health issues.

So may I recommend to the Committee that there is in my view no need to visit St. Ann's again. I think we have been there, done that. We have seen out of St. Ann's an issue arising out of the criminally insane, that is something that the Ministry of National Security in my mind will have to deal with. The St. Ann's people are quite aware. I think everyone is aware that that facility is not really the best to treat with mentally ill individuals charged with offences. But the children's aspect is something that I think we need to enquire on, and so we will put that on the agenda at a follow-up hearing.

Miss Ameen: Chair, just on the point of the police. There is the community policing unit that often deals with those issues, so they have come before—

Mr. Chairman: The community police appeared, I tell you I am not impressed with community police, and I will tell you why. They tell me what I want to hear not what they actually do.

Miss Ameen: Most of the people who come before us do that.

Mr. Chairman: But certainly with the community police when they came before us on bullying, and they told us that within a few seconds because of cellphones they are on the scene. I have seen so many fights lasting so many minutes on videos, and it is not within the time frame that the community police say that they are responding. But we will call in the community police to see what role they possibly can play.

Miss Ameen: This lady, Sampson-Browne, I know I have seen her on television already talking about these kinds of issues. Margaret Sampson-Browne I think is her name.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Mr. Chairman, I want to appraise you that police officers do not respond unless they are called by the principal.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, unless they are called by the principal?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: And that is a policy matter.

Mr. Chairman: Now that is interesting. I was of the view that somebody, a teacher or somebody, a security guard, will call the police. If the principal is not aware—the community police did not tell us that, MP. They did not tell us at the hearing on bullying.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I am looking at the time for response, yes.

Mr. Chairman: Time for response, yes.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Not the response time for the police but rather when the principal or the senior person in the school calls the police; they must have that authority to enter in the school.

Mr. Chairman: But the issue now is a fight outside on the street.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Well okay that is different.

Mr. Chairman: So they do not have to necessarily get a response, a call from the principal. Anybody could call and say there is a fracas going on and please respond.

Miss Ameen: Chair, one other thing in terms of people being invited. UWI students are most times are 18 years and older, but should we consider or ask the UWI person who is in charge of that department to share their experiences with us in terms of mental health among students?

Mr. Chairman: At the university?

Miss Ameen: Yes at the UWI.

Mr. Chairman: Young adults?

Miss Ameen: Given we have had two instances in the public domain of young students committing suicide.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, okay. I am just wondering whether that is going to take us a little bit out, and that is a separate matter because at the university we are really dealing with young adults and not children as defined by the Children Act. May I recommend that we consider that age group, maybe the 18 to 29 age group, as a separate category? If, in fact, there is a need, what we can do is with the psychologist we can inquire as to incidence of that kind of mental problem within the age group 18 to 29, whether it is different from the 29 and above. It could very well be that the young adults have their own issues to face, different from children and different from the more established adults. So we may want to look at that separately.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: One correction, Chair, Margaret Sampson-Browne is no longer is no longer with the child unit, she now works with CEPEP.

Mr. Chairman: I think we have settled that we do need to be looking at children's mental health issues. We would like, following up from the St. Ann's visit, we may very well maybe take a visit to Mount Hope to see if they say there are going to be difficulties, we would like to know: what are the types of infrastructure they would need for a ward dealing with the mental illness of children? Do they need a different type of ward, a different design, I do not know. But only they would be able to tell us and we would like to get a time frame, if in fact the Committee so recommends. We cannot recommend unless we find out. But it is recommended that there is a need, we would want to know what the budgetary needs of say a Mount Hope facility would be, because it is now going to require some investment in plant and equipment to get that going.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Just going back on what Miss Ameen mentioned regarding

the young adults, I want to remind the Committee here that sometimes a child may be experiencing mental disorder, but it is not realized until probably when they are older in life when there is some traumatic experience that may trigger it, but it is there.

Mr. Chairman: Could we consider that then? Have the enquiry, if it is comes out that that too—you see, the children's issue only came out because of our general enquiry, now we are going into sub-areas which we did not know existed, but which the Committee has discerned from its own investigations. In the issue of child and adolescent psychiatric problems, psychological/psychiatric, we really need—and we are coming to the university too, not only university young adults, but what the university researchers themselves are doing—we need to get the information after all. I will address the issue with respect to liaising with the individuals at the university.

I have decided that I will liaise with the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, not the individual himself. You see, the dean is the relevant officer who is in charge with external relations. So we would normally go through the office of the Dean, and I undertake to working with the Secretariat—please remind me—so we will draft a letter to the Dean—and because I have a kind of interest there having been a member of that faculty and I have deep disappointment with the response of my faculty to a request of a parliamentary Committee, I am going to personally visit the Dean and indicate to her that we do need to get the assistance of the university when the Parliament calls. And I will remind the Dean that in 2002 then Prime Minister, Patrick Manning, called me at the Department of Economics to undertake an enquiry on the state of the public finances, because he wanted an objective report done in a timely manner at no charge. That is what the university is supposed to do, and in receipt of the large sums that they get from the State, I think we are going to indicate that we do need their researchers to focus

their minds on some of the queries, objectively, that we have. So we will send a letter off to the Dean, and hopefully if you can draft the letter I could have that signed off by the end of this week. So that is the channel with which we will operate.

10.00 a.m.

So the item for enquiry is that mental health issue. We do have to have some follow-ups as well when it comes to violence in schools. Violence in schools is something that is not ceasing. We got tremendous amount of input from all the stakeholders, what we need to do and I would be working with the Secretariat to have a follow-up again, and we need scheduled follow-ups during the current parliamentary session so that we will find out where we are with respect to some of the measures that we recommended. So we go through, Mr. Secretary, with the measures which were recommended in our report and we bring in the officers to find out, we bring in the teachers as well, so it is not as if we simply enquired and we forget about it. We are enquiring and we are going to look and see what was done.

I would also recommend that when it comes to say something like the geriatric homes we can do another follow-up with respect to recommendations that we made. [*Chairman confers with the Secretary*]

Okay. Yes. Very well. Yes. I will just want to focus on the other item and after that we will deal with that. Yeah. The other item on Matters Arising. Yes. MP. Jennings-Smith, you had a concern?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I am not sure where we were at, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Right. With respect to the item 2.3 (c), (d) and so on, all those things were covered in the discussions concerning mental health, the St. Ann's visit and it was basically agreed that we do need to look at the children's issues. If there is anything that I did not cover on these items, instead of going through them

item by item, just raise it and we will—but they all dealt with the children’s issues of mental health. Yeah.

I want to focus on item 5.2(e) that is on page 2 of the Minutes. We did offer to have an enquiry on the First Peoples, indigenous people, but for reasons of time scheduling and so on, they were not able to participate. Culture at heritage sites also is part of the remit of our Committee. We have not really done it before and we did indicate that we will defer our meeting with the First Peoples to hear their positions and so on, their views on what we could do in the country with respect to the First Peoples’ traditions. Is it that we could reschedule this sometime during the course of this parliamentary session maybe at the beginning of next year? You see, the timing was very important. It was supposed to coincide with the holiday, but now that that has passed I do not how topical is it. If—

Mr. Forde: Mr. Chairman, we were sent a roster by the Secretariat and we were asked to identify in terms of the priority, the order and so on, so I think—well I submitted mine—

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Mr. Forde:—in order to know. So I cannot recall what order I had it in.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Forde: But I will stick by that order. Timeliness is important now with these First Peoples, not saying that we casting them aside.

Mr. Chairman: Right. But I think that the moment has passed and—

Mr. Forde: The momentum is now.

Mr. Chairman: Right. I imagine that we could wait until an appropriate moment. If an appropriate moment comes again; the holiday, the granting of the one-off public holiday was, in fact, a valuable time for the Committee to look at the cultural aspect associated with the First Peoples. But I think, could we, Committee members, defer this until—

Mr. Ogilvie: The first quarter of 2018?

Mr. Chairman: Well we do have a number of things on the agenda now. You see, we have a lot of these follow-ups and these follow-ups are going to be important. I see an important follow-up on bullying; that is not disappearing. We made a number of recommendations. We had a number of stakeholders and I think—the socially displaced. So that I think, could we say we postpone it, we do not abandon the enquiry, but we postpone it, and if an opportunity arises where it is once again very topical and in the national domain, we pursue, we have done the research, we hold a public enquiry and we invite the members of the First Peoples, the first indigenous people to come into the Parliament to tell their side of the story.

An opportunity I am sure will arise, but could I get the agreement of the Committee that we wait for that opportunity?—and if the opportunity arises then, of course, we can always convene the hearing. But I really would like as a follow up we do have a meeting on a date tentatively scheduled for the 15th of November. Is that too early to do the enquiry on children's mental health?

Mr. Ogilvie: Well it would be a follow-up.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah. A follow-up. Okay. Are members of view that we look at a follow-up on our mental health enquiry, we can do children's mental health on November 15th? It is not a new enquiry, it is a follow-up. [*Chairman confers with the Secretary*]

Okay. Right. On School violence. Let me put it to the Committee again.

Mr. Ogilvie: On both, you know. [*Chairman confers with the Secretary*]

Mr. Chairman: Right. Okay. Members, I was also advised that we have a lot of follow-up work to do on bullying and school violence. We have follow-up to do on children—these are follow-up visits arising from our preliminary, our first enquiries. Views on, Committee members, violence, mental health?

Mr. Forde: Mr. Chairman, where does fireworks fit in?

Mr. Chairman: Well later in December. My recommendation is—

Mr. Forde: No. Mr. Chairman, why later in December?—because I remember when asked, right, I was one of us suggesting that we bring it forward early—

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Forde:—in the event that if we can any input in what is going to happen at the end of the year.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. You see, this is what I would recommend with respect to fireworks. Coming closer to December we would be able to pursue a site visit, and I am hoping that if we could have the fireworks enquiry around the first week of December, and then conduct our site visits two weeks later, so just before we close for the Christmas by around the 20th December we should be able to get our site visits done. So I am hoping that December, again timeliness, is when we have our fireworks follow-up. So, Committee members, does that make sense? So we use November, November is a month in which we can have our follow-up visits on mental health and bullying, and December our fireworks. Is that—

Mr. Forde: And again, we can operate, our Committee can operate outside of the closure of let us say recess and so.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Oh yes. As long as members are in agreement we can conduct our site visits. In fact, if members are so amenable we can conduct our site visit on Old Year's Day, you know. Old Year's Day is when all Old Year's Day. Yeah. We just go down, check out all. There is nothing preventing us from doing that, and we can actually have the EMA on call on Old Year's night. All of us can call the EMA on Old Year's night, find out what it is they are doing because the EMA gave us a lot of talk and I really would like to see the follow up of the EMA because they came under a lot of criticism when we had the fireworks enquiry. They seemed to be, at least, the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and

Fisheries, to my mind, ought to be forgiven. They were not aware that the Act stipulated that they had animal care under their jurisdiction. Though I find it surprising since veterinary service falls under, not medical, but the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. But the EMA to my mind seemed to have been very clueless on how—they seemed to have not an idea on how to solve this problem. So I think we need to follow up with EMA as well.

Mr. Ogilvie: No problem.

Mr. Chairman: So could we get December for fireworks? Yes. December, for timeliness. Yes.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Chair, I just wanted to know, I know that you may have been saying it in jest, but the 31st December is, in fact, on a Sunday.

Mr. Chairman: 31st of December is on a Sunday. Well as you know, Trinidad and Tobago is a secular State, there are seven days in the week, the Committee, this Committee regulates its own affairs. As long as Committee members agree there is nothing preventing the Committee, but the Committee members must agree. [*Chairman confers with the Secretary*] Yeah. Right. Yes. Okay. Right. Well we are making very good time. It is 10.11; we are supposed go down at 10.15.

We do have then agreement, we need to get agreement for November 15. Is it bullying or is it going to be mental health? I am of the view that we can pursue the mental health aspect of children, and then when is [*Chairman confers with the Secretary*] Right. Okay. Could we, if it is possible, could we hopefully conclude our follow-up enquiry on mental health on the 15th and maybe initiate, have some agency also come in with respect to bullying? Bullying and mental health are coterminous, they go hand in hand and we can then have another enquiry, a follow-up enquiry dedicated specifically to school violence. Yeah.

