

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 21, 2020

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEAR 2021) BILL, 2020

[Fifth Day]

The Standing Finance Committee of the whole House resumed its deliberations on the Bill and Estimates.

[Chairman: Mrs. Annisette-George]

10.00 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Good morning, everyone. The meeting of the Standing Finance Committee will resume.

Head 15: Tobago House of Assembly, \$2,116,000,000.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Tobago House of Assembly is statutorily responsible for the delivery of public goods and services in Tobago as set out in the Fifth Schedule of the THA Act 40 of 1996. The island is structurally and distinctly different from Trinidad, as the Government Services such as tourism, transportation, food production and fisheries and culture and the arts contribute the largest component to the small GDP of the island. As a result of the global impact of the pandemic COVID-19, the tourism sector has been one of the most affected. The ripple effects on the social and economic fabric of the island is palpable and requires a robust and comprehensive strategy to provide both welfare and stimulus for the sustenance of business activity and the delivery of goods and services. As a result of these and the overall 6.49 per cent cut in our allocations, the emphasis of each of the 11 Divisions is to focus on a few transformative elements by increasing efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of goods and services, capacity

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building and institutional strengthening, business processes reengineering and elevation of the role and importance of strategic planning in the mobilization and utilization of resources. These tenets are dovetailed into the policy alignment and the adherence to the principles of transparency, accountability, and good governance and excellent service delivery to the widest cadre of residence in keeping with both the national goals and the policies derived by the Assembly. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 15 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$2,116,000,000 for Head 15 Tobago House of Assembly is comprised of monies proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. We are page 23. Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies. Division 01: Assembly Legislature; Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 16 under Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services Contract Employment. Yes. And so my question is, I am seeing the Estimates for 2021 at 567,000, which represents a decrease. Can we get an explanation as to what this means for the Contract Employment?

Madam Chairman: Okay, just so that I am sure, I am with you. We are page 23. This is the Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies, and if I look at 02: Goods and Services, 16: Contract Employment, I am seeing \$2.8 million.

Ms. Haynes: I am actually now at the same page.

Madam Chairman: Right, okay good, thanks.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Haynes: Yes. Okay, so then my question is: Can we get the approximate number of employees hired under this Vote, contract employees?

Hon. Webster-Roy: Madam Chair, we have 21 persons.

Madam Chairman: That is it?

Ms. Haynes: Yes, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Was there an increase in this Contract Employment from last year to this year?

Hon. Webster-Roy: No.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to bring the Minister's attention to Item 27: Official Overseas Travel. The actual spend in 2019 for overseas travel was 65,000, whereas in 2020 it went up to 253,000. Can the hon. Minister please explain the increase in overseas travel for 2020?

Hon. Webster-Roy: Member, we had an opportunity to visit new territories and different jurisdictions, for learning for trade purposes to improve services in Tobago.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister provide some details on those travel expense?

Hon. Webster-Roy: That would be provided in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, it is the same line Item 27, I know we have COVID so I was just curious, the travel 253,000 how it was managed to be succeeded?

Hon. Webster-Roy: Well in the opening statement, I would have mentioned that we depend heavily on tourism. So that would have been based on trade shows, et cetera. Now with COVID, we do not expect this level of travelling to occur.

Mr. Young: If I may, Madam Chair, just to assist my colleague, is what we know is, prior to COVID, so prior to in March travel being curtailed, there were a lot of tourism trade shows, shows to bring cruise ships, we were actually seeing the benefit of that, in both Trinidad and Tobago. And, both Trinidad and Tobago normally go to these conferences and trade shows as separate delegations, because of course Tobago is in charge of their own tourism drive, but working together at the conferences.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva/North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just an observation on that same Item. The actual spent in 2019 was 65,000, but it would have increased in 2020 even though we had the borders closed for half of the fiscal term. Madam Chair, I would like to move on to the following page. Item 66, that is under the same Head right? Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminar and Other Functions.

Mr. Young: Madam Chair, what would have happened there as well, is Tobago has its own entity that is directed and charged with the responsibility of promoting

tourism. It is the Tobago—when we had disbanded the Tourism Development Company, they have their own entity and they are the ones who would be driving it and presumably using a lot of their budget to do the things that needed to be done during that period.

Mr. Ratiram: I am not sure which line Item the Minister is speaking on.

Mr. Young: The same one you started off with, which was 27 where you said there was a 65,000 spend in 2019. And then it went up and then you flip the page. I was dealing with the first one at Item 27.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay, so I would like to continue.

Madam Chairman: So we are on at item 66?

Mr. Ratiram: Yeah, I would like to continue at Item 66 please? The Hosting of Conferences, Seminar and Other Function. 400,000 was utilized in 2020, Can the hon. Minister provide us with some details of how this 400,000 was spent, if not here, possibly in writing?

Hon. Webster-Roy: A breakdown would be provided in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Madam, I am back on line Item 27, Official Overseas Travel. Minister of National Security indicated that it would have been for some trade shows in terms of additional cruise ship liners coming to our country. Can the Minister then elaborate, based on these travels, how many additional cruise liners of flights would have been added to the Tobago tourism economy?

Hon. Webster-Roy: Well that would fall under a different line Item, eh. That would fall specifically under Tourism. When they have the trade shows here, this is when we have had the Chief Admin and the Office of the Chief Secretary will

accompany but in terms of the actual breakdown, that is a different line Item, that will come under Tourism.

Mr. Hosein: So when we get there we would—

Hon. Webster-Roy: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. The original Estimates in 2020 was \$60,000 and we saw a Revised Estimate of 320,000. So if the Minister can give us some clarity on this Revised Estimate for 2020 and then the subsequent 250,000, how it is expected to be utilized?

Madam Chairman:—to page 24. You all want to give this in writing or you all are in a position to answer?

Hon. Webster-Roy: We would provide it in writing.

Madam Chairman: Anything else, Member for Tabaquite? Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair, good morning everybody. I am at Item 43: Security Services on page 23. I know that there was an increase between the Revised Estimate and the Estimate of a significant amount of money. Can the Minister indicate what would have prompted this drastic increase in expenditure on Security Services?

Madam Chairman: He is on page 23, and I will ask all Members, it is very early in the day, and therefore our attention should be at the peak.

Mr. Imbert: The amounts are the same, so what is the question please?

Mr. Tancoo: Can you speak into the mike please?

Mr. Imbert: The amounts are the same so what is the question please?

Mr. Tancoo: The question, Sir, is that you budgeted \$200,000, which was more or less in line with what was the actual spend in 2019. You budgeted \$200,000 but your increased spend went to \$786,000. I am asking for clarification as to why that increase occurred.

Mr. Imbert: That information will be provided to you in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

10.15 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households. Division 02 - Office of the Chief Secretary. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 01, I would like to bring the Minister's attention to Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. I recognize from the actual spend of 2019 of 3.9 million, it has increased to 4.5 million. Has there been an increase in staff there?

Mr. Imbert: The Estimate in 2020 was 4.5, the Revised Estimate is 4.5 and the 2021 Estimate is 4.5. That kind of question should have been made last year.

Mr. Tancoo: If I may intervene?

Mr. Imbert: These are the Estimates for 2021. When you look at them, you will see the original Estimate for the previous fiscal was 4.5, the Revised Estimate for the previous fiscal was 4.5 and the current Estimate going forward is 4.5. You are asking about a fiscal year that is two years ago. That question should have been asked in the last Standing Finance Committee, last year.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, if I may. No, Minister, what I am asking—and it seems as though you maybe did not understand the question, so I am going to

repeat it again.

Mr. Imbert: I understand the question and I have answered you.

Mr. Ratiram: If I may finish, please, Minister. Please, can I finish?

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East, could you give the Member for Couva North an opportunity to make his point, and then you will have an opportunity to respond, if you think it is necessary. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. The only actual figures that we have in front of us are the 2019 actual figures. The figures for 2020 is only Revised Estimates that are in front of us, and the figures for 2021 that are in front of us is projected spend for the fiscal term. Based on the actual spend for 2019 of 3.9, we recognize 4.5 was estimated for 2020 and it was revised at the same 4.5. The question that I asked is if it is that there has been an increase in the head count that falls under this line Item, if more persons were hired?

Mr. Imbert: I repeat that the original 2020 was 4.5, the revised 2020 is 4.5 and the 2021 Estimate is 4.5. And, therefore, prima facie, there is no change in that Item for this fiscal from last year.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, can we get in writing the head count for 2019 and the head count for 2020 please?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Tancoo: Asked and answered, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: You are complete or you have?

Mr. Ratiram: Just one more.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 14: Remuneration to members of Cabinet-Appointed

Committees. It has been budgeted at 168,000. Can the hon. Minister provide us with a listing of the Cabinet committees and the members please?

Mr. Imbert: In writing, yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Public Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to bring the Minister's attention to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. This line Item was actual for 2019, 4.9 million and the 2020 Estimates and Revised Estimates was an increase to 5.8 million. Can the Minister provide us with the head count for 2019 and for 2020, please?

Mr. Imbert: Thanks a lot for not asking why it changed.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, I am not sure if I heard the answer to the question.

Mr. Imbert: The answer to the question is yes, and my comment which I believe, Madam Chairman, I am entitled to five minutes, was thanks for not asking a similar question as asked before.

Madam Chairman: I would take it as a compliment. And I would also say, while we all have five minutes on every intervention, let us keep the five minutes to matters that are relevant and cordial. Item 011: Planning. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Again, from the actually spend of 2019, there has been an increase from 993,000 to 1.5. Now, this increase could be as a result of increase in salaries. There was an increase in the salary that the officers were receiving or an increase in the head count. So, there are many different scenarios that can

contribute towards an increase and we would have liked to understand, what was the scenario that would have contributed to this increase? However, if the Minister cannot advise what contributed to the increase, then I would appreciate if he can provide the head count for 2019 and 2020 in writing.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, to avoid this question being asks on all 50 pages or whatever, of the Tobago House of Assembly Estimates, I will undertake to provide, in writing, for every single Head or Sub-Head or Sub-Item where this issue arises to provide the head count for 2019 and 2020, and I hope this will now pre-empt this repeated question in the next 50 pages.

Madam Chairman: Well, Minister, if it is one thing, I would say it would help with efficiency. Any other question, Member for Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: Just a supplemental to this.

Mr. Imbert: I will decline to answer that question again.

Mr. Ratiram: Just a supplemental to this first question. The undertaking that the Minister has just given, does that imply the Minister is not sure why there is an increase from the 2019 actual to the 2021 figures, and we are just using the head count to try and see if we could figure out why there is an increase?

Mr. Imbert: I decline to answer that question on the grounds that it is irrelevant.

Mr. Young: Madam Chair, maybe now might be a good time to intervene as well, just to remind my colleagues in the House about the law. There is a specific Act. The THA is a creature of statute. This administration has always worked with the THA within the parameters of that Act. There is a Schedule and Schedules to the Act that list out what the THA is in charge of, without interference from central government. So the THA is given a block Vote, annually, in accordance with a decision of an arbitration many decades ago, and that block Vote, is then up to

them as to how they apply it. They can shift around money without coming to central government because that is what the legislation sets out.

I recall interacting with the THA in pre-2015 with a Milshirv matter and having to record on affidavit, evidence before the court that the central UNC Government refused to take the telephone calls of the THA at the time. I am happy to say that that is no longer taking place here, and it is not for central government to be telling the THA how many workers they should have. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Imbert: I would also like to add, Madam, some clarity. From starting on page 98 and going to page 141, are the approved positions with respect to public officers on the establishment of the Tobago House of Assembly in every single one of its units, departments and divisions, there are 43 pages of posts. And, again, Madam Chair, it goes without saying that not every single one of these posts would have been filled in the 2020 or 2019 fiscal. And, therefore, in the 2020 fiscal, some vacant posts may have been filled which could lead to an additional expenditure on Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, because this refers to monthly-paid officers. So there is no sinister reason for this. This is a perfectly routine matter.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. This is just a quick response to the Member for Port of Spain North East? North West? Thank you. This conversation about interference, Madam Chair, I think really it is kind of out of place here, because what we are doing is examining the Estimates of expenditure and asking questions based on the Estimates to get clarity. It is not a question of central government interfering or telling the THA anything. It is an issue of accountability, and I think the Member knows that, because he has been part of this process for quite some time. So, I do not think it is right to give the public any kind inference that we are trying to interfere with anything in the THA. [*Desk thumping*]

Mr. Young: Madam Chair, as is typical style on the other side, a twist and a turn of the language that was used. The question that was asked of central government and directed at the Minister of Finance, was with specific respect to the number of contract positions. That is what I took offence to when they made the comment, when he said, he will have to provide it— “Oh, so you do know how many positions there are.” That is what I was responding to.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. If the Member for Port of Spain North/West St. Ann’s would be a lil bit—

Mr. Young: And I also take offence to the fact that they never on that side seem to know, even in the election, is Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West. They get that wrong. Yesterday they were referring to Morvant in a different way.

Mr. Tancoo: May I continue please?

Mr. Young: They do not know anything about—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: All right. So, Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann’s West and all Members, I think we should get back on track with respect to what the major substance of this exercise is. Okay? And maybe—[*Crosstalk*] Member, Member, Member, I am going to ask you to please regain your composure. We have a long day ahead of us, and if we go with the guidance of tolerance—and that applies to all Members, all right—while a certain amount of banter is allowed, we all have to respect each other. Okay? So Oropouche West, I am going to call upon you now. I am not going down the road with respect to the conversation about who knows, who do not know, what Act. That is settled. If you have a matter to raise now on the Estimates, I call upon you.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I thank you for your guidance and look forward to continued good banter from our side, asking questions and receiving

answers.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, let us move on, please. Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. We are at page 26. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I see the 2020 Estimate was 3.5 million, but the Revised Estimate is a little higher by 500,000. It is 4 million in the Revised Estimate.

Madam Chairman: What line Item? I am sorry.

Mr. Ratiram: My apologies. 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. Yes, the Estimate of 2020 was 3.5 and the Revised Estimate was 4 million. Based on the planning of the Estimate, it would be to satisfy the liabilities associated with this line Item. However, the Revised Estimates reflect that there was an increase and an overspending in this line Item. Can the Minister advise why the revised was more than what was estimated for?

Mr. Imbert: There was no overspending. The THA is renovating one of its buildings and, therefore, rented temporary accommodation. That is it.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Anything else, Member Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, supplemental. Thank you, Minister. I see in 2021, the Estimate is the same 4 million. So, is it that the temporary accommodation continues? And, can we get, in writing, the rental arrangement for this line Item?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Ms. Haynes: Madam Chair, thank you very much. I am at line Item 28: Other

Contracted Services. There is also a slight increase here, if the Minister can give us clarity as to what these Other Contracted Services are and what accounts for the increase?

Mr. Imbert: Just generally for the education of new Members, Other Contracted Services covers a wide range of services, including, legal fees and any form of goods and services that the department believes is appropriate. In this particular case, this was management services, maintenance, and upkeep of the buildings and other similar services.

10.30 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Cumuto/Manzanilla.

Dr. Ragbir: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and Other Functions, can you clarify the 420,000 expenditure compared to the 2020 Estimate in light of the COVID-19 pandemic with social distancing and gatherings?

Madam Chairman: Line Item?

Dr. Ragbir: Line 66.

Mr. Imbert: There is 420 in 66.

Dr. Ragbir: The expenditure was 1,420,000 and the 2020 Estimate was 1 million.

Mr. Imbert: Where are you seeing that?

Dr. Ragbir: Line 66.

Mr. Imbert: We are on 02, 66, page 28?

Dr. Ragbir: Page 26.

Mr. Imbert: You went back?

Madam Chairman: No, that is where we are at.

Mr. Imbert: Okay. During 2020 they had expenditure for the hosting and

commemorating of Tobago Day 2019/2020, celebrations of a number of national holidays such as Independence and Emancipation, a retreat for the Executive of the THA and Heads of Department, and other departmental conferences and seminars, and that is the expenditure in 2020. It will vary from year to year. Every year you would have a different arrangement, a different quantum of conferences, different type of conferences, different type of celebration, so it is not a static figure.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 19: Official Entertainment. The Official Entertainment spent for 2019 was 39,000, but during this trying economic time and with the advent of COVID it has increased in 2020 to 100,000, and the entire budget amount was utilized from the Estimates to the Revised Estimates. Can the Minister explain this line Item, please?

Mr. Imbert: We will see if we can get some details for you, but I do not think 100,000 on Official Entertainment in a fiscal year is significant. It is actually .02 per cent of the amount spent by the Leader of the Opposition when she was Prime Minister, .02 per cent.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, if I may—

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, if I may, I heard what the hon. Minister attempted to indicate, what I would like to let him know—

Mr. Imbert: Attempted to indicate? I have spoken facts.

Madam Chairman: Member—

Mr. Ratiram:—is that yesterday we sat here and we dealt—

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East, I would like to hear

what the Member for Couva North is saying. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, yesterday we sat here and we went through the regional bodies in Trinidad, the various regional corporations and we all participated in looking at the accounts where we saw significant reductions in most of the budget Items in some critical areas, like Materials and Supplies where regional corporations could not afford to buy tissue for their staff and staff had to go home; where they could not afford material for the patching of their roads and the cleaning of their watercourses, and we sat here and we all went through the accounts and we all had a greater appreciation for the difficult economic times. And what I am asking is there is an increase in Official Entertainment. It moved from 40,000 in 2019 to 100,000 in 2020, where half of the year the country was in lockdown, and for the Minister to say that it is no big thing to spend 100,000, I think that I would like to get some explanation on the line Item. [*Desk thumping*] Because during this—

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Firstly let me correct the record, and this is a habit of these new UNC Members. I did not say, “it was no big thing”, that is an untruth. That should be taken off the record. What I said was that 100,000 for an entire fiscal year for Official Entertainment for the Tobago House of Assembly pales into insignificance to the \$50 million spent by the UNC on the same figure. And—[*Crosstalk*] I did not interrupt anybody when they were speaking—if we go to the money spent on entertainment by UNC municipal corporations in the same fiscal year, it will be more than 100,000.

Madam Chairman: Any other questions? Okay, so we move on. Item 002: Information. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw to the Minister's attention the Short-term Employment, the Actual spend for this line Item in 2019 was 135,000, however, during these trying economic times and these difficult challenging times that we have this vote has increased to 350,000. Can the Minister advise why this significant increase to this line Item, and if it has anything to do with an upcoming election in Tobago?

Mr. Imbert: We will get some further details for you, but Short-term Employment is used primarily to engage temporary staff when permanent staff go on vacation, among other things. But we can get it.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Also Item 28: Other Contracted Services, it has increased from 165,000 to 200,000; 165,000 the Actual spend from 2019 to 200,000 for 2020. Again, can the Minister explain what this line Item entails, what the increase is for, and if it has any relation to do with the upcoming election to Tobago?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I would crave your indulgence to ask Members on the other side to pay attention. The Actual spend was 150,000 which is less than the 2019 Actual; 200,000 was the original Estimate, the Revised is 150,000. Please, pay attention. There has been no increase.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I would like to follow up with this, please, and I would like to tell the hon. Minister of Finance that he should in fact pay some attention, because the Actual spend and the only Actual figures that we have in front of us is the 2019 Actual figures, and that is 165,900. That is the Actual spend and it is not 150 as he is indicating. The Actual figure is one hundred and—
[Crosstalk] Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Members, one person has audience here right now and that is the Member for Couva North. Yes, Member.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. And if it is we are abusing the ears of Port of Spain—what it is?

Ms. Ameen: Ignore him.

Mr. Ratiram: Port of Spain/Laventille—[*Crosstalk*] Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Members, could we please reboot? All right? Every Member here must be rebooted so that we can go forward.

Ms. Haynes: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: The Member who has my audience is the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I just want us to help the hon. Minister with the figures—

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, if I may, please?

Ms. Ameen: Madam Chair—

Mr. Tancoo: The Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West just leaned across and suggested that racist comments are being made from Members on this side.

Ms. Ameen: He is calling people racist. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Young: I am not saying that.

Ms. Ameen: He said, "racist". He said it twice.

Mr. Young: I never said racist comments—

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West, I believe you were drawing something to my attention.

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am. The Member on two occasions thus far has leaned across and indicated that Members on this side of the House were—in fact, what he said is that we were making racist statements, we are racists.

Mr. Young: I am not saying that. [*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you. [*Crosstalk*] Member for—

Mr. Young: I did not say that. I said they were racist—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: Member for—

Mr. Hosein: Madam, there he goes again.

Mr. Tancoo: There you go.

Ms. Ameen: He is repeating—

Mr. Young: They do not understand English.

Madam Chairman: Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I have heard what the Member for Oropouche West had said, if indeed you have said such a thing, I would ask you to withdraw it. I said, if indeed you have said such a thing I have asked you with withdraw it.

Mr. Young: Withdraw saying what they are?

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair, Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Member for Port of Spain—

Mr. Young: Withdrawn, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Right. And Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, I think I will take this as a word of caution, I would suggest that maybe you take a little walk, reboot yourself and come back. [*Desk thumping*] And I really do not want any support from anybody. Okay? I think maybe that might help us, help all of us. I believe the Member for Diego Martin North/East has a matter to respond to.