So I think priority it is going to be mental health for children because that

has policy implications, and violence in schools, again, we need to really delve deeper into that with respect, in my mind, to how the Ministry of Education has succeeded or not succeeded in implementing the recommendations of the Committee. Our Committee was very, very, very involved, with detailed enquiries and we made numerous recommendations, so we would want to see where we are, and we will also want to get the stakeholders to come in to determine why there are impediments. So we need to go through our report. We need to look at all the recommendations we made with respect to school guidance officers, the ratio of guidance officers to students, and what are some of the things that we had recommended, and so let us do that on the 15th and maybe our next hearing would be—could we have one afterwards? [*Chairman confers with the Secretary*] In January. Okay. Very well. Yes. So we start our follow up—members, we start our follow up in two weeks November 15th, follow-up visit, and we will be appraised by the Secretariat on exactly what the issues are. I would like an issues paper to be prepared so that we would be looking at some of the issues to be covered for the November 15th visit.

It 10.13, 10.13 we should go downstairs soon. The matter before us is, of course, the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme. I know we have a deep interest in it. The interest is that I really do not know how much has been allocated to it in the appropriations Bill; what is the status of this programme. But before I go on, are there any major concerns that members have so we could address them here before we conduct the public enquiry?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Chair, this is just one of the concerns. I noticed that in the questions that the Secretariat had sent regarding the persons who were hired, because in the documentation they indicated that there were a number of persons who had not been renewed, their contracts had not be renewed.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: And therefore, Secretariat had asked: well what were the qualifications of these persons? And I noticed that the qualifications they submitted they were for two positions, that is deputy—

Mr. Chairman: And not the officers themselves.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:—and not the officers themselves.

Mr. Chairman: I noticed that as well. Okay. Could we then agree on how we conduct, this morning, our hearing? As usual we conduct normally, and I will open. Is there anyone who would like to open the questioning? You would like to open? Okay. MP Newallo-Hosein, would like to open. Just catch me by eyes. We will go a first round. If there is a need for a follow-up, just look at me and you will get the opportunity to follow up although it is not really your substantive question, but just look at me and follow-ups will be permitted. But ideally in the first round everyone will be given his or her opportunity to pose a question, and then I would like a second round of questioning so if you have a substantive question.

May I ask you to, please, keep the question pointed so that we will elicit the responses from the officers, as opposed to statements? We need a pointed question. If we can get pointed questions, we will be able to get the real facts of what is happening.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Chair, I remember when we visited the home in Couva—

Mr. Chairman: Couva. Yeah.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:—there was someone who had approached you—

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein:—regarding I “doh” know if you remember?

Mr. Chairman: I remember.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Someone approached me and we indicated that we are not in the position to grant, that has to be the authority. And she indicated that she, as

far as she was aware, she qualified because she was poor, she is living in a home and she was somehow denied. So we need to find out—

Mr. Forde: Mr. Chairman, in terms of going forward, remember there has been a review of the system. Well, I think we would probably get that—

Mr. Chairman: We will get that.

Mr. Forde:—information downstairs.

Mr. Chairman: Very well.

Mr. Forde: There is a new qualification criteria. So that is information we should be able to ascertain today.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. [*Chairman confers with the Secretary*] Very well. I was told that we got the job specs for the lower ranking officers. Yes. What I was not clear about is that there was a direct question on the number of persons who were assigned to the treatment via the life skills programme on how to budget, how to look after household finances and so on. They gave us a number of 4,000. I do not know where that number came from, whether it came from life skills, whether they just picked it up, so I need to find out. I thought that seemed to be rather small because the recipients of the programme was huge, and I thought that there would have been a continuous programme actually giving these poor families, poor individuals some kind of insights on how to manage their affairs; how to organize themselves, how to help themselves to get into the job market, how to write up a little CV or résumé or something. Yeah. [*Chairman confers with the Secretary*]

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Chairman, could you tell me, I am seeing two job descriptions here.

Mr. Chairman: Yeah.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Could you tell me the reason for that in our packages? Are we going to be questioning along those lines?

Mr. Chairman: Well if members had a query on what the qualifications are, that

query would be raised. I did not have that query. I think MP Newallo-Hosein was saying—[*Chairman confers with the Secretary*]

Mr. Ogilvie: The reason for the request is that I think they terminated the food card—

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Right.

Mr. Ogilvie:—the programme is now absorbed under the Social Welfare Division—

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ogilvie:—so you must look at the capacity of the officers to handle the additional responsibility.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Okay. Okay. So it is basically how trained the officers are to function in the roles assigned to them. Yeah. But that will come out in the enquiry whether, in fact—

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: What is the enquiry targeted to really?

Mr. Chairman: Okay. We do have to assess—we have the enquiry objectives, yeah, and we have the proposal: the effectiveness of the programme since inception: to examine the efficiency of the management systems in place to ensure the effectiveness; to examine the effectiveness of the organizational structure and the financial status.

So when we are looking at the evaluation, the capabilities of the personnel to evaluate, you see, I think that is where the issue arises. If people feel that they have not been properly evaluated, we need to find out whether the officers were trained, is that training adequate for the evaluation for those in need, because it is targeted. Are they trained to really identify the targets? That, of course, we will get from them.

Colleagues, we do have this matter outstanding, the enquiry into the prevalence of STDs amongst school students and into the general services administered to treat

STDs in Trinidad and Tobago. I understand this report, the report is completed, it is finished, it is circulated. Is it ready for signature? Okay. MP Newallo-Hosein and Senator, I understand that you all have not yet signed the report.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: This is the review of the recommendations.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Could you review that quickly so that as soon as the—and we have agreed, did we agree on who will lay this report?

Mr. Ogilvie: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Right. So could you send your final conclusions by Friday? Okay. It is 10.20, but with respect to the reports, could we agree on the procedure? Okay. Yes. Could we agree on the procedure with respect to the reports? Yeah. The Committee prepares the draft. I would recommend strongly, I know we are all very occupied, but let us read the draft. I tend to read the draft as soon as they send it to me in hard copy. They know that I do not read and adjust on the screen, I need to write up. So once they send the hard copy to me they normally get a response in a timely fashion, usually in a week or so.

Could we once we get the draft, if we need hard copies I am sure that the Secretariat will send it, and after two weeks from the receipt of the first draft we should have our comments. At the end of the two weeks we look at the final draft, and if there are still queries with the final draft, usually they will not be major, we take an additional week after we have seen the final draft as now you have seen the final draft. I would say by next week Monday if we can get the final comments in so that it will be ready to be laid in both Houses as soon as it is practicable.

So for members who are not yet signed, I would recommend that you read the recommendations, and if you could commit for the work of the Committee to have the necessary amendments made by Monday 4.00 p.m. so that by Tuesday, I do not know if Senate is going to meet on Tuesday we should be able to have the report laid on Tuesday. Yeah.

So I think this is a time line we are looking at. It think this is reasonable. Two weeks after the first draft we send our comments to the Secretariat. The final draft is really not final, it is penultimate. Once we get this final draft we should take one week to review, and seven days after we have received the penultimate draft, we should send our additional comments so that we would be able to lay in both Houses in the very timely fashion. Usually what I have found is that when the penultimate draft is presented, the matters which are at issue are usually very small, they are not major. So I think with five days we should be able to, five working days sort those other issues out, clarify them and then we file accordingly. Could I now, 10.23 adjourn this meeting and we reconvene downstairs. We suspend, we suspend the meeting. Thank you very much.

10.23 a.m.: *Meeting suspended.*

10.31 a.m.: *Meeting resumed.*

**OFFICIALS OF THE MINISTRY OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
AND FAMILY SERVICES**

Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers	Permanent Secretary
Ms. Natasha Barrow	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Mr. Asif Ali	Deputy Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ms. Carla McKie	Auditor II
Mr. Vijay Gangapersad	Chief Technical Officer (Ag.)
Ms. Taramatie Samaroo	Director, Human Resources (Ag.)
Mrs. Cheryl Layne-Pereira	Director, Social Welfare Division (Ag.)

Mr. Chairman: Good morning and welcome to this, the Seventeenth Meeting of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration. A

special good morning to all officials from the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services who are with us today. Good morning to all of our viewers and listeners on the various media by which the Parliament transmits its deliberation to the public. This is the Committee's, our Committee's first public hearing pursuant to its enquiry into the management of the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, also known as the Trinidad and Tobago Food Card Programme.

This particular subject falls under the remit of our Committee as part of our work on improving overall public administration in Trinidad and Tobago. The members of the public are asked to invite their comments on the Parliament's social media platforms. Sometimes members of the public are very much aware of what is happening. They may possess insights and information and if, of course, members of the public have any solutions that they would like to offer the Committee, please feel free to so do. They are always considered in order that we could have everything open and transparent as possible.

At this point I would like to ask members of the—oh, and the panel this morning representing the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services to introduce themselves, then I would ask members of the Committee to offer brief introductions of themselves before we open for the enquiry in total. Thank you very much.

[Officials of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services introduce themselves]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you committee members. May I ask members of the Joint Select Committee to briefly introduce themselves.

[Members of the Committee introduce themselves]

Mr. Chairman: And good morning again, I am Dhanayshar Mahabir, Chairman of the Committee. Sen. Dhanayshar Mahabir. May I remind of the enquiry objectives. The enquiry objectives are really five:

1. The first is to assess the effectiveness of the programme since its inception. Effectiveness in relation to poverty reduction in Trinidad and Tobago;
2. To examine the efficiency of the management systems in place for ensuring efficiency of the programme;
3. To examine the effectiveness of the organizational structure, again, to determine how efficient the programme is. Efficient, by efficient we mean whether the programme is really doing what it is supposed to do, and whether individuals who are targeted actually are in receipt of the intended, or of the proposed benefits;
4. To examine the financial status of the programme, and the procedures and policies in place to ensure transparency, accountability and to ensure that there is value for money in the management of the programme; and
5. To assess the systems in place to monitor and evaluate the success and the impact of the Food Card Programme, also known as the Conditional Cash Transfer Programme.

At this point I will ask the Permanent Secretaries—I have always been intrigued by the fact that this is one Ministry with two Permanent Secretaries. This is a large Ministry and it is not surprising that it is one of the larger Ministries requiring so many different arms of administration, because the subsidies and transfers component of the national budget is by far and away the largest component of expenditure of the State, and expenditure on the social aspects of the subsidies also constitute a very large part of the transfers of the Government. We really would want to find out a lot more into the effectiveness of these transfers.

Basically, we want to know that he or she who is entitled to the transfer is actually receiving it. Is there efficiency? What could we do, if anything, to ensure that the

population who are targeted in Trinidad and Tobago are actually the beneficiaries in a major way of the programme, or are there slippages? So, may I ask the permanent secretaries to offer brief introductions before we begin the formal part of the enquiry?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you very much, Chair. Esteem members of the Committee, Chair, Vice-Chair, viewers, listeners, I wish to thank the Committee for affording the Ministry the opportunity to deliver an opening statement for today's session on the Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, more commonly referred to as the TCCTP or the Food Card Programme. One of the focus of this session this morning is the food support programme, I will focus on the strategic direction of the Ministry for fiscal 2018, and in so doing I will contextualize the purpose of all our programmes of the Ministry.

My PS colleague, PS Barrow in her brief statement will speak specifically to the Food Card Programme. Now within recent years the Ministry has undergone significant changes in organizational structure and mandate. Notwithstanding, the Ministry continues to be the lead Ministry charged with the responsibility of providing social protection to the most vulnerable of our nation and combating the scourge of poverty. The Ministry is cognizant of the consequences of the prevailing economic conditions on those in society considered to be less fortunate. Or in other words, those who are least able to withstand or far less escape the many social challenges they are likely to encounter.

In this regard, the Ministry recently prepared, in collaboration with the health economics unit of the UWI, a national social mitigation plan 2017 to 2022 to cushion the impact of the current downturn on the vulnerable in our society. The implementation of this plan will be the priority of the Ministry for fiscal 2018 and beyond. Given its mandate, services are designed and implemented through several delivery points throughout the country, and the Committee I am sure is

aware of this. Though the services are decentralized, it is fragmented with no real coordination between service units. It has long been recognized that the manner in which the social protection system is designed and implemented results in a significant burden on families, especially those families who experience interrelated psychosocial issues, and they have to navigate the social protection maze, seeking support. For them this could be a daunting task, and on the part of service delivery units, certainly poor customer service will result in a waste of scarce resources. So, the Ministry is of the view that service delivery can best be realized through an integrated social service delivery approach. One that would not only enhance its efficiency by providing value for money, and this enquiry is about that from an administrative standpoint, but one which will also bring about an enhanced customer service.

In this regard, the Ministry has embarked on a restructuring exercise to bring its operations in line with the integrated model of delivery. The Ministry will complement this initiative with several other projects which will support the integrated approach and improve service delivery. It is expected that this restructuring exercise will bring about consistency in the manner in which services are delivered across the country, and improve efficiency and effectiveness to the benefit of all. In the light of this scenario, Chairman, and the winds of change prevailing in the organization, the Ministry welcomes this invitation to share information on the food support programme.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Permanent Secretary, and may I ask the second Permanent Secretary, PS Barrow to offer her brief opening remarks.