Mr. Imbert: Yes. If we look at page 27, Sub-Head 002, Sub-Item 28: Other Contracted Services, one will see that the original Estimate for 2020 was 200,000 and that the Revised Estimate for 2020 is \$150,000. In no universe, Madam Chairman, in no world or no planet, in no country, in no town nor village or place can 150,000 be more than 200,000, therefore it is not true to say that there was an over expenditure in 2020, as the hon. Member has said. The Actual for 2019 is 165,900 and the Revised for 2020 is 150. That is not an increase; that is a reduction.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I did not say what the Minister is quoting me of saying. What I did in fact said, and I could specifically repeat what I said, is that the only Actual figure that we have in front of us for this line Item is for the year 2019; that figure is 165,900. That is the only Actual figure.

Madam Chairman: All right. The point you were showing—

Mr. Ratiram: There is an—

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: There is an increase from the Actual figure of 2019 to what is budgeted in 2021. What is budgeted is 200,000. If the hon. Minister could kindly explain—[*Crosstalk*]

Madam Chairman: One minute. We are now being asked this, all right, so let us hear. So you were saying, go on.

Mr. Ratiram: So if the hon. Minister could kindly explain what is the purpose for this increase from the Actual of 165,900 of 2019 to 200,000 of 2021?

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I see we are going to have a long day if Members

continue to try and confuse issues. The original 2020 Estimate was \$200,000, a flat figure. It was not a dollar figure, it was a flat \$200,000. If the Member looks at all the estimates in all thousands of pages we have here, you will see in many instances, in fact in most, it is a rounded off number. It is a flat estimate. It is simply an estimate. So that in 2020 the original Estimate was 200,000, the Revised Estimate is 150,000, all they have done in 2020 is to put back the original Estimate of 2020. There is no magic in any of this. The Member is trying to make a mountain out of a mole hill.

10.45 a.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Minister simply—

Mr. Imbert: I am not answering anymore questions on this.

Madam Chairman: Minister, you cannot say that. You cannot say that.

Mr. Ratiram: The hon. Minister simply cannot explain to me the reason for the increase that I have asked for on three times, so—

Mr. Imbert: There is no increase.

Mr. Ratiram:—can he kindly provide—

Madam Chairman: So Member for Couva North, my understanding is this, what the Minister has explained, whether it meets your full satisfaction—the Minister has explained that the \$200,000 that you see there in 2020 was an Estimate, and all the Tobago House of Assembly has done is used that same figure as a projection for 2021. That is all. So he is saying there is no increase. They have just used as the projection, the same figure. That is the answer you have got.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am guided by your explanation also.

Madam Chairman: No, I am not explaining, I am correcting that he did not answer; I am saying that is his answer.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay, I am guided by your correction, Madam Chair. And the projected figure that the Tobago House of Assembly, they would have submitted to the Ministry of Finance, for the Ministry of Finance to approve the submissions and place it in the 2021 budget. Can the hon. Minister then provide us with the detailed spend of this line Item? What were the contracted services and how much for the years 2019 and 2020?

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Public Administration.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to bring the hon. Minister's attention to Item 05: Telephones. The Actual spend in 2019 was 685, the Revised Estimate for 2020 was 900,000, similar to what was estimated for 2020 and similar to the figure being estimated for 2021. Can the hon. Minister indicate what was the reason for this increase in telephone expenses?

Mr. Imbert: I assumed they used the telephone more.

Madam Chairman: Minister. [*Laughter*] Member, do you have a follow-up question?

Mr. Ratiram: I will move on to another line Item. I would like to move to line Item 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. Again, this rental for 2019 was 1.581 million. The Revised Estimate for 2020 was 1.751, which happens to be the same figure as the 2020 Estimate and what is being estimated for 2021. So from what was Actual in 2019, there has been an increase in rental. Can the hon. Minister indicate if there is a new facility being rented, or if there has been a revise of the rates to the landlord?

Mr. Imbert: Yes to the first question, no to the second question.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister provide us a copy of the new lease agreement?

Mr. Imbert: “What you want?”

Madam Chairman: Excuse me, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: I am so sorry, Madam Chairman, I was just taken aback by the question. I will get the House of Assembly to provide appropriate details.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Item 16: Contract Employment. The Actual figure for 2019 is 1.2 million, and the Revised Estimate for 2020 happens to be 4 million, which was the same for the Estimate and the Estimate for 2021. Can the Minister indicate if it is that additional persons were recruited under this line Item, or if it is that there have been changes in the rates of employment?

Mr. Imbert: Yes to the first question, no to the second.

Mr. Ratiram: Would the Minister be able to provide the details of the new recruit?

Mr. Imbert: Sure. “Why yuh doh ask that one time instead of the long preamble?”

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance—Minister of Finance—and I am addressing you so, please. Minister of Finance, I think the governing rule—*[Crosstalk]* What I think I will give everybody a little time. Maybe we all had a very good breakfast, too much sugar. Okay?

Mr. Imbert: “I doh eat sugar.”

Madam Chairman: So—there are other things that spike the blood sugar too, if not sugar, carbohydrates. So I will say when we will resume, so we will be a little more productive. *[Pause]* Member for Oropouche East, you will tell me when we are ready to resume.

Dr. Moonilal: I am ready, Ma’am.

Madam Chairman: We are all ready? I expect we all now have invoked tolerance and respect. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 50: Housing Accommodation. I am seeing 1 million is budgeted there for Housing Accommodation. Can the hon. Minister explain what this 1 million, this Housing Accommodation is for and for whom?

Mr. Imbert: I would like to point out first that there was no increase in this Item from the Actual expenditure in 2019. I would like to make that point first. The second point I would like to make is that the original Estimate for 2020 was a million, the Revised Estimate for 2020 is a million, and the provision for 2021 is a million, and the expenditure in 2019 was 1.1 million. I would like to make those points. And then I can advise that the accommodation is for Immigration, Customs, Judiciary, Trinidad and Tobago Police Service housed in several parts of Tobago including Montgomery, Bloody Bay, Charlotteville, Tobago Plantations, Carnbee, Buccoo, Grange, Signal Hill, Lambeau and Plymouth.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Asked and answered.

Mr. Ratiram: I would like to move to the other page, line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. The Revised Estimate for 2020 was 455,000. Can the hon. Minister advise what this 455,000 was used for?

Madam Chairman: We are at page 28, 02, Item 66: Hosting of Conferences. That is why we all have to be tolerant with each other. The writing on these pages is very small and the pages tend to mimic themselves, each other.

Mr. Imbert: This is a divisional department of the THA, the Tobago Emergency Management Agency. First I would like to point out that the Revised Estimate for 2020 is half of the original budget Estimate of 200,000, and the 2021 Estimate is even half of that at \$50,000. We will get the details for you.

Mr. Ratiram: I think the Minister is in the wrong place. I would like to bring him back to the correct place.

Madam Chairman: Minister, if I understood what you said, you said it is a division of TEMA. We are not at TEMA as yet. We are at Public Administration, page 28. So it is above the TEMA. It is 66.

Mr. Imbert: Comments would be the same, that the Revised Estimate is lower than the original, and the 2021 Estimate is a quarter, or even a fifth of the original 2020, and we will get the details for you.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: So we now go on to TEMA. Item 008: Tobago Emergency Management Agency. Item 010: Information Systems Department.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I want to speak on Item 008, Item 08: Rent/ Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, on page 28. There is a new—

Madam Chairman: We have left TEMA, we are now on Information Systems Department.

Mr. Ratiram: My hand was up, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: No, no. I saw when your hand went up. Your hand went up under Information Systems Department.

Ms. Haynes: I am at line Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. The Actual spend was \$932 in 2019, but then we saw an Estimate of 80,000 and a subsequent spend in 2020 of \$70,000. Now, while I appreciate that the Estimate for 2021 is lower at 40,000, could the Minister account for the spend, the \$70,000 spend in 2020 and what we anticipate the 40,000 will be used for in 2021?

Mr. Imbert: Are we on page 29, 010/62?

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Imbert: So where did this \$900,000 come from?

Madam Chairman: No, the Member said 932.

Mr. Imbert: Well, the figure in 2020 again was lower than—revised is lower than the original, and the 2021 is substantially lower. Would you like it to be more?

Ms. Haynes: I actually said all of those things you repeated.

Mr. Imbert: Would you like it to be more?

Ms. Haynes: No, I would not like it to be more. I would like for you to explain what the \$70,000 in 2020 was spent on, given that only \$932 was spent in 2019. That was my question.

Mr. Imbert: We will get that for you. I mean, it is the Information Systems Department, why should it not do publicity and printing?

Ms. Haynes: Minister of Finance, if you look through all of these divisions, there is a Promotions, Publicity, Printing line Item for all, including a communications unit that we will get to. So it is not that this is just the remit of the Information Systems Department. So that is where my question arose from.

Mr. Imbert: It is not where my point arose from.

Ms. Haynes: Well, I am not sure what your point is.

Mr. Imbert: I am saying this is the Information Systems Department, so why should it not do promotion and publicity?

Ms. Haynes: Yes, that is IT, Minister, like Mi-Fi. This is IT, not comms. Information does not mean communication in this instance, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: So they should not advertise their website? They should not advertise online services? They should not advertise e-commerce?

Ms. Haynes: Yes, but they spent \$932 in 2019, and then spent \$70,000 in 2020, and that is where my question came from.

Mr. Imbert: Because we are going to an online digital government, that is why.

Ms. Haynes: Yes, but online is cheaper in advertising, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: Not only that, during 2020, we had COVID-19, which you apparently failed to remember.

Ms. Haynes: Yes, well, that is my point.

Mr. Imbert: You have no point.

Ms. Haynes: Minister, I think the technology is evading you.

Madam Chairman: All right. So Minister of Finance and Member for Tabaquite, we will halt a bit. I think the request is for the details, okay? Sometimes we have to be careful in our responses because a Member has a right to ask in this exercise, and therefore the response could be as helpful as we can be, rather than it appearing to be some sort of reflection on the Member. So we proceed. We live and we learn.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 12: Materials and Supplies. Again, the Actual spend for 2019 was 169,000, and there has been an increase to 260,000. Can the Minister kindly explain this increase here in Materials and Supplies?

11.00 a.m.

Mr. Imbert: Details will be provided but I am—

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert:—quite incredulous over a question of a \$30,000 expenditure by the IT department. What do you expect them to do? Spend \$10?

Madam Chairman: No. Minister of Finance, the point might be serious but I think the way how the point is put forward, we cannot say “what we expect them to do, spend \$10”. Okay? So let us try to contain those aspects of our

responses going forward. I will control the questions, and once I allow the question, I will also control the answer. Member for Couva North, are you finished?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Item 011, Planning. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to bring the Minister's attention to Item 16: Contract Employment. The actual spend for 2019 was 1.8 million. The 2020 Revised Estimates was 2 million, same as the Estimate and the same figure is being proposed for 2021. Can the Minister advise if additional persons have been recruited under this line Item?