Ms. Barrow: Thank you, Chair, and good morning all. In addressing the nutrition and food security for the vulnerable in Trinidad and Tobago, it should be known that the Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes have been receiving widespread prominence as an effective approach in the fight against poverty and in fostering

social inclusion. Key to this concept is the linking of immediate cash relief to long-term sustainable self-reliance. These programmes are very popular in Latin America and have been used as a best practice internationally.

Trinidad and Tobago's adoption of a food support programme while it has born many labels, has undoubtedly bolstered the social safety net of our country. The Targeted Conditional Cash Transfer Programme, TCCTP, is the only national food support programme in the country, and seeks to reduce the incidence of poverty by promoting nutrition and food security to vulnerable households. Currently over 30,000 households access the TT card on a monthly basis, thereby contributing to food security and poverty alleviation among recipients and the respective dependants.

Additionally, the programme provides an urgent response to not only the critical conditions of poverty, social and economic hardship due to disease and spiralling effects of the global economic recession, but also to other social and environmental disasters that deem citizens vulnerable. The war against poverty can best be won if our people are empowered to fight against the many variables that confine them to that state. While Government grants and other forms of transfers are noble and definitive signals in the State's commitment to vulnerable persons, these can only serve to re-enforce the dependency syndrome if it is implemented as a solitary measure, and is therefore not an effective sustained approach to poverty reduction. The TCCTP was designed to address food insecurity via a cash transfer, while at the same time facilitating rehabilitative and developmental activities by ensuring that recipients are also afforded the skills training, referrals and assistance needed to find employment as a prerequisite or condition of receiving that cash transfer.

The objective of the programme is also to provide recipients with training specific in areas namely, such a budgetary planning, family planning, career guidance and life skills. Through the design of the former Rise-Up, the developmental

component of the food support programme was a regionally and internationally accepted model. However, the implementation of the conditional component of the programme has been minimal. The programme has since been rebranded to its former name, Social Transformation and Empowerment Programme, Uplifting People otherwise known as Step-Up. And in fiscal 2018 will become a critical part of not only the food support programme, but the entire suite of programmes offered by the Ministry, and in this way the Ministry will begin the journey of transferring individuals from welfare dependency syndrome to one of self-sufficiency and resilience. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. We agreed that MP Newallo-Hosein would start, but I will override her, and I will pose some preliminary questions, because I really do not know too much about the Food Card Programme. So, for the benefit of me and the audience, I would imagine other members of the Committee, could you give a brief background into the card which existed in the past? Because I know you are in the process of reviewing the programme. What is the value of it, I do not know. Is it that it is given only to families with young children? I do not know. Is it that when someone gets one of these purchase cards that they can buy anything? Or is it simply to ensure that the minimum calorie intake of an individual is satisfied? Do you limit the range of goods which could be purchased? So, basic background information simply I need before we start the enquiry. Could the PS provide that insight?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair, again. PS Barrow provided some information in terms of the nature of the programme. Currently we have three denominations; the \$410 card, the \$550 card and the \$700 card. These are the permanent cards. The programme constitutes permanent food cards and temporary food cards. The \$410 cards are for families with one to three persons; four to five persons, \$550; and six and over will get the \$700 card. The temporary

food cards have the same denominations, and they are given for a different purpose.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, single persons do not qualify? A single individual who is poor—

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: He qualifies?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: And what is the value?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: That will be one, \$410.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, so that \$410 is for a single person?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. Okay.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: One to three persons.

Mr. Chairman: One to three, very well.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Generally, persons will come in and apply for the card and there is a process that they would follow, which includes a means test and a visit to their home to determine the eligibility criteria and whether they meet that criteria for the card. The programme also involves, as was indicated, the developmental aspect. Over the years not everyone on the card actually participated in the developmental aspect.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, we will get that. But the second follow up to that is, are individuals in receipt of other types of assistance from the State such as old age pension—the old age pension grant also eligible for these cards?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: They can qualify.

Mr. Chairman: Oh, they can.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes, they can qualify. You also mentioned what could be purchased with the card, and there is a list of items which could be purchased.

Generally, it is food items. Of course, alcohol, cigarettes and so on will be disallowed, and the grocers will know the items that could be purchased.

Mr. Chairman: You said generally food but does the grocer have a flexibility to say that this item that you purchase is not covered, or is it anything goes except alcohol and cigarettes?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: At the beginning of the programme there was a list that was provided to the grocers in terms of what could be purchased, but as the programme morphed I think most people could purchase beyond foodstuff, I think they could even purchase some items of necessities that they would have to use on a monthly basis, once it was not cigarettes and alcohol.

Mr. Chairman: Right. Okay, so it is pretty large based upon the choice of the individual or family at that time with respect to the needs that he or she would like to satisfy.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: One final question with respect to persons who are in receipt of the disability benefits from the State, are they automatically considered for one of these cards to supplement the disability grant, or must they also go through the same formal application process?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: It is not automatic. According to the policy they must apply.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well. Thank you very much. That satisfies the preliminary queries that I had. I will now invite MP Newallo-Hosein to pose her first question.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. Before I go into my questions I want to ask a very important question, it is this: Do you still have the food card, the card itself, or is it a direct deposit system?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We still have the food card. Just a little under 27,000 people with the food card and some persons receiving their benefit from cheques. And it

is not direct deposit, they actually collect the cheques.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Okay, so when they collect the cheques, with the actual cheques being collected, how does the Ministry determine if the recipients are in fact purchasing these basket of goods that is representative of a nutritionally balanced diet, because that is how you determine whether you are impacting upon poverty?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: In 2016, we had a situation where there were approximately 5,000 or more persons who had qualified to receive the grants since 2014 but had not received any benefits, so the decision was taken to provide their benefit through a cheque with the understanding that this was going to be a short-term arrangement. And we understood that we would not be able to monitor these persons, but there was a sense that because these persons qualified and perhaps the families were disadvantaged by not receiving a benefit that they were eligible for, the decision was taken and we understood that we were going to move towards a new card system that would enable them to now transfer to the card from the cheque, which we are going to be implementing by the end of this year into the beginning of the second quarter of fiscal 2018.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: PS, I do not want to be disrespectful or anything, but I remember distinctly that the Minister in Parliament made a very clear statement that the cards were obsolete, they were causing problems, and they were in fact rejected by the banks and therefore the Ministry had to revert to a direct deposit system. So, I do not understand what is—there is a discrepancy in what is being said today and what was said in Parliament, and therefore it comes back again, how do you in fact measure whether the poverty reduction is in fact being impacted upon in Trinidad and Tobago, because, obviously the population wants value for money? And you just indicated that some persons are getting cheques, and therefore with a cheque you cash your money, nobody—when you go to a

grocery no one is able to determine whether that cash that you are walking with comes from State resources, and therefore they could purchase cigarettes and alcohol, and not in fact get the nutrition that is required. So, how do you measure it? What monitoring and evaluation systems are in place to measure?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: There are a number of questions there, but the first statement I would make concerns the Minister's statement, I am not aware that a statement was made concerning the fact that the cards were now done away with. I know the cards became obsolete. There were some problems with the cards, but the banks stopped producing new cards. However, the old cards continued to be used, and the statement was made that we were moving away from the obsolete system to a new system, as far as I am aware. So that we still have the cards in operation, and it is just 4,000 persons or so that are on the cheque. We started off with just about 2,000 and we moved to 4,000 as at the end of September. So it is a minimal number of persons with the cheque, and with the understanding, as I indicated, that we are moving to a new card system. But Mr. Gangapersad who is the Chief Technical Officer, he is also able to give some further insight on this matter, because he had an integral part to do with the shift to the cheque system.

Mr. Chairman: Right. I have a follow-up and I find it a bit surprising that a card can become obsolete. Because we are dealing with technology, and the ATM cards that we use simply have a strip on them and the computer scientist does what he has to do and all you have to do is activate that strip or update it. So, I would like from your Chief Technical Officer to explain how a technological card becomes obsolete, and why simply reprogramming could not activate some of the old cards? Because, you see, the question posed by MP Newallo-Hosein to my mind is a very valid one, in that if it is a targeted programme and it is not really spent in exchange for goods, to see what the goods are, and people have cash, then the cash can be used for a range of things which are not intended for the

programme, which is to really improve your calorie intake as a poor person. So, I wait to hear what your technical officer has to say about the obsolescence of the card then I would ask Mr. Esmond Forde to come in. Technical Officer how can a card become—because my ATM card is about 12 years old and it is the same thing issued by the bank, and it is not obsolete at all?

Mr. Gangapersad: Thanks PS. Chair, just to explain that this system was procured by the Ministry in 2006. It is not an open system, it is a closed-loop system that was built for the Ministry, so only our cards can be used on that machine. So the technology that we have out there is a 2006 technology and has not been updated since that time.

Around March of 2016 the bank did indicate to the Ministry that it was an exposure both to the bank and the Ministry if they continue to operate on that system as it is, and advised that we move to a new system. And as you know, what we were doing at that point in time was transitioning to the biometric system. So the bank was facilitating the process at that point in time. What happened, as PS indicated, is that we had over 4,000 persons waiting, and the applications, some of these applications were dated back to 2013. We also had some persons who were placed on the biometric system, and since the biometric system was put on a hold, the bank indicated that they were not going to put these people back onto the old debit card system because of the exposure to the bank as well as the Ministry.

So a decision had to be made, these persons had been coming to the Ministry often, calling the Ministry, reporting through the media, the MPs, all over the place, indicating that they had been approved and were not receiving any support. So the decision was taken out of an abundance of caution to these persons, and recognizing that they have a responsibility if they are in need of food, that they will meet their food need when we give them the cheque, a decision was taken to pay by cheque. So, the system itself is a system that was built for the Ministry, and

hence the reason why—and it was never updated.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much Mr. Gangapersad. It is getting as Alice say, curiouser and curiouser, and the reason is this: I am now hearing from you that the cards themselves are not obsolete, but the system to process the cards is. And I imagine the banks are a bit reluctant to update the system because, as you know, you are a computer expert, every three years the technology has to change. So you are saying the technology they had was 10 years old, is it that they are reluctant to spend the funds to upgrade their technology to handle the cards, and that is what is causing the problems for the 4,000 people who are now in receipt of cheques? Is the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services prepared to provide some kind of contractual arrangement with the banks so that they will update the technology and ensure that everyone has the card? Because it is surprising to me that in a targeted programme people actually have cash.

Mr. Gangapersad: Just for clarity, I am the Chief Technical Officer, I have no IT background. But just to say, this is the way in which the Ministry is going right now. We have since been working with the bank to upgrade the system, and as PS indicated, a new debit card system would be introduced sometime in December or the beginning of January. It was in the context the biometric system was approved since 2005. Successive attempts to get this has been posing a challenge, and asking the bank to upgrade a system knowing that the biometric system was soon to be introduced was making—that was an issue at the point in time. So, as time went by we were always—in fact in 2007 a tender was put out for a biometric card. We did select a provider, and then the banking infrastructure, from what we were told, could not manage smart card transaction. So we continued to try after that, and then in 2010 again we went out again. So, it was always in the context of a new system being introduced that we never went after upgrading that debit card system.

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: I have so many more questions now, but I will ask MP Forde to come in and then I will ask Sen. Sinanan to come in as well. So after MP Forde, Sen. Sinanan you will pose your questions.

Mr. Forde: Before I ask my particular question, I just want to follow up on a statement that was made. What sort of dollars and cents are we talking about with regard to this biometric system upgrade, it being obsolete and now going forward? What sort of figures are we talking about? The cost of the whole biometric system to upgrade or for a new one?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We have two—I think you are mentioning two things there, the biometric which was a system that we were actually bringing on stream in 2015 and the new system from January which will be facilitated through First Citizens Bank. And as far as I recall, that system would be costing us about \$1 million a year. The biometric was much more. I think Mr. Gangapersad has that specific figure in terms of how much we spent for the biometric.

Mr. Forde: Okay. You can provide it now?

Mr. Gangapersad: Yeah, sure.

Mr. Forde: Okay.

Mr. Gangapersad: Thanks again PS. The capital expenditure on the biometric system was, \$30,975,000; that is the biometric system. The capital expenditure on the financial platform development was \$3.8 million. The recurrent expenditure for the biometric platform was \$2.8 million annually, and the financial platform which included an SMS text messaging module and bank charges was \$29million annually.