Mr. Imbert: That will be provided in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. If I may continue, Madam?

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 43: Security Services. There the actual figure for 2019 was \$418,810. This figure has increased to 575,000 in the 2020 Revised Estimates and in the 2021 Estimates. Can the hon. Minister provide an explanation for this increase, please? Increase in rates?

Mr. Imbert: I just said that.

Mr. Ratiram: I did not hear you clearly.

Mr. Imbert: Sorry. You did not hear.

Mr. Ratiram: Your apology is accepted.

Mr. Imbert: Cool.

Madam Chairman: I think we are getting somewhere.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I would like to move on to Item 66, please,

Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. The Revised Estimates for 2020 was 150,000. Can the hon. Minister explain what were the conferences, seminars and functions that were hosted during 2020?

Mr. Imbert: Annual Statistics Day.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Item 012: Land Management; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Information; Item 007: Public Administration; Item 008: Tobago Emergency Management Agency; Item 010: Information Systems Department; Item 011: Planning; Item 012: Land Management; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. We are at page 31. Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. And the Non-Profit Institutions, if the Minister can provide in writing the list of institutions which the transfers and subsidies goes to, we would appreciate it, please.

Mr. Imbert: We have a list, we will provide it to you.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 007—sorry. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 05, Shaw Park Cultural Complex. From the estimated figure in 2020 it was 650,000 but the Revised Estimates is almost twice at 1.1 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate why the Revised Estimates was above what was estimated for?

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Anything else?

Mr. Ratiram: No. 007: Households. I am okay.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So Item 007: Households. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 40: Gratuities to Contract Officers. There is an estimated figure there for 2021 of \$3 million. Can the Minister advise how many contract officers are to receive this gratuity?

Mr. Imbert: 177 contract officers received gratuity in 2020 and it is estimated that approximately 100 will receive contract gratuities in 2021.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 03: Urgent Temporary Assistance. In 2020, 500,000 is the Revised Estimate from 1 million. I am asking the Minister to account for what goes under this spend under Urgent Temporary Assistance?—since we are allocating 650,000 in 2021.

Mr. Imbert: COVID relief.

Ms. Haynes: The extra 150,000 for COVID relief in fiscal 2021, Minister?

Mr. Imbert: I think just said that.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Divisions 03: Finance and the Economy. We are at page 33. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, there is an increase in Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance from 800,000 in 2019 to 1 million in 2020 and in 2021. Can the hon. Minister advise if it is that additional

persons have been recruited or if it is that the rates have been varied?

Mr. Imbert: We will provide that information in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. And the specifics related to the position, if it is a new recruit? Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Finance and Accounting. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. There is an increase from 10.9 million to 11.65 million in this line Item. Can the Minister also provide an explanation for the increase?

Madam Chairman: Okay. If I am not mistaken and I think the Minister had said with respect to Salaries and COLA that he undertakes to provide details for all these Votes, these specific Votes in respect of number of employees, rates and so on. So what I would suggest is, Member for Couva North, if you wish, you would just point out and say, you expect that this is included in the undertaking, just to ensure that your concern is highlighted but the Minister has undertaken for all of those Votes of Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Okay? Minister, I am correct?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. Anything else under this Item? Item 003: Customs. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like to point out Item 01, there is an increase from 76,000 to 200,000, so if the Minister could also include the details.

Madam Chairman: Anything else under 003?

Mr. Ratiram: 03: Overtime Monthly-Paid Officers, the overtime for 2019 actual was 5 million. The overtime for 2020 Estimates and the Revised Estimates is close, 5.1 million, and the same is being proposed again for 2021, 5.1 million. Is there any kind of management solution being put in place to manage the overtime in this division?

Mr. Imbert: The issues of the Customs service, not just in Tobago but in Trinidad, is that customers request and quite often demand that Custom officers present themselves 24 hours a day seven days a week for the clearance of goods usually with respect to goods that are imported by way of air transportation. Customs has to balance between expenditure on overtime and providing ease of doing business for its customers and therefore, there will always be overtime required. If Customs were to be strict and say they will work from 8.00 to 4.00, I can ensure you that there will be a howl of protests from courier companies and other shippers probably promoted by members of the UNC that protest.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, the salaries for this division is 200,000 but the Overtime—the salaries is 01 and the overtime is 03. The salaries is 200,000 but the overtime is 5.1 million. I am simply suggesting that some management solution can be considered to facilitate a reduction in this overtime so that the rates being paid to the workers and the workers also will not have to work additional long, hard hours but will have standard working hours so that we will get a lot more value for money plus it will be less stressful on the employees if we reduce the overtime requirement for these employees.

Mr. Imbert: I have just made the point that you have to strike a balance

between expenditure and availability. And one of the complaints about Trinidad and Tobago, and I mentioned this in budget statement is that there are issues with respect to the ease of doing business where our ranking in the world and the time taken to perform certain tasks is not acceptable. It is very unusual for a government to declare that the time it takes to obtain government services or to complete a transaction is unacceptable, that is very unusual, that is a bold move on our part to make the point that it takes so many days to complete a particular transaction in a government department.

It is counterintuitive for a Member to say that Customs officers should work regular working hours and not make themselves available after regular working hours to deal with imports and exports, when the mode of transportation—you cannot tell a plane when to land, you cannot tell a ship when to arrive and it is wrong to tell the people of Tobago that Customs officers in Tobago should work from 8.00 to 4.00, so if the plane arrives [*Crosstalk*] at 5.00—Madam Chairman, I did not interrupt anybody. Madam Chairman, I am seeking your protection. I interrupted no one. May I continue? Thank you. It is wrong for Members on the other side to tell the people of Tobago that Customs officers in Tobago must work 8.00 to 4.00, so if an item arrives on a plane at five minutes past 4.00 you have to wait until the next day. That is just plain wrong, and this Government is going to make sure there is ease of doing business in Trinidad and in Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Member, is it the same point? I think the point has been made and answered. You have asked for management solutions, and I think what the Minister has explained that because it is Customs and trade the

management solutions are restricted.

Mr. Ratiram: Two things that I did not say and I would really like to correct the record on a supplemental. Thank you. And his exact words he said that in my contribution I made the statement for Customs officers to and I quote, “not make themselves available”. Madam Chair, I never said that. He said that I suggested they work only 8.00 to 4.00. Madam Chair, I never said that. What I did in fact say was, the regular working hours which they are scheduled to work, if it is a management solution can be put in place so that these Customs officers will not have to be called upon to go way beyond the call of duty to work extra hours so that the overtime rate now at \$5 million, we can address that situation. Madam Chair, if it is we take the salaries, the entire salary complement here is 200,000, is the Vote for the salary. And if it is—

11.15 a.m.

Madam Chairman: Member. Member for Couva North, I am not going to let us rehash that ground. The point has been made, I think extremely clear. You made a comparison between overtime and salaries, and from your point of view it is a disproportionate relationship. You have asked whether there are management solutions to bring this down. The Minister of Finance has in a very detailed way said, look, management solutions may be that people work strict hours, there will be a problem with servicing their customers. Because, from what he said, you do not tell a plane when to land, you do not tell a boat when to come. I think on both sides you all have exhausted the issue and I suggest we move on to another Item. You have corrected the record in terms of whatever was said, and I ruled we have spent enough time on this, we go on.

Mr. Imbert: He did not correct the record.

Madam Chairman: He corrected the record in terms of what he felt he said. Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: No, Madam Chair, I am way ahead of you so I will wait until we get to that line Item.

Madam Chairman: Where are you, Member?

Ms. Haynes: Are we still on Customs?

Madam Chairman: We are still on Customs.

Ms. Haynes: Okay no, I will have to wait.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 004: Inland Revenue. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like to highlight line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 013: Cooperatives. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 22: Short-term Employment. Now, while the Estimates have stayed the same from 2020 into 2021, it is a significant increase from the 2019 Actual spend, so we have moved from actually spending 94,000 in 2019, to a Revised Estimate of 800,000 in 2020. Could the Minister advise how many potential employees are under this Short-term Employment space?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I must object. I said on any Item that deals with employment, I will provide details of the number of persons employed. Every one! I said that already.

Madam Chairman: So for our understanding, that would be Salaries and C.O.L.A. That would be Short-term Employment and Contract Employment, and if there are wages that would be Wages, if there are wages. Okay? So we are all clear

on that. Thank you.

Ms. Haynes: No problem.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would just like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation. There is a new Sub-Item here for \$14.5 million. Can the Minister kindly explain what this new Sub-Item is?

Mr. Imbert: That is lease payments for the building that is now occupied by— what department? The Licensing Department and the Division of Food Production, Forestry and Fisheries located on Shirvan Road, Tobago.

Mr. Ratiram: And can Minister provide copies of the new lease agreement for this building?

Mr. Imbert: That is the Milshirv building, which has been the subject of litigation and a lot of commentary in this House for many, many years. It is a BOLT, built/own/lease/transfer arrangement. It has been litigated and has been the subject of debates, Motions, Matters on the Adjournment in this House for more than five years, maybe 10.

Madam Chairman: Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Finance and Accounting. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I will just like to highlight Item 05. Again, there has been an increase here from 1.38 million to 1.5 million in the Telephones. Perhaps maybe more telephone calls as the Minister has indicated. The rent/lease Item 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage, Actual

2019, 34,000. This has increased to 135,000. Can the Minister advise if there is a new lease agreement here, and if so, would he be able to provide copies of it please?

Mr. Imbert: I will find out what the situation is and provide the information, whatever is relevant and appropriate.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 23: Fees. The Actual spent was 372, there has been an increase to 400,000. Can the Minister provide copies of the fees that were paid out for 2019 and 2020?

Mr. Imbert: I would provide whatever information is available and relevant and appropriate.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 43: Security Services. This line Item has increased from 2019, a figure of 1.9 million to 2.3 million. Can the Minister advise what is the reason for this increase?

Mr. Imbert: The Assembly took on some additional firms to provide additional security services.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister kindly provide us with copies of those additional contracts?

Mr. Imbert: I will provide whatever information is available, relevant and appropriate.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Customs. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: I would just like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 16: Contract Employment, from 291,000—

Madam Chairman: Contract Employment, the details will be provided.

Mr. Ratiram: Provided.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I said that about four times. That is why they

cannot get a single vote in Tobago.

Madam Chairman: Member. Member for Diego Martin North/East. *[Interruption]* Member for Diego Martin North/East, and I did not call upon you to say anything. I said it. All right, let us go on. *[Interruption]* Member for Diego Martin North/East, I would like us to get on with this. Okay? And you know, the point about it is that you are an integral part of this process so I expect you to cooperate so that we could be productive.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, Madam.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Thank you very much. Item 004: Inland Revenue; Item 008, Budget Division; Item 012: Consumer Affairs. Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would just like to draw the Minister's attention to the increase of line Item 16, from 984,000 to 1 million, and I would like the details please.

Madam Chairman: All you will do is draw your attention to 16, and we will put—come on. Okay? We move on. Item 013: Co-operatives; Item 015: Financial Literacy Secretariat; Item 016: Youth Energised for Success. We are at page 38. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to Item 16: Contract Employment for 2020. It was budgeted at 560—

Mr. Imbert: Please! Please! This is a travesty.

Madam Chairman: Member. Member for Couva North, I have already ruled that the way we will do that, you will just point out Item 16, and we will move on. All right? Because, Member for Couva North we have already got the undertaking that

all the details regarding employment Votes will be supplied. Okay? The books— are these books not public knowledge?

Mr. Imbert: They are published on the Ministry of Finance website.

Madam Chairman: All right. So, it is there available to everybody. All right. I think in the interest of efficiency, we need to approach this exercise in a particular way. All right. You have any other matter you would like to raise?

Mr. Ratiram: Well, Madam Chair, for this line Item, the variance between what was actually budgeted for in 2020 versus what the Revised Estimate was, is rather significant.

Madam Chairman: Would you not want the details?

Mr. Ratiram: What I would appreciate is if the hon. Minister can provide us here this morning with some sort of reasoning for the significant increases that we are seeing before us.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, let me just say what my understanding is of what I have seen played out here today. The Minister—this is not the Minister's Ministry. This is the Tobago House of Assembly. The functionary who presents here is a Minister. So, the Chief Secretary of the Tobago House of Assembly or the Accounting Officers of the Tobago House of Assembly, who may be positioned to give the details you wish, are not the persons here to answer the questions. So, the Minister is functionary, and he has explained under this particular Vote that he has recognized that you may have an overarching difficulty with, he would obtain the details. So I would think it is not in our interest of efficiency to ask for details for something he has already conceded he is not in a position to give the details, but that the details will be provided in writing. That is my understanding of what I have seen played out here today. Okay? Item 017: Emergency Social and Medical

Assistance Unit; Item 018: Communication Unit. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like to draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that there is the Communication Unit which is fundamentally different from an Information Services Unit, as previously discussed. The Promotions, Publicity and Printing, line Item 62 here, is a spend of \$878,000, which is consistent from the Estimates 2020. But we would just like, given that each Unit herein has an expenditure for Promotions, Publicity and Printing, can we get the specific responsibilities of the Communication Unit in this regard?

Mr. Imbert: Certainly, but it is irrelevant that this is not general communications and it is IT. Each department must advertise. And with respect to the peculiar challenges of COVID-19 there is an even greater requirement for all Departments of Government, whether in Trinidad or in Tobago, to advertise e-services and to encourage people to use electronic services. And therefore, they must put advertisements in the newspapers, on Facebook, on the electronic media and so on. One would expect a greater expenditure on Promotions, Publicity and Printing during COVID, because of the fact that there are public health restrictions that require physical distancing. It is a sine qua non.

Ms. Haynes: Across all Departments as opposed to having it—

Mr. Imbert: Yes! Yes!

Ms. Haynes: I am not finished with my question, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: “Buh I answer you.”

Ms. Haynes: “Buh how yuh could answer” the question if you did not hear it?

Madam Chairman: Member.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Diego Martin North/East. Yes, Member for Tabaquite.

11.30 a.m.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. So given the Minister's answer, would it not have been more prudent to have a streamline approach since all the communications coming out would have to be the same since the public health rules are the same across the board, as opposed to having each department publish the same rules in the same media houses or the same time and spending the money inefficiently, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: No, the answer is no. Each department would have its own protocols and have its own requirements. The physical distancing and the electronic services—

Ms. Haynes: Minister of Health, could you come in here and tell us for each department—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, Madam Chairman, I did not interrupt anybody.

Madam Chairman: Please proceed.

Mr. Imbert: Without interruption, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: Please proceed.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. Each department would have their own unique needs for communication. It is not a one size fits all. That is why you "cyar" win a seat in Tobago.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North. Minister of Planning and Development.

Mrs. Robinson-Regis: Could I just indicate that these various departments are not equivalent to, but it is similar to having a Ministry. Each Ministry would determine its promotions, its publications and so on. It is a similar arrangement. So that is

why each one would have promotions, publications, it is a similar situation.

Ms. Haynes: Was just in respect to the answer given from the information system versus the communications unit. It is the same as opposed to different units. So he was referring to the Information Systems Unit as promoting the COVID-related information.

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Chairman, may I come in here please? Messages in general or messages for COVID have to be audience specific. What you tell young persons is totally different to what you would tell the elderly. How you communicate with the tourism sector in Tobago is totally different to how you would communicate with the non-tourism sector. With COVID is not a one message, one size fits all. While there is an overarching message to comply with Public Health Regulations, you have to have targeted messages to targeted audiences to have the best effect. So I fully support what the Minister of Finance has said.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much. Member for Tabaquite, do you have another matter you wish to raise?

Ms. Haynes: No.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like to bring the Minister's attention to line Item 28: Other Contacted Services.

Madam Chairman: That would be covered by the details—

Mr. Ratiram: The details will be supplied in writing.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 019: Economic Management Unit; Item 020:

Investment and Public/Private Partnership Unit. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 17: Training. There was not anything spent in 2019 for training. There were no activities there. During our COVID time in 2020, 463,000 was spent towards this training. Can the Minister advise what this training was and when it was executed? If not here, I am willing to accept it in writing.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, as I indicated in the budget statement, as we move forward we are going to try and involve the private sector in the provision of certain public services and therefore there is a need for training. And that should be obvious.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I am very concerned having sat here yesterday and listened to the cuts and decrease in budget for our regional bodies throughout Trinidad, understanding that we are in some financial trying times. But when I see Other Contracted Services, line Item 28, increasing from 9.89 to 2 million, more than doubling its figures, whereas the opposite happened to the regional bodies throughout, I would really like if the Minister can provide us with some kind of explanation and reasoning or perhaps what trend of thought, what policy was used to apply for the justification of the increases that we are seeing here versus the opposite yesterday.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, let me make two points. Firstly the overall allocation for the Tobago House of Assembly, as has occurred with virtually every other Head of Expenditure, has been reduced in 2021 in keeping with our stringent financial situation. For the benefit of the Member opposite who apparently has not read the documents, if one goes to page 21 one will see that the 2021 Estimates for

the Tobago House of Assembly represents a reduction of \$106 million over 2020. So it is wrong to say that everybody else in the municipal corporations get a cut but the Tobago House of Assembly get an increase. That is just wrong, [*Desk thumping*] it is misleading and it is untrue.

And secondly, I have made the point, I have made the point that we are encouraging the private sector to get more involved in the provision of particular public services and therefore there will be a requirement for increased expenditure in 2021 and beyond on this Item of expenditure which is investment and public/private partnership unit. It is obvious that if this is a focus, just like agriculture, we say agriculture is a focus so we put an extra 500 million. This is a focus for the Government, public/private partnership, so obviously there would be more money allocated. But the overall budget is less. So somewhere else has lost money. Common sense.

Madam Chairman: Item 021: Strategic Sector Support Unit. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, again I would like to point the Minister's attention to Item 16: Contract Employment, there has been a significant increase there from the actual of 2019. So if he can provide us with that detail also.

Mr. Imbert: This is a repeated travesty.

Madam Chairman: Just now, one minute. Member for Couva North, [*Crosstalk*] Minister of Finance and Minister of Planning and Development. Minister of Finance and Minister of Planning and Development, if you all will give me an opportunity to speak, please. Member for Couva North, I advised repeatedly, we will approach the overarching concern which you have in a particular way, okay.

So I will allow you say, "I highlight Item 16" or "line Item 16" rather than going through the same process because you already know that the standing response to that that you have already got is that they are going to be dealt with in details. Okay? And I would like you to abide by this ruling. All right?

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair, and that is specifically what I did, I draw the Minister's attention to line Item 16: Contract Employment and let us move on, if we could move on to the other line Item?

Madam Chairman: No, no, I will decide that we move on. Okay. No, no, please. I will decide that we move on. There is no need for any comment after that. Member for Tabaquite. Member for Tabaquite, you do not have a question? Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would just like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 22: Short-term Employment.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Finance and Accounting; Item 003: Customs; Item 004: Inland Revenue; Item 008: Budget Division; Item 012: Consumer Affairs; Item 013: Cooperatives; Item 015: Financial Literacy Secretariat. We are at page 42; Item 016: Youth Energized for Success; Item 017: Emergency, Medical and Social Assistance Unit; Item 018: Communications Unit; Item 019: Economic Management and Research Unit. We are now at page 43, Item 020: Investment and Public/Private Partnership Unit; Item 021: Strategic Sector Support Unit. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to Item 01: Contribution to Non-Profit Organization. The

actual spent for 2019 was 124,000. However, this increased in 2020 to 1 million and has remained at 1 million. Can the Minister advise if there is any reason for the explanation?

Mr. Imbert: The THA has agreed to provide support to nine non-profit organizations.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. Can the Minister provide the details of the nine non-profit organizations and what is being ordered to them?

Mr. Imbert: I will provide whatever is available, relevant and appropriate.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 03, there is an increase if the Minister can provide the reason for the increase from the 2019 to where we are at present.

Mr. Imbert: That is pension benefits. That is a complete answer.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item—anything else Member for Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: Item 40: Gratuities to Contract Officers. They are estimated for 2 million there. Can the Minister advise how many contract officers?

Mr. Imbert: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Ratiram: I did not hear.

Mr. Imbert: Pardon?

Mr. Ratiram: I did not hear the Minister's response.

Mr. Imbert: "Ahh", you could talk a lot but you "cyah" hear. Forty-two!

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Sir.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 26: Project Financing Repayment. For 2020 the Estimate was 18 million and the Revised Estimate was 23.3 million. Can the Minister advise the reason for that increase?

Mr. Imbert: That particular line Item was used for the payment for Milshirv which is now gone into another line Item in 2021.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 20—

Mr. Imbert: The 2021 figure is much lower, at 5 million.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Imbert: If you read the comment, the answer to your question is there, in the comments and the explanation.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 28: Establishment of an Intelligent Island. The actual spent for this line Item was nil in 2019. Can the Minister indicate a little more into what this line Item entails?