Mr. Forde: And the social aspect of this particular programme, what is the total cost of it? When we look at these figures that you are now providing, was it beneficial along those lines that—did it make sense in going at that system or

making a change of what you are probably now looking at for 2018? Because you called some figures there, \$30 million; 3.8; 2.8; \$29 million. Yes, it is a social programme and you may say that we may not want to look at the figures, but again in terms of it being beneficial to the economy, was it a worthwhile investment for those sort of figures?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I would say a cost-benefit analysis would be required to do that and we did not do a cost-benefit analysis. What we did was to put a hold on the system, not the registration however—the use of the biometric card—because at that point in 2016 we were actually paying about \$2.8 million every month to provide \$1.7 million worth of cards to 3,000 and a little bit, I think 3,100 beneficiaries. So that was not making economic sense and we put a hold on that particular aspect of the system, the biometric system.

Mr. Forde: So going forward, as the Permanent Secretary you are satisfied with the new programme or the new system that we are going to put in place in 2018 as being more feasible?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I am satisfied because it is costing just about \$1 million per year for the bank charges and also because we will be continuing the biometric registration because that system still belongs to the Ministry. So the investment would not have been lost.

Mr. Forde: Okay. And now I want to come to my question now, because that was just a follow-up. In terms of the criteria to qualify for a food card, as an MP and in an area where a lot of individuals come enquiring about food cards, you said that the criteria works out, one to three persons for household, right? And then you have four to six and then six and over, right, based on the 410, the 550 and also the 700. In terms of the criteria, you have to go to NIB to get a statement, you have to go to the various places in order to get a breakdown, if you are receiving any benefit as the case may be.

Now, there is a ceiling figure, in terms of, if your income is of a certain value, but then you also sometimes—again, this is based on information some people mentioned to us, in that some people say that the household, if there are other working persons in the household, they may not qualify. As an MP or as an individual, a particular household, individuals over 18 years, as we know in our society that income is mine, as the case may be. The other individual, I may have a brother in my house or a sister-in-law, whatever, that income is theirs. But you are—I am unemployed and you are saying, subject to the household income I may not qualify. It may sound unfair, but what is the logistic, what is the justification for using that approach as one of qualifying criteria?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I know Mr. Gangapersad may have some more information as he has been in the Ministry and involved with these programmes a little more, but I know this is a family benefit and therefore if there is a card in the family then you would not be able to get one as an individual if that family already has a card

Mr. Chairman: But PS, the question is this, there are members of the family who are poor. One family member earns his income, but what MP is saying, that income belongs to him or her and may not necessarily share with other members of the family. Are the other three people saying the family is going to be penalized simply because one other member of the family who lives in the household is a little bit better off and not be qualified for the food card? I think that is the question, you know.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I understand, but what I am saying, when the actual programme commenced it was family oriented. So that, as we go along we may have to look at the policy again but we also have to consider the extent of expenditure on this programme, so that we do not, you know, encourage three and four cards in one household. Because the intent was one card, one to three persons, four to five, six and over.

Mr. Chairman: Right, but PS—

Mr. Forde: That needs to be made clear.

Mr. Chairman: But my concern was that, a household which really should get a card but is denied the card because one member seems to be working for a reasonably good salary and he does not share, she does not share—you are assuming that all people living under one roof are sharing and they are distributing their income. But it may not be. So I really think that we need to evaluate whether that high-income earner is actually sharing or is—but really, you could briefly respond before I ask Sen. Sinanan to come in.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Mr. Gangapersad will give his input.

Mr. Gangapersad: Yes, and I think that one of the key words here is “household”, because in a house there could be several households and I think that what the programme has done is to define what is considered a household. And usually it is those persons who might be sharing some sort of living arrangement, it might be cooking arrangement, washing arrangement, but that family is identified as that unit. So for instance, in one house you may have several households who can come forward and apply and will each on their own merit be assessed—so you could have more than one card in a house, but it belongs to separate households.

Mr. Chairman: Excellent, thank you very much Mr. Gangapersad, and I will have—

Mr. Forde: Hold a second, hold a second.

Mr. Chairman: But Senator, a follow-up—

Mr. Forde: You have evidence on that Mr. Gangapersad?

Miss Ameen: If I may just add. I think what we are also looking at is not where multiple families in one building getting the card, but where applicants are denied because they live under a roof where there may be other people and some of these other people may be children who have jobs just starting off minimum wage. But

when they total the family income or the income under the roof that applicant is rejected when there really is a genuine need. So it is twofold.

Mr. Chairman: We will put that on hold. It is an important issue, the definition of the household because, as Mr. Gangapersad said, there are individuals living under one roof but they constitute separate households. So we need to see what—if you could send to the Committee in writing the policy with respect to the definition of the household, I think it would benefit us. But Sen. Sinanan has not yet posed and he absolutely needs to ask his question.

Mr. Sinanan: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Please activate your microphone.

Mr. Sinanan: What is the total package—before I go to the substantive question—what is the total package in terms of quantum of money that this programme costs the Government? You have, what—27,000 or 31,000 applicants?

Mr. Chairman: Could you repeat your question Sen. Sinanan because we did not get it on the microphone.

Mr. Sinanan: The total cost of this programme to the Government?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: As at the end of September 2017, we had about 27,000 persons on the programme. Fiscal 2016 we had an expenditure of \$260 million; that is fiscal 2016. Since the programme started we have estimated—this is since 2006 to the end of fiscal 2016—we have estimated that it is about \$1.981 billion for simply the food support. This is not including administrative costs and so on.

Mr. Sinanan: So we are talking about close to \$2 billion. Bearing in mind the challenges we have now with foreign exchange, is there any consideration that these grants will be used to purchase local food? We keep talking about alcohol and cigarettes, but alcohol and cigarettes is just, I guess one known. Should we not be looking at using some of the staples that is produced locally rather than the Government giving a grant of close to \$2 billion and a lot of these grants are being

used for foreign stuff that may not be in keeping with the health patterns, because you have no control as to what people buy outside—the alcohol and the cigarettes. And should we not be considering now that we try to promote local products with that money, with the challenges that we have with foreign exchange and to actually boost the manufacturing and production of locally produced foods? Would that be a consideration now?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We have not given consideration to that, but as we review the programme we could look into that approach just to say though that when we give grants, when we give support to persons who are vulnerable we also recognize that they have rights too and we would not want to, you know, put conditionalities that are on these grants that will be a bit, you know, difficult for them to deal with.

Mr. Sinanan: But the magical word there is “a grant” and it is a government grant. I am just considering—if the time has not come now that—it is like in the construction sector. In the Ministry of Works and Transport we would do a lot of contracts now for tendering and a critical clause we have there is the local content and in some cases we are not allowing the importation of imported aggregate again. Because if the Government is spending money, the Government is giving a contract and we are short on foreign exchange in the country, why are we importing aggregate? So, that is a clause in the contracts now. So I am just looking, if you are talking \$2 billion, that is a lot of money and if you calculate that into the amount of US dollars, maybe the time has come to consider that when the Government is doing a grant like that that we give some priority to locally produced food.

Mr. Chairman: Just as a follow-up PS, you of course are guided by Government policy, right? So if the relevant Minister says we would like to have more local content to be consumed out of this grant and this card, are you then not obliged to find a mechanism? And a recommendation would be, all the participating

merchants must then purchase a certain amount from the local farmers, local food producers, have a local content in their supermarket, because the card has to be—you cannot use a card in Chaguanas Market, you cannot use it on the street, you have to use it at an established house of business. So that it may very well be a policy—if it is Government policy, and I sense it is, that you may want to send a directive to your merchants, participating merchants, that they must purchase from the local agricultural sector and at least have local foods available so that the card can then be used to purchase that on a transaction basis. Is that the kind of thing that engages the attention of the planners in the Ministry?

Mr. Sinanan: Chair, I just want to add, if you look at the School Nutrition Programme, they have moved to that concept, where the meals that they provide, they have moved away from the importation of the fruits, and so, that they put and they put locally produced fruits. So I just want to put it on the table that you all could consider something like that because we are strapped for foreign exchange, and if the Government is putting out \$1.8 billion the Government should have a say as to the country benefiting somewhere along the line from that money. Thank you.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: So, Chair, we have heard and I am saying we are reviewing, so we would look at how we could bring in that element—

Mr. Chairman: Excellent.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers:—but just to say that that \$2 billion is over 10 years.

Mr. Chairman: All right, thank you very much MP, and now MP Antoine has to pose his question.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: I am following up. You said the status of the Rise-Up Programme has been rebranded as the Step-Up Programme and that programme would be implemented. I wonder what is the timetable for the implementation of that Step-Up Programme because you say presently there is no one enrolled in that

programme because it has been rebranded. So, what is the status of that programme and what is the timetable for its implementation?

Ms. Barrow: Good morning, again. We are currently looking at revising the entire programme and we want to implement it within this fiscal 2018. So it would be part of the integrated model that we are undertaking as part of our restructuring exercise. So it would be implemented within this fiscal.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: So you are not able to give me any timetable, within the three months, within the next six months, so and so is going to happen as the case may be?

Ms. Barrow: Most likely within the next three months.

Mr. Sinanan: Excuse me.

Mr. Chairman: Yes Sir, and Sen. Sinanan is excused. Thank you very much for participating, Senator. And Sen. Ameen you can pose your question followed by—MP Jennings-Smith you will come in after Sen. Ameen and then we will have Newallo-Hosein again, MP.

[Sen. Sinanan leaves the Committee room]

Miss Ameen: Chair, just as an extension of Sen. Sinanan's suggestion to ensure that money is spent locally by purchasing locally manufactured or grown food. The main programme is meeting the nutritional needs of the families. Have there been—I know that the—well, I know of the Rise-Up component and I know you would be changing it to the Step-Up now. But that part that deals with empowerment and education and health—was health education a part of that and is that going to be part of this main programme with the changes that are being implemented? And to me, the key is to empower and educate the recipient to meet the nutritional needs of the family.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: The answer is yes, the health component would continue to be part of the Step-Up where we have about eight conditionalities that the family

would have to meet. We also have the CFNI, which is the Caribbean Food and Nutrition Institute, involved in the programme and part of the sessions that will be held for the family will include sessions that deal with family planning; there would be sessions for persons in the family who may be pregnant and so on; and, of course, a sense of what nutrition would be important for each person in the family. So there will be the health component and all the other components that are currently—the eight components that are part of the Step-Up.

The only two areas that may be new may be the issue of values, attitudes and behaviours which the Ministry has been given the responsibility for, and how we can actually bring that into the Step-Up and also the issue of the psychosocial that treats with the welfare mentality of some persons such that no matter what you do and take them through a programme like this they still want to remain on the grant. So we want to also look at how we can bring an element that treats with the, what we call the “welfare syndrome”, the dependency syndrome.

Miss Ameen: Chair, if you would allow me, I just want to say at this juncture that, you know, the social aspect of the well-being of our citizens is something that is often impacted every time there is a change in political administration. And I think the fact that this programme is being changed you really have—the programme is really being improved upon and I agree with continuous assessment and improvement. And this is not an indictment on the Permanent Secretary or this programme specifically, but the fact is that good programmes exist and consecutive Governments must continue to improve on them. And stopping a programme and then starting another one and then the term of a Government comes to an end, it is often to the detriment of our most vulnerable citizens.

Mr. Chairman: What is your question to the Committee? It was your question to the panellists on that?

Miss Ameen: I just want to implore or ask—to ensure that the continuity of the

existing recipients, because the programme is not going on that this time while the changes are being made, if I got you correctly. I want to ask if the existing recipients are in fact continuing on the Rise-Up Programme until the Step-Up Programme kicks in or if you simply have nothing going on until the Step-Up Programme begins and therefore how the recipients are being affected now with this change?

Ms. Barrow: What I can say is that the programme has not been going on for some time and there is no one on the actual programme at the moment. What I can say is that all the existing persons who are currently in receipt of the food card, we still have to plan as to how they are to go on this programme, the Step-Up. All right? So it is something that we are trying to do within this fiscal to at least start and have a structured measurement so that we can go through and make sure that persons are benefiting from this new, well, not new but improved, and I agree it is an improved system and it does cover a lot of the different areas. As PS Bailey-Sobers mentioned before, which include all the different—health, as well as education, the social. It is something that we want to make sure is happening and that was the issue that was from before that it was not happening while we were giving out the food cards, and as PS Sobers said, we do not want to continue one of just being welfare and persons being just dependent on the State.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, if I could just—

Mr. Chairman: A brief follow-up from MP Antoine, you will answer but a brief follow-up from MP Antoine and then MP Jennings-Smith has not posed a question for the morning so she will have the floor after MP Antoine comes in. Yes, you can respond.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Thank you. I just wanted to add to that response that our records show, based on a report that was done on the Rise-Up at the point in time

in January of 2015 that up to 2014 persons were actually part participating in the Rise-Up, just up to 2014. So after that they really have not been participating in the programme.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: Yes, PS. I am having a difficulty with the definition of family. Just yesterday I had a young man come to see me. He is 23 years old. He lived with his mother on O’Meara Road in D’Abadie. They were evicted by the landlord because the landlord increased the rent because the landlord is of the opinion that more than one family was residing in the house. He, his girlfriend and a child were living in one bedroom of the home that the mother was renting. Now they are both being evicted. They came to see me actually for HDC. But what is the Ministry’s definition of “family”, because under that household you had a mother, but then you had a son who had his own family within that—

Mr. Chairman: You must have a definition of family.