Mr. Imbert: Madam, the other side is that they keep rotating Members and changing Members. If the Member had been here before he would have heard about this in the last budget exercise. It is a new Item that appeared in the 2020 Estimates. That is why there was no expenditure in 2019 and it simply is providing Internet services and other similar services, ICT services throughout Tobago so that you could get access to public Wi-Fi in various parts of Tobago, free public Wi-Fi and so on. We went into detail in the last Standing Finance Committee when you were not here about that. It is a pity you were not here.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche East.

11.45 a.m.

Dr. Moonilal: Madam Chair, please, I have heard the Minister on several occasions raise issues about new Members and not understand. May I remind him,

Madam Chair, if he is aware— My question is: If he is aware that this is a new Parliament? This is not a continuation of anything. And even the Minister of Finance could have been a new person, a new man so to speak, Madam Chair. But this is not a continuation and I think it is not wise, and it is bad. It is terrible that the Minister is referring to people as new and not understanding process and not knowing. Everybody is assumed to be new when we start our Twelfth Parliament.

Mr. Imbert: I am not new, neither are you.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance.

Dr. Moonilal: I wish it—

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche, Minister of Finance. I want to thank the Member for Oropouche for his intervention. Minister of Finance, I am sure, like all of us, we welcome youth which shows the continuation of life, and therefore, as I said to all of us we need tolerance. Even for us oldies, we need to exercise tolerance. Okay? And that is the end of the discussion. Item? Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I cannot hear you because down there is grumbling.

Madam Chairman: Pointe-a-Pierre, I am hearing you.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister line Item same 28, the Intelligent Island. We spent so far on the Revised 3 million in 2020. Could you give an account of what percentage of coverage of the island that the 3 million was catered for?

Mr. Imbert: I will provide as much information as I can get from the House of Assembly. I too would like to know that.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so we move on. Division 04: Food Production, Forestry and Fisheries. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 45. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Agriculture. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: I would just like to draw the Minister's attention to the increases in line Items 01 and 02 from the actual figure of 2019 to 2021.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. Anything else? Any other matter?

Mr. Ratiram: The allowances also for daily-rated workers, the actual allowances for 2019 and the figure for 2021. There is a significant disparity there in line Item 30.

Madam Chairman: So you want details there? So that again has to do—remember we say anything that is wages, salaries, overtime will be covered. Okay?

Mr. Imbert: For the record, the Member is consistently putting misinformation into the public domain. There is no disparity. The original Estimate is 400, the Revised Estimate is 400, and the 2021 Estimate is 400. The 2019 figure is irrelevant. Constantly putting misinformation into the system.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you for the opportunity, Madam Chair, to clarify. I am not placing any misinformation, however I am simply highlighting the figures in front of us. In 2019, the actual figure was 39,000.

Madam Chairman: So—all right. *[Interruption]* Okay. We have heard the point that you want details to justify this 400,000. Yes? Let us move on please. Item 003: Marketing. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Again, I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 1 and line Item 2, the increases and await the details.

Madam Chairman: One and two, one for three also?

Mr. Ratiram: There is not an increase in Item 3, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. All right. So we move on. Item 004: Natural Resources and Forestry. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 01; 02; 29.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman—

Madam Chairman: Item—

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chair, I made a commitment that we will provide the information requested for all. There is no need for the Member to ask—are all, all, all, all. There is no need as we go through each Division for him to ask on every one.

Madam Chairman: And Member for Diego Martin North/East, I have said that I would allow the Member to say that he expects the undertaking to apply.

Mr. Imbert: And, Madam Chairman, I am asking for your indulgence. I am giving the undertaking for every single Item related to employment in all Divisions of the Tobago House of Assembly—every single one. And therefore, I respectfully say there is no need when we get to the Item in all the other 50 pages to say line Item this and line Item that. I am respectfully asking accept my undertaking, every single Item of employment the information will be provided, and therefore, there is no need to refer to it.

Madam Chairman: And Member for Diego Martin North/East, what I would say is, I will give the Member the opportunity to say he expects the undertaking to apply in the category.

Mr. Imbert: All, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman: And we do not doubt that. We do not doubt that at all. Okay?

So we move on. Item 005: Marine Resources and Fisheries. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to bring the Minister's attention to line Item 17: Training. In 2019 the actual figure for this line Item was 37,000, however the Revised Estimate of 2020 was 90,000. Can the hon. Minister provide us the details on this training please?

Mr. Imbert: Just give me a minute before I respond, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, there are nine Divisions in the House of Assembly. I will read them out if you do not mind:

Finance and the Economy;
 Food Production, Forestry and Fisheries;
 Tourism, Culture and Transportation;
 Education, Innovation and Energy;
 Community Development;
 Enterprise Development and Labour;
 Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment;
 Health Wellness and Family Development;
 Settlements, Urban Renewal and Public Utilities; and
 Sport and Youth Affairs.

And there are two other Items which we dealt with, which are Legislature and Office of the Chief Secretary.

I hereby give an undertaking that with respect all Items relating to employment in all those nine Divisions I just listed and all Items of training, I would provide the particulars required, and I respectfully ask that I am not asked about Items of employment and training in any of these nine Divisions again.

Madam Chairman: So it applies to training, contract employment, salaries and wages, short-term employment. Okay? So that there an undertaking that details will be provided for each of those Votes in each of the Divisions. That is understood?

Mr. Imbert: '19 and '20, yes

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Okay? All right. So can we move on? Yes?

Mr. Ratiram: Just one more.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and Other Functions. During 2020—

Mr. Imbert: It is the same undertaking for conferences, seminars, et cetera—

Hon. Member: He did not say that.

Mr. Imbert:—in all Divisions. All.

Madam Chairman: No, no, this is a new undertaking. This is a new undertaking, so that as far as—

Mr. Ratiram: Can we get the same for other—

Mr. Imbert: I would provide all relevant details for 2019 and 2020 with respect to actual expenditure, the estimated expenditure, the revised expenditure for hosting of conferences, seminars and other functions because it is repeated throughout the Divisions. I will give those details as well for all Divisions.

Madam Chairman: Thank you. So we go on to —

Mr. Lee: Madam Chair, can we get the same undertaking for 28 and 27 also?

Mr. Imbert: Yes. That will be so nice so you would not ask.

Madam Chairman: 28, 27, 66, 17, 01, 02, 29. Okay? We are on to Item 00—

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Couva—

Mr. Ratiram: Item 23, if I may or do we have the same undertaking for Item 23?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Madam Chairman: No, no, no.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, he asked me a question. I said yes.

Madam Chairman: No, no.

Mr. Imbert: How you could say no?

Madam Chairman: One minute please. This is Fees? [*Interruption*] You cannot take back your undertaking. It has already been taken. So we have quite a number Votes here. Can we go on now to Item 002: Agriculture. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to bring the Minister's attention to line Item 09: Rent/lease, Vehicles and Equipment. There was not any spend here for 2019, however in 2020 and 2021 you have 200,000. Can the hon. Minister indicate what the increase from 2019 to 2020, and 2021 signifies?

Mr. Imbert: I am told they had to rent some agricultural vehicles, tractors, for the clearing of land and so on.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Marketing. Member for Couva North. We are at pages 48 and 49.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, Madam Chair. Line Item 21: Repair and Maintenance of Buildings. In 2019 we utilized 11,000 as the actual spend, however there is an increase of 100,000 in the 2021 budget. Can the hon. Minister indicate the reason

for the increase from 2019?

Mr. Imbert: We would provide that in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. I would to move on to Item 37: Janitorial Services. In 2019 it 60,000 and it has increased to 400,000. Is there a new janitorial contract in place; is there additional workers? I am not sure what this line Item is utilized for, if it is to pay a contract or to pay workers?

Mr. Imbert: Well, the difference between the 2020 original and the 2020 revised is only \$20,000. It is not significant. I do not see the point.

Mr. Ratiram: I think the Minister is—

Madam Chairman: No, no, no, wrong Item, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: It is not 37?

Madam Chairman: Item 37. You are looking at Security.

Mr. Imbert: I am sorry, I am looking at the other one.

Madam Chairman: You see, that is why I say tolerance for all of us, oldies and newbies.

Mr. Imbert: No, I am sorry. The information will be provided.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair. That is it for this Item.

Madam Chairman: Excuse me?

Mr. Ratiram: That is it for this line Item.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So we are at Item 004: Natural Resources and Forestry. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Item 05: Telephone. The actual spend in 2019 was 67,000, this increased in 2020 to 150,000 and it is the same for this 2021 term. Can the hon. Minister kindly explain what is the reason

for this increase?

Mr. Imbert: They made more.

Mr. Ratiram: More calls?

Mr. Imbert: Yes, more calls.

Mr. Ratiram: Tobago people like to make calls.

Mr. Imbert: You see, Madam Chairman. Madam Chairman, that is why they cannot win a seat in Tobago. He just bawl out “Tobago people” and, Madam Chairman, I am not speaking to Oropouche East.

Dr. Moonilal: Please, what this has to do with winning a seat in Tobago?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I have the floor. I distinctly heard the Member—

Dr. Moonilal: Condescending.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, Oropouche East—you are not even putting your hat in the ring for leadership and you want to get on so? [*Desk thumping*] So, Madam Speaker, I heard the Member for Couva North— “They ain’t go support yuh, yuh know.” I heard the Member for— “You nearly ain’t even make screening.” You nearly did not make it. [*Desk thumping*]

12.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman, I heard somebody say, it sounded like the Member for Couva North say, “Tobago people”. I heard that with my own ears, it is on record. I do not know what that means. But the fact is that during the COVID-19 period, Government units and administrations, whether in Tobago or in local government or in central government, would have had to rely on forms of communication such as telephone communication and therefore, the expenditure would naturally be higher in 2020 than it was in 2019 because we had to use our phones to provide government services. Therefore, to keep asking why was the expenditure on this

Item more, is just wasting time. The answer is that they used the phone more because of COVID.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 37: Janitorial Services. The actual spend for 2019 was 13,000. This increased to 400,000 in 2020 and 2021. Can the Minister kindly advise the reason for this increase?

Mr. Imbert: What I am advised is that many departments, units of the House of Assembly relocated to the Milshirv building on Shirvan Road and as a result, there was an increased requirement for janitorial and security services, and in the period under examination, eight service providers were engaged in fiscal 2020 to provide janitorial services at various areas in Tobago but including, in particular, the Milshirv building.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing. This Vote was nil in 2019, however, it has increased to 190,000. Can the hon. Minister provide some explanation for the increase?

Mr. Imbert: The original Estimate for 2020 was 200,000, the Revised is 190 and therefore, there is no increase in 2021 over the 2020 figure. "Yuh want meh to go back to 2010?"

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, the question I asked is from 2019, the Actual figure was 13,000, it was increased in 2020 to 400,000 and it has remained consistent at 400,000. Can the Minister advise if this increase is a result of a new contract that was issued under this line Item and if so, can the details please be provided?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, exactly what Item is he speaking about? I heard

him say printing and publicity.