Brig. Gen. Antoine: What is the definition of a family?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We have social workers here, both Mr. Gangapersad and Mrs. Layne-Pereira and they are on the ground so they will be able to say, I think, the definition of family as opposed to household, because that is where the distinction—

Mr. Gangapersad: Well, I know that in some of the programmes in the Ministry, especially as it relates to public assistance, a household is considered to be those persons who are sharing the same living, and basically it is same cooking arrangement, the same laundry arrangement. If my memory serves me correct and I know that the Chair had asked that we send the definition for the TCCTP it was a similar-type kind of definition.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Could you then—I would like to see how these definitions conform with international norms if possible, because we are looking at eradicating poverty and we know what the minimum calorie intake and so on. So

the definition of a household, the definition of a family, these are things that I think, especially in the Trinidad and Tobago context which is unique. But MP Jennings-Smith has not yet posed a question and MP you can pose more than one question because it is your turn now.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Good morning all. I listened where PS you outlined plans to restructure your delivery service and a sore point keeps coming up is when persons have to access temporary food card, can you tell us what changes, if any, you intend to implement with regard to facilitating a faster period for persons like, for example, persons whose homes were burnt, persons who suffered flood, persons who would have had an emergency, like family break-up, and they are in difficulty in terms of their living arrangements? Can you tell me what has changed with respect to the temporary food card—if you are looking at making any changes to facilitate that faster access to that temporary food card? I want to ask in relation to that: Was any consideration given to the decentralization for approval for these food cards, because at this point in time I know we are just from the budget but a lot of people keep going to the centre and asking when they would get that food card and the answer is usually, well they have to wait on headquarters to send down the cheques. So could you outline to us if that is correct or not and what really happens?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I think your first question had to do with the temporary food cards and Mrs. Layne-Pereira would give a response, but as far as I am aware you could get your temporary food card once you have been assessed immediately, unless there is an issue of none being available, because we had some issues with the 410 card which is usually what is given for temporary measures. Mrs. Layne-Pereira would respond.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Well PS, that is exactly what happened to some of the persons who ended up in my office. They said that there were no temporary food

cards. So in cases such as these, what happens?

Mrs. Layne-Pereira: Good morning. In cases where there are no temporary food cards in the office, we normally advise the client that they can come back. They give them a specific time, because the temporary food cards are also lodged at our head office. So the supervisors can come up, collect some and carry back to the offices. Temporary food cards are issued to persons in need, like natural disasters on a same-day basis. As with the recent flood we have issued temporary food cards.

Mr. Chairman: Could you indicate how many of these cards were issued on account of the recent flooding on a temporary basis and on a daily basis?

Mrs. Layne-Pereira: The figures are still coming in because we still have assessment forms out there. I do know that in some areas as much as five temporary food cards were given out because we are second responders. And the first responders who went out issued a lot of hampers. So the clients actually indicated that they got foodstuff.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Coming from where my constituency, I can say that when we have the flooding we really get quick response, but I am really referring to the persons to go on a one-on-one basis with nobody else knowing that they went. They usually find themselves back at their MP's office complaining that they have to go on multiple occasions. And I want to particularly ask if any consideration is given to training of persons who have to deal with persons going to offices? I would not mention which offices, but certainly—the compassion and the responses to people going to those places—because going to those centres a person has to be really in need and we see persons going many days for the same response and they tell me they feel humiliated, they feel that they are not a person and I want to know, did you give any consideration to training of persons who work at those centres?

Mr. Chairman: Yes MP, and as a follow-up, how many of those persons, your staff, have themselves been subject to life skills training with respect to customer service and dealing with the public and ensuring that you have a sympathetic demeanour to people in need. Very valuable

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: PS Barrow would speak to the customer service, but I just wanted to indicate that most of the 410 cards because at the beginning that was the card that would be given out for disasters were depleted and we have since taken a policy decision to use the 550 to assist with disasters that would come up because the bank is also not, as you recall, the bank is not producing any more of those cards. So we have taken the decision to use the 550, the next denomination. So that should bring some relief.

11.30 a.m.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I want to follow up with the suggestion by the hon. Minister of Works and Transport. I see here that your programme partnered with approximately 277 large and small-scale merchants and 172 groceries and I am also looking at persons receiving cheques and what they do with those cheques. Did you ever consider—or is it possible that these cheques—because I know you do it for furniture and furnishings when we have flooding. Is it possible that those cheques could be made in favour of the grocery stores? And taking up from where Mr. Sinanan left off with respect to encouraging persons to buy local, could some arrangement be made in that regard to facilitate that approach to dealing with persons getting relief at this point in time, through cheque payment?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: PS Barrow would speak.

Ms. Barrow: Just to answer with regards to the previous query with regards to the training. All the members of staff at the Ministry have undergone client-care training which was an initiative that the Ministry undertook from April this year, and all members of staff in all the different district offices have all undergone

client-care training. It is not a one-off training but one that we are trying to continue as we go through the year, as we try to improve how our staff greet with our clients and how they—and I do think that sometimes it happens that persons might become desensitized sometimes to the needs of our clients over the years, but it is something that we need to keep reminding them of, and that is the initiative that we have undertaken.

Mr. Chairman: Who provides the training? Is it in-house?

Ms. Barrow: It is internal.

Mr. Chairman: Pardon me?

Ms. Barrow: We did it internally—

Mr. Chairman: Oh, internal. Okay. There may be a problem with internal training, you know, in that the wrong things may be repeated continuously. Have you considered maybe having your training programmes itself being evaluated?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Just to say that while the training was actually provided by persons from inside the Ministry, it was approved externally—the content. And we had some external persons involved, but they would have been from Public Service Academy.

Mr. Chairman: I kind of like training from the private sector especially when they are trying to earn profits. The training I have seen from people in the private sector—in the food sector—is one which makes me want to return. There is one company in particular I want to return. So I do not know if you would consider having some private sector involvement there, so that—to infuse the public sector with the private sector drive for profit. Your baseline is customer satisfaction, but that is something, as PSs you will consider.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I want to ask, and I want to stress again, because, you know, we want to promote agriculture and we want to promote persons to get into agriculture, and a lot of persons are now engaging with grocery stores to have their

products sold, and I really feel that this point could be given some consideration. I do not know if it is possible.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Which point, Mrs. Jennings?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I spoke about your relationship with the grocery stores. I see you have 237 large and small-scale merchants and 172 groceries that you will have a relationship with, and I was querying the fact that you all are giving cheques to persons who are accessing support and I am looking at some of the concerns of this Committee where they are thinking that, maybe, what persons would really buy with the cheques. Would they buy foodstuff? And also the point where we want to promote local products and the point that Mr. Sinanan raised, and I want to ask if you could look at making any kind of arrangement to facilitate this suggestion.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We need to take it on board, Chair, to look at it as we review the programme.

Mr. Chairman: Basically, all your merchants simply partnering with local suppliers, that you will approve so that they can have at least local content in their place of business. I think that seems to be the recommendation. MP Newallo-Hosein wants to come in and then we are coming around this way. We will come back to MP Forde and then you.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. Coming back to the biometric card, PS, I understand that the biometric card allows the recipient to access a range of social benefits which include social assistance grants, disability grants, food cards and general assistance. Does this new card that you hope to implement in 2018 provide for the same?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: No, it would be a debit card without those features.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: All right. Listen. One sec. The biometric card also allows for—to prevent the abuse of State funds, fraud and duplication of grants to any one

person. Does this new card provide for that?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: There are measures which we will put in place to address that, not necessarily the card, but there are other supporting measures that we would put in place to address those issues, including a new IT system.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: The biometric card allows for your fingerprint. In other words, it is unique to an individual, which means that you will eliminate fraud, you will eliminate duplication, you will eliminate a number of administrative costs and you are looking at—this is costing so much of moneys compared to \$1 million. And I am asking: are you getting the same value with that \$1 million card compared to the biometric card?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: And I am saying we would not have the biometric card, but we would still be using the biometric system for registration and Mr. Gangapersad would add to that.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: But beyond that, I am asking a further question. With the system management that comes with the biometric card whereby a person who would have moved for whatever reason; they may have had an injury and they have to go and live by their daughter, once their file moves—the case management—once they move from one location to another, their file must go and oftentimes their file is lost, and if the file is lost their benefit would stop, which the biometric card would have facilitated that transition. Does this card do this in 2018?

Mr. Gangapersad: Thanks PS, Chair. I just want to add that the basis for any payment was our central beneficiary registry which, in the past, was mainly paper-based, paper-driven and data being inputted in that registry, basic payment data. Since the Ministry invested in the biometric system which, as PS indicated is ours, the Ministry—it belongs to the Ministry—the basis for any payments to be made would be from the biometric system. So even if we have to issue a cheque, it

comes from the biometric system that these are persons who are enrolled in the biometric system and we will continue. For instance, the senior citizens pension, they have to do a life certificate every year. Once we have all our senior citizens pensioners inputted in the database, it means that we have persons there who would be validly paid because we have it in the registry. And it will still be using your biometric data instead of a number which is usually assigned—either the ID card number, which can be compromised, or a file number which can be compromised.

As it relates to the movement of persons, the movement of persons and the movement of the file is in law. Both the Public Assistance Act and the Senior Citizens Pension Act require that if a person moves from one address to another one which is outside of the regional office that they belong to, their file must be transferred. The system of payment, whether it is biometric or if it is a debit card, would not prevent the file from moving. I understand the point that you are making that sometimes files get lost, but it is not because of the payment platform or the central beneficiary registry. And I think that some due diligence has to be put in place to ensure that that does not happen. But as it relates to the current payment system, or the biometric, it would not really prevent a file from being lost.

Mr. Chairman: Just a brief follow-up. You mentioned something about life certificates for the old age pensioners, and at this forum at another meeting it was indicated that of December 31st, this year, 2017, life certificates were going to be eliminated and it was going to be replaced by death certificates. Please indicate the status of that. Because from your explanation and discussion it appears as though it is a fait accompli that life certificates will continue till infinity. I just need to get the feedback of both permanent secretaries on a commitment given to this Committee on another forum.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, I am happy to say that we have been moving along

progressively. We have an MOU signed with the Registrar General and we are now to just implement in terms of, you know, actually having it operationalized. There is just one small element that still has to be done with immigration to allow us to do it. So we are still working with 1st of January—2nd of January, 2018.

Mr. Chairman: That is very heartening to hear because when I heard your Chief Technology Officer indicate about life certificates I got a little nervous, indicating that, okay, the undertaking that was given at the beginning of the year is now being reversed without advising the Committee. And I understand fully the immigration issues that are going to arise. But before I go back to MP Newallo-Hosein, we got a query from a member of the public who said that since July of 2017 of this year, food card recipients were asked to sign for banking transactions and failure to do so would cause them to lose the grant and hence he or she, the caller, is concerned that there should be no cheques issued at all. Is this factually correct or incorrect, that they were asked to sign up for banking services or online transactions, something to that effect, and if they did not, the card was going to be terminated? Could you verify that that was so or not so?

Ms. Barrow: That had to do with the direct deposit and it was not necessarily transaction information that we were asking for but more verification of an account with a bank, and we clarified that with our clients.

Mr. Chairman: And is that for the food card or just old age pensioners?

Ms. Barrow: No, that was for the direct deposit.

Mr. Chairman: Direct deposit for other grants—

Ms. Barrow: Other grants.

Mr. Chairman:—disability, old age pensions.

Ms. Barrow: Senior citizens, everybody else.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, very well. Thank you very much. You can continue with any follow-up you have and then we come to—

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you—[*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: No, no. It is her second round. And your second round is coming, MP.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you very much, Chair. PS, you indicated that for the Rise Up, in 2014 was the last time anyone had applied, which I can verify is, in fact, incorrect because a number of persons in 2015 were awaiting approvals and interviews. My question is—because I know that aspect is, perhaps, incorrect and it may have been provided for you incorrectly. You indicated that for the Step Up Programme, no one is on the programme currently. But has anyone applied for the Step Up?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: I am not aware that people applied for this programme. The understanding is that once you have been approved for a food card you are supposed to go through a process of being trained, of being assisted and referred so that you could be brought to a place where your family can graduate off of the programme. So it is not an application process for the clients, it is actually a programme that has to be administered by the officers of the TCCTP Programme, so that all the persons on the food card are carried through. The households are carried through that programme to a place where they could be graduated.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Which brings me to this question. How many persons are administratively dealing with the Step Up Programme and the TCCTP currently?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: PS Barrow and the HR team would treat with that matter.

Ms. Barrow: The Food Card Programme is now part of the Social Welfare Division and it is not separated out from the rest of the functions of the Social Welfare Division. So all the different staff—the staff that would normally administer grants are currently processing the food card also. With regards to the Step Up, that programme is one that we are now looking at to implement so we do not have anyone assigned to that particular programme as yet. We are still

working out the logistics of it.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: So Rise Up was de-branded and you have a new brand re-branded, Step Up, and there is no one there in the system to run it. And for the TCCTP Programme, you indicated that the persons there, the whole department was, in fact—their contracts were not renewed. So how many persons are, in fact, managing this programme in the Social Welfare Department?

Ms. Barrow: All the field officers within the social welfare districts administer the food programme.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: How many?

Ms. Barrow: In each district? We could provide you with that information.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Please provide it in writing. Thank you very much, MP Newallo-Hosein. And now MP Esmond Forde.

Mr. Forde: I know my colleague is probably speaking from the point of view of being part of the Ministry prior. Right? Now you said that contract workers, once you moved away from Rise Up, that the contract workers were not renewed. But in a document that you all provided to us here, which is “Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration”, the inquiry document, we received it on October 27, you all spoke about retrenchment on page 3.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We did not.

Mr. Forde: Oh no. The question was retrenchment. Right. Because if you are on contract you cannot be retrenched. Basically your contract will be renewed. So I just wanted to get that aspect clarified.

And my second point that I want to refer to is on page 4. In 2014, in terms of permanent food cards and temporary food cards, there was a total of 65,000-plus. In 2017, it has now probably come down to 28,000. You are following me, Madam PS, on that document?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes.

Mr. Forde: When we go to page 5, at the top of page 5 at Roman Numeral X, only 480 persons appealed, or queried from that list. Why such a small amount? If it is that the persons were in active use of a food card, you know—65,000 persons—and, you know, it has been since reduced to less than half and only 480 persons query it, what could be some of the reasons why a vast number of persons would not have queried, you know, the failure of not getting back their food cards? I am seeing a smile on PS Barrow face, boy. I hope I could get a good answer.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: As you said, Member, we had a significant reduction from 2014 to the end of fiscal 2017. However, in fiscal 2016, that is when we would have undertaken our review exercise where we would have requested persons who were on the card, to come in to register if they were not biometrically registered. We sent adds out in terms of deadlines when persons should come in to register, following which they will be removed from the system. After we came to the end of the deadline, there were a number of persons, some 13,000 or more, who did not come in to register and were therefore removed. Some of them, as you indicated, came in and re-applied and were given a food card because they were eligible—they were deemed to be still eligible. I cannot speak for those who did not come in. There were some persons—

Mr. Forde: But you can speculate.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We can speculate but I know, based on some of the calls, some of the persons had actually died, others, we just could not locate them. So those were some of the valid reasons why some people did not come in, but we could not speak for the other thousands who, you know, we just did not—

Mr. Forde: No, but you see, but Madam PS, we are talking about a vast number of persons, right?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Yes.

Mr. Forde: And in terms of my maths, the specifics, we are talking about over

20,000 persons; 480 came in, which is, let us say, under 500, so we still have 19,500 persons. So am I to—if I want to speculate, were they persons that were not rightly entitled to TT food cards in the first place?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Could be, but I just want to say that the number also included the continuous deactivations that would be done by the Ministry based on persons no longer being eligible and the reviews that would be done by the officers every month or so. So 13,000 may have come off because of the review exercise but also persons were coming off and being deactivated because they were no longer eligible.

Mr. Forde: And in terms of dollars and cents, from 65,000, do we have a dollar value of what that would have been in 2014, versus the 2017, 28,000? Could we have a dollar value to those figures?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: We could get the dollar value but what we knew is that after the review exercise we were able to save \$110 million every month—

Mr. Forde: Every month?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: On a monthly basis.

Mr. Forde: So on a yearly that will be how much?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: On a yearly basis, sorry. It was \$110 million per year, sorry, after we were able to take those persons off.

Mr. Forde: Okay, all right. All right, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: A follow-up?

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: After you, Sen. Ameen wants to come in. No, no, if it is a follow-up, MP Jennings-Smith—

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I will give way.

Miss Ameen: Thank you, Chairman, thank you MP. Two questions I have: one, in the recent flooding—we had serious flooding in the last few weeks and the

aftermath of Bret, how many persons, or was this programme targeted specifically to reach those who would have needed temporary assistance with food? That is one. And secondly, Mr. Chairman, a number of persons have not had their contracts renewed from a number of these units within the Ministry of—well, what was the Ministry of People—and I know that you indicated they are now all in the Social Welfare Division. We have had the Poverty Reduction Unit and Poverty Alleviation, and a number of other units, where persons who were employed on contract did not have their contract renewed. We have a number of regional offices as well, where it appears that, you know, you just have skeleton staff, but we have not had a comprehensive statement from the Ministry. I know a Member earlier indicated that this is not retrenchment per se, but the fact is that it represents people effectively losing their jobs. How is this impacting on the Ministry being able to deliver, particularly to regions—because I am very concerned with that decentralization and the ability of the Ministry to reach to every community—with the regional offices and in general in these units in carrying out their duties?

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Again, I think DPS Ali and the team would be able to speak to the staff that we have on board in all the boards. I think it is operating from 11 boards now, where we provide all the services. We still provide the services and we do have a number of persons still dealing with the SEED Programme and at every point where persons were not retained, a statement was made concerning the continuation of the services for the public, or whether it was said by the hon. Minister in Parliament, because she was requested to answer questions and so on. So we have made a number of statements concerning those persons who were not retained in the Ministry and the various divisions that were no longer operating. But their service or their function was still being undertaken within the Ministry. So, Mr. DPS Ali, PS Barrow would speak to the staff that we have on board still, providing these services.

Miss Ameen: If DPS Barrow could include in her answer, perhaps the number of people who have been—well, the number of contracts that were—not renewed—but the number of people who effectively lost their jobs, perhaps over the last year or two.

Ms. Barrow: What I can say is that with regards to the food programme, there were 91 contract positions—*[Interruption]* With regard to the food card programme there were 91 contract positions that contracts came to an end that were not retained. However, what we did do was to re-engage some of the persons and placed them within the Social Welfare Division. But as I said, I can give you all the actual figures in writing.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you can send it. But you said basically 91 individuals did not get their contracts renewed from the food card programme, and that some of them were absorbed?

Ms. Barrow: The food card, 91 positions contracts came to an end.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, right.

Ms. Barrow: There were some persons who were retained. I would not want to say that—there were some persons who we did keep back.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, right. If we can find out the numbers who were retained and whether they were retained because they were—

Ms. Barrow: By district?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, because of their qualifications, their experience, their expertise: the basis of retention and the basis for non-renewal. That certainly would, I think, provide some additional insight. But I will ask MP Jennings-Smith—and there is a question I have to pose to Mr. Gangapersad but I will wait for afterwards.

Miss Ameen: The flooding issue.

Mr. Chairman: What was the question on flooding, Senator?

Miss Ameen: My question on flooding. I asked two questions. In the recent flooding and in the aftermath of Bret, did you specifically target those communities which were affected by the flooding to reach out to people who may need the temporary food cards?

Mrs. Layne-Pereira: Yes. With regards to the recent flooding, each area that was affected we deployed staff and they went out house-to-house and they enquired as to anyone whether they needed food cards or whatever articles they may have lost. As I indicated before, we are still in the process of getting all the DANA forms in so that we can address the other aspect, the household articles.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: Well I am happy to hear that because persons who were affected in the Matelot area, they are still to be compensated. And I am coming back to my former point, eh, because I see when we ask of your Ministry to provide us with some main technical administrative flaws, one of the answers you gave us is that “a customer service mechanism for responding to queries from the public is non-existent.” And I remember when the Chairman asked you a while ago what kind of training you give to your workers at these centres, you said you give them internal training. And, you know, when we are dealing with persons who are accessing these programmes, they are poor, they are vulnerable and they do not have a voice. They do not have a voice. And I was about to ask you if a person is out there and one year, two years have passed—because they talk about the tardiness in persons visiting; they talk about the attitude problem—who do they turn to? Because certainly you are saying here you do not have a customer service mechanism. So who would seek compensation on behalf of those persons, or even—“ah doh” want to use the word, “compensation”—who would seek to get a response from the officials of the Ministry on behalf of those persons outside there, and the very many complaints that they give and they have and they seem to be voiceless. Because when they go to the offices they are sometimes turned back.

And I want to specifically outline the Sangre Grande area. It is really one of the worst scenarios you could experience when you go there to access assistance.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Just to indicate, this question came out of the report of the Auditor General in terms of some of the issues that were brought up concerning the programme and at that point in time there was no customer service mechanism. However, following that, there was some attempt to put in a customer service response and we are still working on that. It is not working fool-proof and it is not perfect, but we are still working to have it operate as it should. So we do have hotlines also for older persons and we also have a hotline for the Ministry. We are working with that also. But the customer response is something that we are focusing on for fiscal 2018 because we understand that it is a real pain point for our clients.

Mr. Chairman: I want to just come in here for a follow-up--and I know you will complete. You see, the State of Trinidad and Tobago has a number of agencies and I get the sense that we do not use them very well. There is a Life Skills component that, I think, if your officers were subject to it as opposed to pure in-house, there would be benefits on customer service and less complaints coming from the public. And second, I saw from your submission, only 4,000 people, recipients of the food card, were in receipt of these trainings. So I am wondering whether you are going to be looking at all the assistance which exists in the rest of the Government service to come to service your very large Ministry. Because I do not think you are looking at the things that are in existence which are available to you. But that is something for you to consider, Madam PSs. But I will ask MP Jennings-Smith to come in.

Mrs. Jennings-Smith: I just want to say, I know PS, it is high on your agenda and I know you would want persons to really respond in an effective manner. I sometimes have to call your members of staff, Mr. Gangapersad and others, and I

know that you all have that concern. It is just that, you know, to set up that system to ensure that the persons out there do not have to go to other levels to get that kind of response. Thanks.

12.00 noon

Mr. Chairman: While MP Newallo-Hosein comes to pose her question—and then it will come to me because I have a question again for Mr. Gangapersad.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: And I am saying, Chair, it is a priority for the Ministry. Premium customer service, it is a priority.

Mr. Chairman: Very well. And I am saying that there are agencies of the state which can help, which would be available at no cost, I would imagine, which I think in this time of financial stress you may very much want to lean on to ensure that with the little bit that you have, customer delivery that the MPs are concerned about, can be enhanced. MP Newallo-Hosein?

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Thank you, Chair. On page 9 of your report on enquiry into the management of the targeted conditional, No. 3.1, it was indicated that temporary one-off cards are also issued to regional offices and these cards are issued to families who are considered to be extremely poor and for families who lost food stuff, et cetera. For my area, in particular—as you would know the UN has indicated that Sangre Grande is the poorest region in Trinidad, and therefore, I would like to find out how many temporary food cards were issued to the regional corporation, as well—and you do not have to give me that answer now—to the Social Welfare Office in Sangre Grande, please.

I would like to know how many persons in fact benefited, and therefore, if you could give me that answer I would appreciate it. Also, what criteria was used in fact for measuring the value of goods that were lost? Persons during the flood, how much loss was incurred in terms of their value because there are a number of persons in the constituency, from your Ministry, that received \$1,000 and I was a

little bit taken aback by that because I have never heard a figure of \$1,000 being given to any family. So I just want to know what criteria was in fact used, please, and that was for hurricane Bret.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Mr. Gangapersad, Ms. Barrow, you all deal with that on the ground.