Madam Chairman: The Member is at 62 at Promotions, Publicity and Printing.

Mr. Imbert: So, why is he saying 400,000? What is he talking about?

Mr. Ratiram: My apologies, Madam Chair. And Mr. Minister, it was actually nil in 2019. The increase I was referring to was the nil from 2019 to the figure of 2020 of 200,000.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I just want to make a particular point. When you look at the front of this book, it says Draft Estimates for the Financial Year 2021 and we do a comparison with 2020 to see whether there is an increase from 2020 to 2021. The far right-hand columns in the books, on every page, are headed “Increase” and “Decrease”, and they mean increase or decrease between 2021 and 2020. They do not mean decrease or increase from 2019. Therefore, there is no difference between 2020 and 2021.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, I recognize that there is no increase, what I asked is for the increase from the 2019 actual to the Estimates and the Revised Estimates.

Mr. Imbert: If you were here last year, you could have asked that.

Madam Chairman: Minister of Finance, I think what the Member—*[Inaudible]*—why he consistently refers to 2019 is that his understanding is that 2020 figures are Estimates and the Revised Estimate in 2020 cannot be used as an actual because the understanding is that the Revised Estimate at 2020 may not necessarily be the spend in fiscal 2020. So that, the only figure in his view that he can use as actual to see what is the justification, if any for 2021, will be the use of the 2019 Actual.

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I disagree with that. We are here at the Standing Finance Committee to deal with the Appropriation Bill, 2021, and the increases

and decreases before us are in comparison between 2020 and 2021. I disagree. I think we have to use the 2020 figures and look at the 2021 figures and that is what we do every year and that is what I have done in this Parliament for 29 years. “If yuh gonna go back two years”, that is something new.

Madam Chairman: Well, I do not think the exercise that he is doing here is going back two years. He is just trying to find out how then do we arrive, even in 2021, at \$190,000 spent.

Mr. Imbert: Right, but my point is, Madam Chairman, if you go into the *Hansard* record for the deliberations of the Standing Finance Committee for fiscal 2020, which was last year, those questions were asked and answered then so it is on the public record as to why the Estimates for 2020 and 2021 are different. That answer is there. So he is asking a question already asked and answered in this House.

Madam Chairman: So that your response is, it is on the public record.

Mr. Imbert: Correct. Go and look at it.

Madam Chairman: Member, any other matter you wish to raise?

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, the reason the 2019 Actual figures are before us is for us to make reference to the 2019 Actual because there are no actual figures for 2020 and in my questioning, that is all I am doing, making reference to the actual figure. So, I have heard what the hon. Minister has stated and I would like, if I may, to move to another line Item 37: Janitorial Services. The Actual 2019 figure.

Madam Chairman: But did you not just ask about—

Mr. Ratiram: No. I was on 62: Promotions, Publicity and Printing.

Madam Chairman: I am sure we asked about 37—

Mr. Imbert: He did.

Madam Chairman: Janitorial Services.

Mr. Imbert: He did.

Madam Chairman: And the response was many of the Divisions were relocated to Milshirv on Shirvan Road, eight service providers and details were asked about the service providers. I think that is what my recollection is. Okay. So, if you have no other questions, Item 005: Marine Resources and Fisheries.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Agriculture; Item 003: Marketing; Item 004: Natural Resources and Forestry; Item 005: Marine Resources and Fisheries.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, and we are at page 51; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 008: Subsidies. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to Item 04: Agricultural Incentive Programme. Can the Minister indicate how many persons benefited from this programme?

Mr. Imbert: Fifty-seven.

Mr. Ratiram: Also, Item 06, the persons who have benefited from Subsidy for Fishermen.

Mr. Imbert: One.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers. Division 05 - Tourism, Culture and Transportation.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Tourism. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. Madam Chair, I would like to draw Minister's attention to line Item 43: Security Services. The 2020 Estimate was 4 million—

Madam Chairman: 43?

Ms. Haynes: Item 43.

Madam Chairman: On page 53?

Ms. Haynes: 55. Are we not on 002: Tourism, page 55?

Madam Chairman: Page 53.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. Sorry, I am ahead.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Culture.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 54; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002, Tourism. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. I am now at line Item 43: Security Services where the Estimate for 2020 was 4 million and actual amount was—

Madam Chairman: Page 55?

Ms. Haynes: Page 55—and 6 million is the Revised Estimate for 2020. Can we account for the extra 2 million under Security Services, please?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I am looking at security, 43, I am not seeing any increase in 2021.

Ms. Haynes: No, no, no. I said that the Estimate for 2020 was 4 million but 6 million is the Revised Estimate for 2020. So, why you are not seeing an increase is because we used the Revised Estimate to create the 2021 Estimate. But in fiscal 2020, can we account for the extra 2 million that was allocated from the 4 million that was originally estimated for fiscal 2020?

Mr. Imbert: There were six additional service providers.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Transport; Item 007: Culture.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Pointe-

a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just confirming, page 58?

Madam Chairman: Yes, page 58.

Mr. Lee: Minister, I will just take two line Items 17: Tobago Tourism Festivals, Estimate is 1.4 million for 2021 and a new sub line Item: Tobago Festivals Commission Ltd, Estimate of 12.1 million for 2021. Is there a duplication or are there two different functions in these two line Items? Line Item 17 and line Item 21.

Mr. Imbert: Could you just repeat that question, please?

Mr. Lee: Line Item 17, the heading is Tobago Tourism Festivals and we have estimated 1.4 million, an increase of 6.9, and then line Item 21, which is a new sub line Item, the line Item's name is Tobago Festivals Commission Ltd, you have an Estimate of 12.1 million. Are they two separate functions?

Mr. Imbert: Okay. What I am told is that for fiscal 2021, the Assembly will be using a company by the name of Tobago Festivals Commission Limited to do the majority of the work in this area, which is why you have such a significant reduction in the line Item under the general division, Tobago Tourism Festivals is almost 7 million and then the money is now allocated under this company, Tobago Festivals Commission Limited. They said it was more efficient to do it that way.

12.15 p.m.

Mr. Lee: If I hear you clearly, the new Sub-Item is now on the role of—

Mr. Imbert: It will have responsibility for most of the duties and functions of the internal department that handled it before.

Mr. Lee: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 20: Tobago Tourism Agency Limited. The original estimate in 2020 was \$20 million but the Revised Estimate is \$60 million for fiscal 2020. Could the Minister account for that extra \$40 million?

Mr. Imbert: In 2020, the Government decided to assist hoteliers in Tobago with a grant for hotel upgrade as part of the COVID-19 relief. That is why the allocation for the Tobago Tourism Agency Limited went up from 20 million to 60 and that continues. That programme continues, so that is why there is an allocation of 40 million in 2020.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair, and now I am just up line Item 18: Tobago Infrastructure Development Fund. One million was allocated in 2020. There is nothing in the Revised Estimate and we are allocating one million again in 2021. Can you explain why nothing was utilized in 2020 and therefore why the grant?

Mr. Imbert: I would think that because of COVID-19 a lot of tourism projects would have not been able to be placed or be realized in 2020, and I would think that one is hoping that in fiscal 2021 the travel restrictions would be relaxed and tourism could recover. So that is why an allocation has been put in, again in 2021.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, but you would note, I know you do not like to look at the 2019 column, but in there, there is also no spending in 2019.

Mr. Imbert: Well, this may very well be a new Item and we can find that out for you.

Ms. Haynes: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima. No?

Division 06: Education, Innovation and Energy; Sub-Head 01: Personnel

Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration, page 59. Item 002: Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education. Item 003: Library Services. Item 004: School Feeding Programme. Item 007: Happy Haven School, Tobago Council for Haven School. Item 008: Tobago School for the Deaf, Speech and Language Impaired. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education. Item 003: Library Services. Item 007: Tobago Council for Handicapped Children, Happy Haven School. Item 008: Tobago School for the Deaf. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Just to catch back up.

Madam Chairman: We are at page 63. Item 008: Tobago School for the Deaf, Speech and Language Impaired. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. We are at page 64. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Primary, Secondary and Vocational Education. Item 003: Library Services. We are at page 64. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, the question that I would like to ask would be related to Items 07, 08 in going forward. So to save time, perhaps, I just make mention of that. But first, for Library Services, the actual figure from 2019 has moved from a total of 622,000 to 160,000. Does the hon. Minister think that this would be sufficient?

Mr. Imbert: As the Member for Port of Spain North/St. Ann's West, not Morvant, indicated, the Tobago House of Assembly gets its money in a block Vote and they have the freedom to move money around. I am sure if Library Services requires more funds, they will make appropriate arrangements.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Tobago Council for Handicapped Children, Happy Haven School. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would just like to point to the Minister's attention to the 2019 actual figure of 540,000 to the estimate for 2021 of 73. There is a significant decrease in the funding there again and I assume that it would be the same response the Minister would give.

Mr. Imbert: No, I would give a different one.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: The fact of the matter is that you have to look at the Item. This is Minor Equipment. You do not want to purchase minor equipment in the same way, in the same form, the same fashion, the same quantum every year. It depends on what you require. This is for things like photocopying machines and things like that. So they may have made a big item of expenditure in '19, which is no longer required in '20 or 2021. This is Minor Equipment. And as I said, if they require more funds for Minor Equipment, and I am stressing the word "minor", I am sure with their allocation of \$2 billion they could find a couple thousand dollars or a couple hundred dollars for Minor Equipment.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 008: Tobago School for the Deaf, Speech and Language Impaired. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. We are page 65. Item 005: Non-profit Institutions. Item 006: Educational Institutions. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at Item 03: Trade Centres. Can the Minister tell us what changes we expect to these trade centres that would account for the decrease in the \$2 million in the allocation?

Mr. Imbert: But I am seeing a decrease of \$2 million.

Ms. Haynes: That is what I said.

Mr. Imbert: Am I on the correct one, 006/03?

Ms. Haynes: Yes, I said can the Minister account for what changes we can anticipate in the trade centres.

Mr. Imbert: I thought I heard the word “increase”.

Ms. Haynes: No, I said decrease in 2 million.

Mr. Imbert: I see. Well the trade centres involved are at Roxborough and Bon Accord and the funding is provided for salaries and wages, utilities, tools and equipment and other operating expenses. It may well be it may have been major capital items of equipment or capital repairs that would have been performed on these trade schools during fiscal 2020 that are not required during fiscal 2021. If you want a more detailed answer, we can try and get the information for you.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the Minister’s attention to line Item 01: School Feeding Programme. Madam Chair, this School Feeding Programme, actual spend for 2019 was 35 million but it significantly declined to 26 million in 2021. Can the Minister advise the reason for this significant decline in funding for School Feeding Programme?