Mr. Gangapersad: Thanks, Permanent Secretary. Chair, it is just to indicate that the assistance that is given during times of disaster from the Ministry, is that a food support. As PS indicated it is the same denomination that we have, 410, 550 and 700, as well as household items which is up to a maximum of \$10,000, and it is given for particular items of household items like beds, stove, washing machine, fridge, wardrobes, et cetera. Those items have a specific cost to it. So more than likely the \$1,000 would have related to someone who indicated that they just lost a mattress. So the cost is related to the items that you reported, that the Ministry validated that was lost during the disaster. Additionally, the Ministry also gives assistance for housing repairs, and at that time during disaster the housing repairs is \$20,000. It is up to \$20,000 to do repairs to your house.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Gangapersad. And now I will pose a question that I have to you and to the PSs as well. You see I have been hearing that the biometric card system is a time consuming process. It is expensive, it is drawn-out, and until that system is complete you are somehow in limbo. What I would like to pose to you as the chief officer with respect to technology and that area of the organization—

Mr. Forde: Remember he said he is not IT eh.

Mr. Chairman: He is not IT, but is the chief technology officer.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Technical.

Mr. Chairman: Well a technical officer must be au courant with the technology. You see here is a situation and I would like you to consider it and maybe discuss it

with the PSs. We have another agency in Trinidad and Tobago, it is called the Elections and Boundaries Commission. The EBC collects data on all of us while we are registering for a National ID Card, and I was just wondering whether to ease the work of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, the EBC itself can start collecting while we are registering for our electoral districts the same information that you require to administer your own social programmes. So that when someone comes to you with his National ID Card, that ID card would already have encoded in it the information that you need and it will avoid the duplication of you trying to collection information that another agency in the country is mandated to collect.

Do you think if the EBC starts collecting that information as part of its mandate and then you have a memorandum of understanding as you have in the Ministry of Legal Affairs on life and death certificates, that that would expedite the process, minimize the amount of work you have to do in that area, and then allow you and your staff to really focus on delivering your services to the population? You see I am concerned about the cost and the fact that there is duplication, and the potential having started collaboration with the Ministry of Legal Affairs that there can now be collaboration with the other agency which really is charged with collecting information more than most in the country and simply sharing the information with you on their platform. Do you think that is an idea that can work and will assist your large Ministry to discharge its function?

Mr. Gangapersad: Chair—

Mr. Chairman: I am thinking outside the box and I will tell you why we are doing that. As an economist I understand the financial gravity of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, but yet we want to discharge our functions to the people in the most efficient way. Looking at all the agencies in the state the question is: can we now have a closer collaboration so that line Ministries like yours, huge

Ministries, cannot duplicate what others are doing, but simply use the information which exist in other arms of the state?

Mr. Gangapersad: Well Chair, just to answer that question simply, when the whole issue of life certificate came up in the past we did invite all of the stakeholders as it relates to our grant for the disabled. The EBC was one of those, as well as Immigration and the Registrar General. So we did engage in discussion, and the Ministry for information of this proceeding is moving in the direction of collaboration. In fact, we have signed on to a MOU with the Registrar General, we are soon to do the same with Immigration. We are also at the cost for signing an MOU with the National Insurance Board, and it is primarily to get that kind of synergy in terms of having to get client to be running from office to office just to get information.

And just to answer your question, clearly there is merit in collaboration. What we collaborate on might be the details what gone, but clearly we are already at the stage where we have at least started the conversation, and for some so advanced that we have signed MOU and the others we are at poised to do the same.

Mr. Chairman: But you think that—because I have seen it done elsewhere. In North America there is a Social Insurance Card. That SIN number has the data that you need for everything, almost all transactions, and I am simply wondering whether our National ID number in the ID card office—I know that is a statutory corporation. It is not a Government, but we all are arms of the state. They all take from the Government's purse, and if our National ID can have encoded in it all the information you need, then would that not make your job in expediting the biometric aspect of your work easier? So that if you as the chief officer in charge of that area of the Government is of the view that you can simply get the information from another place—because they are charged with collecting information. Your office is charged with delivering to the customers. You collect

information as a means, not as an end. The EBC collects information as a means. That is their function in order to register us as voters. So that I think if our National ID Card can then have encoded in it all the information that you need, that would mean that if they could start now it would mean that your job, and the two PS's job would now be focused on delivery of customers to the service.

So I would like you all to consider that. When you come back—you will be coming back—I will raise it again. We are looking at solutions because in this time of financial scarcity we have to use all available resources to ensure that the people at the ground, and your people, are the most vulnerable in the country, the people you service. So we are looking at delivery, and we are looking at expediting the information gathering process, and we are looking at harmonizing the various arms of the state as you are as said doing so. I think you have mentioned all the agencies except the EBC. So we will be looking into that, and I would like if you can give some thought together with your senior officers, may be even send us in writing how in fact that process could work. I now ask MP Esmond Forde to come in after I pose my own solution. It may not be the best solution you know, but it is one more than people have.

Mr. Forde: Thank you. With regard to the temporary food cards that are issued are they issued with any amount of assessment, or it is just given out on an ad hoc basis; or is there an assessment done first to issue the temporary food card pending the permanent food card that will come subsequently?

Mr. Gangapersad: There are several scenarios under which a temporary food card can be issued. One is during times of disaster and usually it is done with an on field assessment where food was lost, and from all indication that there is no food in the house it is given, and that is given almost on a universal basis. You do not have to do any means test for that.

Mr. Forde: Good. And then the person would make a formal application?

Mr. Gangapersad: Well it is given in the disaster to treat with that issue. If there is need for a food card, then the person can apply for a food card.

Mr. Forde: Okay.

Mr. Gangapersad: The temporary card is also given to cover the period between where an application for a permanent card has been approved but one has not been issue as yet. Because when the administrative process of requesting the card might take some time, so the temporary fills that gap. The third condition under which a food card is given is when the preliminary assessment is done. A person comes into one of our officers and a preliminary assessment is done, and there is a range. There are scores that are assigned based on the assessment and anybody who gets a score that is below 15—and in the scheme of things that is considered a person who may be suffering from extreme food needs, they have no money at all—the temporary card is issued and up to three temporary card is issued. The second one—however, after the first assessment you are asked to bring in document and whatever it is to complete the applicant, the second one is only issued once you produce the document or there is some reasonable explanation as to why you do not the document to submit.

Mr. Forde: I am good, Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, thank you very much. Sen. Ameen. You ready? Okay. MP Newallo-Hosein.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Yes, thank you. Mr. Gangapersad you indicated that you have in place MOUs for several Ministries which you are required to collaborate with, would you state whether NIB, in particular, had anxiously look forward to signing an MOU in light of the fact that the biometric card would have bought so much benefits to both entities, both NIB as well as the Ministry, as they collaborate on a number of issues?

Mr. Gangapersad: Chair, just to indicate the context of the MOU with National

Insurance Board, what is required as was indicated earlier on by one of the members, is that whenever an applicant applies for a grant in social welfare one of the first things that we request of them is information pertaining to their contribution or to their benefits payable at NIS, and what it requires is for persons to come and sit in our office and to be issued with this form, and then go to the NIB and sit in their various offices and wait for another person there to deal with them to issue the information.

In total, we have approximately 25,000 persons making application all told for all grants in the Ministry. It means that 25,000 persons are going to sit at NIB offices across the country waiting for information. The MOU is going to allow us to share that kind of information without the client having to move from office to office. So clearly what we are doing at our end is to set up a system that will allow NIB to see the persons who apply and to provide us with the information that we require.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. You know I am simply wondering why in fact we are not harmonized with information sharing. For example, if in fact I supply you with my ID Card number, a unique number, should you not in assessing the harmonized database be able to see what my NIB contributions have been, whether I am obtaining a pension or a disability grant, and if I am the trying a fast one by now asking for a food card? Because I would imagine if we have one card that we must supply, whether my driver's license is supposed to be in order or something, if our one card can do that, then it means simply that someone presents his National ID Card to you, you punch in the data and every time he is the recipient of some state grant from your office, or an NIB grant or any other grant, it should come up in his database. So if that is the case with the information sharing, then we would be able to simply sit at the computer terminal, assess the customer. Could you forward your ID card and I have all the information readily available I could get—in fact, it might even be linked up with the Ministry of

National Security so we see exactly what your status is with respect to all assistance you get from the state. As the chief officer in charge of that technical area do you think we are light years away from such a system, or do you think if we work collaboratively amongst all arm of the state we should get there over a three-year period?

Mr. Gangapersad: It was the intention of the biometric system when we engaged the provider. It was a system that was supposed to be national, and in fact when you look down in the past there was a national smart card policy that was supposed to incorporate all agency. It had many applets on a card. So it could have had your driver's permit, your birth—everything on that card including grants, library passes and stuff like that. It is not light years away. It is doable and I think it requires the will to do it.

Mr. Chairman: Could you then speak to your technology officer, the one who really understand IT and IT platforms, on what really is needed in order for us to get to this system over a three-year period? Because unless we get there a lot of problems will happen in the interim. We do need to harmonize information now, certainty to discharge efficiently the job you have to do because you would get the information to know whether someone who has asked for a smart card is indeed a smart man. The information would be in front of you without you having to do field checks and so on. You would be already in possession of all the other grant he or she has gotten, his income and everything. So that if your technology officer can now work on how we can get to that stage where all agencies now share information, we would, I think, be able to really improve upon the efficiency. So that of the 10,000 people or so who were removed from the system, they should automatically be removed by computer. Computer should pick it up and say, "Well you are already in the receipt, unless you can prove otherwise, of course, we have been able to identify you electronically that you do not quality". So once you

speak to your technology office at the level of this Committee, it may require some legislative changes to ensure that information is shared, but I cannot know unless I get the information from the technology officers on how doable this is once the parties collaborate, that is NIB, EBC, the legal affairs. Once there is collaboration the legislative changes would be our remit in this particular Committee.

You can send a little note in writing after you have discussed with the IT officer on how we get to that stage of having a one card do all with respect to collecting all the information on some one. But my sense is that EBC might have to be in charge of collecting the bulk of the data with other agencies just adding little titbits on it. But MP Newallo-Hosein has a follow-up on that.

Mrs. Newallo-Hosein: Chair, I just want to concur with what with it is you are saying. However, with the biometric card because of this fingerprint there are a number of persons outside with duplicate ID cards and we know that, and it is not just duplicate, they have triplicate and so forth. Therefore, the biometric card will in fact clean up across the country, across agencies, across Ministries, this system of whether it is corruption you want to call it, or mismanagement, abuse, whatever it is, and therefore, I really would like to encourage the Ministry, the PSs to reevaluate what it is you are about to implement—forget about the past. Remind us what you spoke about Mr. Gangapersad about the platform, but it is not simply the platform. It is in fact implementing this system where you can remove as much as possible the abuse of state funds, and state funds that people are looking at is limited, and therefore, yes we are looking at the ID card but also even the ID cards there is that system of abuse and that will eliminate it. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Just as a follow-up to my colleague. IT people will solve that. There is no rule which says a National ID Card cannot also be biometric. You need fingerprint, and once a National ID Card is biometric I am telling you, the both PSs, you can then exert all your energies to the poor people of Trinidad and

Tobago because another agency would have already done 95 per cent of the data collection that you would have to do. So that is something that we will on the national agenda coming out of this meeting, a National ID Card, a biometric ID card to assist the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, all for the poor people of Trinidad and Tobago. Sen. Khadijah Ameen.

Miss Ameen: Mr. Chair, before I ask my question, when the idea of a national biometric information platform was first introduced in terms of legislation, the idea was to integrate the National ID Cards but all the information. Not only the welfare and social support, but HDC housing, the Ministry of Legal Affairs with your birth and death documents, marriage records as well, and all of these things including name changes and so on will be on one platform. I do not know if the Ministry of Legal Affairs ever embarked on a full scale programme to implement that, and that may be the Ministry that could take the responsibility so that the social development people could focus on social development.

My question, Mr. Chairman, having regard to the contribution by Mr. Gangapersad concerning victims of natural disasters such as floods that they can access furniture, appliances, beds and so on if they lose their things in the flood. I know that Mrs. Layne-Pereira indicated earlier that the DANA forms which is an assessment exercise is still being conducted in some areas. As a former local government councillor I have participated and worked alongside your representatives when they are out on the field and it could be very time consuming if you do not have the intervention, for instance, of the regional corporations sending their workers to help pick up the information and so on, I want to ask, one, if you have a deadline by which you want to collect that assessment for the recent floods; and, two, having regards to the cried that we have heard where people are turned back and saying that they do not have money, do you believe the Ministry is in a position with its present allocation to meet the needs of these thousands, well

hundreds definitely, perhaps thousands of people who have been severely affected by the flooding and lost everything in their homes?

Mr. Gangapersad: Yes, there was a commitment to complete assessments by Friday—this Friday—and just to indicate as well that the Ministry did engage the members of the defence force. As you are probably aware, over the past two weeks we had between 40 to 50 members of the defence force out of the teams in the Ministry and, in fact, just from the St. Helena area in seven days' time, five days' time in fact, they covered almost 900 homes together with members of the defence force. In the Sangre Grande region, the regional corporation did get involved, and in so many other areas the regional corporation officers as well as the defence force and officers of the Ministry just so that we could get the assessment done on a timely basis.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: The money to pay, you would be aware that the Cabinet did approve an additional \$35 million last Cabinet meeting for response to the disaster.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much for that response. I do not think I have any more questions from members of the Committee at this time. We seem to have exhausted our line of questioning on this subject. Before I ask both Permanent Secretaries to offer some closing comments, I have to say that before this enquiry I knew very little about this particular subject, and this has been a very informative one. In fact, when it was recommended I wanted to know what was this all about, had no prior knowledge, but after today's hearing I think we have made some valuable inroads with respect to this very, very critical initiative to assist the most vulnerable in Trinidad and Tobago.

What has come thus far from today's hearing is I think that we do need to engage officers in this programme with some requisite sympathetic training in customer care, given that practically all the individuals who try to access this programme are

really the poorest in the society and we do need to understand their specific needs, respect their dignity and understand the circumstances in which they live, that there are other agencies such as the life skills programme in the state which can be used to provide free training to supplement that which the Ministry offers in-house.

We do know that there is a need to understand clearly what we mean by a family, what we mean by a household. We need some definitions because I would imagine if the definitions are not clear certain individuals who feel that they qualify may be excluded based upon the definitions which are currently in use, and I would like to know whether the definitions are international or whether we need to tailor them for the Trinidad and Tobago environment. It has come to light that the given the cost of the programme there is a need for there to be some local content in the purchasing. It is to a large extent dedicated towards the ensuring as per the quality of life of poor people, the minimum calorie intake on a daily basis for an adult. That is the basis upon which the numbers would have been arrived at scientific basis, but we do know that you need things like cleaning material, dishwashing liquid. You cannot really say food alone if you are to ensure that the poor person can live reasonably well, but there is that issue about local content, and the recommendation I would put forward for the Government is to see whether the merchants can be encouraged via moral suasion or other types of inducements to have more local content in their places of trade so that the options are available for people to purchase some locally grown or produced products.

We have broached the idea of the Ministry collecting less and less information. If we have the greater collaboration with other agencies of the state, and that a smart ID card or a biometric national ID card which collects all the information relevant to what you want and which can then be used every time we access every single service of the state, our driver's license, our food card, soon as you try the first card you are asked for, can I see your ID card and it is registered. I think if that

card ever comes into being then the information and the data that you require to make very quick decisions for equity and efficiency. You see, we are looking at both. We need the people who qualify to obtain the benefit quickly, but we need to ensure that the people who do not qualify are ejected quickly from the programme given the funds you have that has to be allocated and it is targeted to the vulnerable.

So that just as in the joint select forum we came up on the idea of eliminating life certificates and implementing it with death certificates as per MOUs between Ministry of Legal Affairs, I think we now should be looking at MOUs with the EBC to ensure that they can collect the bulk of the data, and that card can then be used for all transactions with the state entering into the database, but that will require, of course, the input of your IT specialist so that your systems can in fact be on a common platform and you can read the information that is available. So from my view, as someone with a National ID Card presented to you should have information once you input his data on all his NIS benefits, all his food card benefits, all his disability benefits, when they were paid, whether he is in receipt of a HDC house, and I think once we get there the information would be readily available to make your jobs efficient.

I have rambled on, but these are the suggestions. I now will ask after this very fruitful morning—I have so many things now that I would like to ask because I am becoming more and more involved in programmes for the poor, given the fact that the economy is not going to generate too many advantages for them over the next couple of years. I would ask the PSs in this very critical Ministry to offer us closing comments before we close our session this afternoon.

Ms. Barrow: PS Bailey-Sobers is going to respond for the both of us.

Mr. Chairman: Very well, okay.

Mrs. Bailey-Sobers: Chair, Vice-Chair, Members, I wish to thank the Committee,

again, for the opportunity to share and thank you also for the valuable contributions and suggestions that you have made. Certainly, we have committed to give consideration to these and to also provide you with the additional information you have requested.

The policy prescription of the National Development Strategy for Vision 2030 is for a paradigm shift in the way we deliver services, in order to bring about better management and social protection programmes, efficiency, effectiveness. But the need for concerted action is based certainly on the reality of our current circumstances and we are aware that we can no longer expend resources the current way that we are delivering services, so we are committed to moving forward with the restructuring of the Ministry speedily. And focusing on customer service has come up as one of the priorities, integrated delivery and also the IT and management systems that would enable us to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable citizens of our country. So we make those commitments and again, we thank you for the rich discussion this morning as part of this session.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, thank you very much. Are you sure you do not want to make some closing remarks, PS Barrow? No, I think she wants to make a few closing remarks herself. I know, I saw it. I mean—[*Laughter*] you can close.

Ms. Barrow: The only closing remarks that I would want to just emphasize that the technology that we have across the different Ministries and Departments sometimes make it difficult and the compatibility that we may not necessarily have so that we can sync our different systems. But it is certainly something that we want to move towards, having that kind of collaboration between the different Ministries so that we can move towards having one card.

But a lot of times, what keeps back the Ministries from moving sometimes quickly, in those directions, is really the compatibility of our systems. And for example, even our interaction right now with immigration, right, because we have had

discussions with them, they have their own system, we have our systems and it is really to find that common ground and really try to found out how we can have the same system across the board where we can all have the same type of access.

Mr. Chairman: Right. “Yuh see?” I knew you had something valuable to say because then it is sending a signal that we would have to consider the Ministry of Public Administration which would be charged with ensuring that their platform is common across all Ministries so that public administration can be made more efficient.

Before I adjourn this meeting, I would like to thank all officers of the Ministry of social services for being here. You have enlightened us with the responses to our questions. I would like to thank members of the media for being here so that they can transmit to the population what transpired this morning. All of our viewers and listeners, especially those who took the time to send in questions, I wish to thank them for being with us. And Members of the Committee, again, it is really very good, having the Committee, the Joint Select Committee, looking at this extremely critical Ministry so that we can always act in the service of the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and in this occasion, the poorest and the most vulnerable. I thank you all for being here and good afternoon.

12.34 p.m.: *Meeting adjourned.*

Appendix IV

Regional and international definition of family and household

A private household consists of one or more persons living together (sleeping most nights of a week) and sharing at least one of the main daily meals. It is important to note a member of the household is not necessarily a relative of the main family. For example, a domestic employee who sleeps-in most nights of the week and shares at least one of the daily meals is also included as a member of the household. The concept of the household and family is not the same. It is possible to encounter more than one family constituting a single household once they share common living arrangements.³⁷

Regional and International Definitions

The United Nations (UN) defines the term "household" as follows: The concept of "household" is based on the arrangements made by persons, individually or in groups, for providing themselves with food or other essentials for living. A household may be either: (a) a one-person household, that is, a person who makes provision for his own food or other essentials for living without combining with any other person/s, or (b) a multi-person household, that is, a group of two or more persons who make common provision for food or other essentials for living.

In the publication entitled, the System of National Accounts, 1993 (SNA93) page 138, a household is defined as a small group of persons who share the same living accommodation, who pool some, or all, of their income and wealth and who consume certain types of goods and services collectively, mainly housing and food.³⁸

According to the United States Census Bureau, a family household consists of a household maintained by a householder who is in a family and includes any unrelated people (unrelated subfamily members and/or secondary individuals) who may be residing there.

According to the Jamaica Statistical Institute, a household consists of one person who lives alone or a group of persons who, as a unit, jointly occupies the whole or part of a dwelling unit, who have

³⁷ Central Statistical Office of Trinidad and Tobago: Concepts and Definitions Manual

³⁸ A system of National Account 1993-A publication of the World Bank, IMF, OECD, European Commission

common arrangements for housekeeping, and who generally share at least one meal. The household may be composed of related persons only, of unrelated persons, or of a combination of both.³⁹

The Barbados Statistical Services defines a household as comprising all occupants of a dwelling unit including related persons, lodgers and servants sharing food from a common kitchen.⁴⁰

On the other hand, the UN defines the family as those members of the household who are related to a specified degree, through blood, adoption or marriage. It is important to note that, according to the UN, a family cannot consist of more than one household but a household can consist of more than one family.⁴¹

A family is defined by the United States Census Bureau as "a group of two people or more (one of whom is the householder) related by birth, marriage, or adoption and residing together; all such people (including related subfamily members) are considered as members of one family."

A family is a group of people affiliated by consanguinity, affinity, and co-residence.⁴² The definitions utilized by the Ministry is, in essence, the same in the region as well as internationally. It is to be noted that households comprising one person can apply to the Ministry for services and same will be considered in accordance with the other rules associated with the various programmes.

³⁹ Jamaican Census 2001-Enumeration Manual

⁴⁰ Barbados Statistical Services: <http://www.barstats.gov.bb>

⁴¹ "Concepts and Definitions". Accessed on August 17, 2018.

<http://www.un.org/esa/population/techcoop/SocInd/manual7/chapter1.pdf>

⁴² Jamaican Census 2001-Enumeration Manual

Appendix V

Field Officers assigned to each Social Welfare District Office

The table below illustrates the number of Field Officers assigned to each Welfare District Office.

TABLE 7: NUMBER OF FIELD OFFICERS ASSIGNED TO EACH WELFARE DISTRICT OFFICE

REGIONAL OFFICE/LOCATION	NUMBER OF FIELD OFFICERS
St. George Central (San Juan)	7
St. George East (Tunapuna)	8
Caroni (Chaguanas)	6
St. Andrew/ St. David (Sangre Grande)	2
Nariva/ Mayaro (Rio Claro)	3
Victoria West (San Fernando)	9
Victoria East (Princes Town)	4
St. Patrick East (Siparia)	4
St. Patrick West (Point Fortin)	3
St. George West (Port of Spain)	2
Tobago	4
Total	52

The number of staff retained from the discontinued Food Card programme in each Social Welfare Local Board is as follows:

TABLE 8: THE NUMBER OF STAFF RETAINED FOLLOWING THE DISSOLUTION OF THE FOOD CARD UNIT

REGIONAL OFFICE/LOCATION	NUMBER OF STAFF RETAINED
St. George Central (San Juan)	2
St. George East (Tunapuna)	1
Caroni (Chaguanas)	2
St. Andrew/ St. David (Sangre Grande)	0
Nariva/ Mayaro (Rio Claro)	1
Victoria West (San Fernando)	2
Victoria East (Princes Town)	2
St. Patrick East (Siparia)	1
St. Patrick West (Point Fortin)	2
St. George West (Port of Spain)	1
Tobago	6
Total	20

Appendix VI

The procedure and benefits of utilizing the Biometric Smart Card System

Biometric Smart Card System

In 2013, the Ministry entered into a contractual arrangement for an integrated, multi-application Biometric Smart Card System, which comprised in part, a Biometric Platform inclusive of the Automatic Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS), Government Resource Management System (GRMS) and the Card Management System (CMS).

This System is capable of expansion and interoperability with other Government e-platforms to form a National Smart Card System which would facilitate the delivery of services by other Ministries and the access to such services by every citizen of this country through the use of one (1) Biometric Smart Card.

Accordingly, the Ministry is in possession of some necessary backend components to enroll, store and read fingerprint data using the CIVIL Automated Fingerprint Identification System (CAFIS), Government Resource Management System (GRM) and a solution that manages the smart card lifecycle from the initial supplier. These components could also be used in the development of a National Identification Card that contains the relevant identity information required by any government agency/department to uniquely identify the holder of the card and the means through which relevant services can be delivered.

From a technological standpoint, a more detailed analysis of the requirements for the integration with existing technology as well as any new investment into more recent complementary solutions, is necessary to determine the viability of such a national project. There may also be a need to examine current legislation which governs the issuance of the Electoral ID Card, Drivers Permit, Passport, National Insurance Payments and other services likely to be incorporated with a harmonized National Biometric Registry and thereafter a catchall National Card.

Implementation of a harmonized registration system across public agencies

The Committee was advised that the Ministry has engaged in discussion with the Elections and Boundaries Commission (EBC), Immigration Division, National Insurance Board (NIB) and the Registrar General regarding a collaborative effort for the implementation of a harmonized registration system for information sharing regarding persons receiving public assistance.

The Ministry is at the stage of reviewing the cost of signing an MOU with the NIB primarily for a collaborative effort toward retrieving the applicants' information pertaining to their contributions payable at NIB.

Benefits of the Biometric Registry System

The Committee was advised that the Biometric Registry System has replaced the paper-based, Central Beneficiary Registry as the platform for any payment of benefits to be made. Benefits are paid using the recipients' biometric data stored on the system instead of a National ID card number or a file number which can be compromised.