Mr. Imbert: The Member for Oropouche East is no longer in the Chamber. The Member for Couva North should know there is something called COVID-19, which the hon. Member should know resulted in something called a Public Health Regulation, which the hon. Member should know resulted in restrictions, which the hon. Member should know the first restriction was the closure of schools. And since schools were closed, and this was explained during examination of the Ministry of Education Estimates, since schools were closed, the School Feeding Programme could not continue at the same level and in the same quantum as occurred in 2019 and schools are still closed. And, therefore, the allocation for

2020 must of necessity be less, and for 2021 may also be less. That is the reason and it should be obvious.

Madam Chairman: Member for Fyzabad? No? Item 009: Other Transfers. Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Mr. Lee: Thank you, Madam Chair, under “Other Transfers”, Minister, line Item 07: Tobago Hospitality Tourism Institute, I know when these Estimates were done, 7 million for 2021, a decrease of 2 million, but this is in keeping with the closure of the Trinidad Hotel School. There might be a demand on the hospitality institute in Tobago. So I am just asking if consideration would be given, while there is a decrease here that some consideration be given that you might get a demand on the institute now with the closure of the Trinidad Hotel School.

Mr. Imbert: I am sure they will make appropriate adjustments. I do recall a newspaper article, although one cannot always believe what you read in the papers, that the head of the Institute for Tourism in Tobago was inviting Trinidadians to come there for their education. So I am sure they will make appropriate adjustments within their overall allocation to accommodate any additional students that may arrive. COVID, of course, makes travel and accommodation difficult.

Madam Chairman: Okay? Division 07: Community Development, Enterprise Development and Labour. We are at page 67. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Community Development. Item 004: Labour. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Community Development. Item 004: Labour. Item 005: Occupational Safety and Health. Item 006: Business Development Unit.

We are now at page 70, Sub-Head: 03 Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. Item 002: Community Development. Item 004:

Labour. Item 005: Occupational Safety and Health. Item 006: Business Development Unit.

We are now at page 71. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 005: Non-profit Institutions. Item 007: Households. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 005, line Item 17.

Madam Chairman: We are 007: Households. Anything there? Item 009: Other Transfers.

We now go to page 73. Division 08: Infrastructure, Quarries and the Environment.

12.30 p.m.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 73; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Maintenance of Roads; Item 003: Maintenance of Buildings; Item 004: Transport; Item 007: Mechanical Workshop; Item 009: The Environment.

[MR. FORDE *in the Chair*]

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 74. Item 001: General Administration, pages 74 and 75; Item 002: Maintenance of Roads, pages 75 and 76; Item 003: Maintenance of Buildings; Item 004: Transport Division, pages 76 and 77; Item 007: Mechanical Workshop, page 77; Item 009: The Environment, pages 77 to 78. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Maintenance of Roads; Item 003: Maintenance of Buildings; Item 004: Transport and we are on page 79; Item 007: Mechanical Workshop; Item 009: The Environment. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers, page 80.

We now go to Division 10 – Health, Wellness and Family Development. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 81; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Hospitals; Item 003: Health Centres; Item 004: Public Health and the Environment, page 82; Item 005: Social Services. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration, pages 82 to 83. And I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Chairman. Can the Minister provide the details for line Item 08 please?

Mr. Imbert: Are you on page 82?

Mr. Chairman: Page 82, Goods and Services, 02.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 08: Rent.

Mr. Chairman: Rent/Lease, Office Accommodation and Storage.

Mr. Imbert: Hold on, wait, wait, wait, wait. Is he not talking? How you reach in this?

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Finance, hold on. It is Couva North.

Mr. Imbert: Who was talking? Is it him?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Couva North.

Mr. Imbert: Oh, I am sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Couva North.

Mr. Imbert: You sound the same. Allow me to have some fun “nah man”. Sorry, please proceed, what page?

Mr. Chairman: Page 82, 02: Goods and Services, and we are on line Item 08. Not so, Member for Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage.

Mr. Imbert: What is the question now?

Mr. Chairman: Care to repeat your question, Member for Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: Well, in keeping with the commitment made by the hon. Minister earlier, I kept the question very simple to ask if the Minister will provide the details for this line Item. If the Minister would like me to elaborate with a further question I can do so.

Mr. Imbert: Yes, this is a little different to the other Items, could you please give us the particulars?

Mr. Chairman: Care to elaborate please, Member?

Mr. Ratiram: Sure, thank you. There is an increase in this line Item of 200,000 for Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage. Can the Minister indicate the purpose for that increase?

Mr. Imbert: Well, if you look at it carefully you will see it is actually a decrease from the original 2020. But we will provide the details.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002: Hospital, page 83; Item 003: Health Centres, pages 83 and 84; Item 004: Public Health and the Environment—

Mr. Ratiram: Chairman.

Mr. Chairman:—page 84. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Chairman, I was trying to get your attention for Health Centres.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, 003, 83 and 84.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. With respect to Health Centre; Item 05: Telephone, no money was spent for 2019 and the Revised Estimate reflects nil. Can the Minister indicate if these telephone lines were functioning at the health centres?

Mr. Imbert: There are two scenarios possible. One, they did not use the phone, or

two, this is a preliminary figure. We will find out.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, can the Minister make the undertaking to supply the information please?

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Ratiram: For both 2019 and 2020.

Mr. Imbert: Well, is zero in 2019, what you want me to tell me you? Zero from zero make zero?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Imbert: I mean come on, '19 is zero, what details you want?

Mr. Chairman: We move on. Item 004: Public Health and the Environment, page 84, Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am at line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. Now, while I appreciate a lot could fall under this, we are looking at an increase from the estimated expenditure for 2020 from 13 million to some 25.9 million spent in 2020. Could the Minister account for that additional \$12.9 million [Interruption] line Item 28: Other Contracted Services?

Mr. Imbert: As I indicated earlier, Other Contracted Services is really a general Vote for a multitude of services and this is not a static allocation, it will vary from year to year depending on the types of services that are procured. In this particular case I am advised that this was with respect to services with respect to elevators, software subscription license fees and payment of consultants for diabetes and stroke centres. So that these are things that will vary. I mean, you cannot tell somebody when they should or should not have diabetes or have a stroke. So you have variable cost from time to time, they are not static.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Social Services, page 85; Item 007: Probation Services;

Item 008: Litter Eradication Programme. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chairman. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 05: Telephone, the 2019 figure was nil, the 2020 Revised Estimate was nil. Would the Minister kindly advise the reason for this?

Mr. Imbert: I certainly shall not give particulars on 2019 because that was zero. So there is no information to give there. We will find out why when they had an allocation of \$10,000 they did not utilize it in 2020, and why the \$10,000 has been put back. And this is litter eradication.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: We are not sure what level of telephone is required but we would find out.

Mr. Chairman: Item 009: Gender Affairs, page 86. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration; Item 003: Health Centres; Item 004: Public and the Environment; Item 005: Social Services, page 87; Item 008: Litter Eradication Programme; Item 009: Gender Affairs. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 005: Non-profit Institutions; Item 007: Households. I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. Mr. Chair, I am at Sub-Item 04: Emergency Cases Fund, 800,000 was originally estimated for 2020, we spent 1.6 million. Can we account for that increase as well because we are now allocating the same 1.6 million in 2021?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Mr. Imbert: Okay, an emergency by definition is "a serious unexpected and dangerous situation". We had such a thing in 2020 it is called COVID. That is why it went up and COVID continues, that is why it remained the same as the Revised

2020.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, I am glad you were able to Google emergency to answer the question.

Mr. Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers, page 88. I now go to Division-11: Settlement, Urban Renewal and Public Utilities. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 89; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Settlements; Item 004: Electrical Inspectorate. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 90; Item 001: General Administration. I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much Chairman, I would like to—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Chairman: Page 90.

Mr. Ratiram: I would like to bring the Minister's attention to line Item 08, the Revised Estimate for 2020, 4.2 million versus the Estimate for 2020 of 2.5 million. Can the Minister kindly explain the reason for this increase?

Mr. Imbert: The increase was due to temporary accommodation because of relocation.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister provide us with the—

Mr. Imbert: Sure.

Mr. Ratiram:—lease agreement for this temporary accommodation? Thank you.

Mr. Imbert: You see this lease agreement thing, I just want to make it clear. I have given a standard response. I will provide whatever information is available. It first has to be available, relevant, and appropriate. There are certain things which are confidential and private, which I will not provide. So I will provide whatever is available, relevant, and appropriate, and I will be guided by the Attorney General in terms of what can be provided.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister. Item—

Mr. Ratiram: Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Follow up?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 27: Official Overseas Travel, the Revised Estimate for 2020 was 140,000 whereas the Actual spend in 2019 was 56,000, so there was a significant increase in overseas travel. Can the hon. Minister kindly advise what this increase represents?

Mr. Imbert: We will provide the information.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 002—my apologies—Item 002: Settlements, page 91. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chairman. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 27: Official Overseas Travel, for 2020 we have a figure of 100,000 there for that Overseas Travel, we would like some details on the travel there please?

Mr. Imbert: I will provide as much information as I can.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 004: Electrical Inspectorate. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 92; Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Settlements; Item 004: Electrical Inspectorate. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies.

Item 007: Households. We now move to Division 13: Team Sport and Youth Affairs. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 93. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Sport; Item 003: Youth; Sub-Head 02: Goods and

Services; page 94. Item 001: General Administration. And I recognize the Member for Couva North.

12.45 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chairman. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and Other Functions.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, you were not here but when Madam Chairman was here I gave an undertaking to provide full details on this Item in throughout all the Divisions and I asked respectfully at the time that this question not be repeated over and over and over. I have given that undertaking.

Mr. Chairman: And again given Members, again. I concur with the information because I have it before me here the ones that will be provided by the Tobago House of Assembly as stated by the Minister. We move on. Item 002: Sport; pages 94 and 95. Item 003: Youth; Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; page 96. Item 001: General Administration; Item 002: Sport; Item 003: Youth; Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 005: Non-profit Institutions; Item 007: Households; page 97.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new booklet and we go to page 19, Development Programme. Sub-Head 09: Consolidated Fund; page 19. Members, you all with me? Item 003: Economic Infrastructure; pages 19 to 24.

Hon. Members, Item 003 spans 8 pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. B: Extension Services; page 19, D: Fishing; F: Land Management Services; H: Research and Development; pages 19 and 20, A: Electricity; page 21, A: Drainage and Irrigation; page 22, D: Tourism; pages 22 and 23. I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you. I am on page 23, line Item 349.

Mr. Chairman: Repeat please.

Ms. Haynes: Page 23, line Item 349: Tobago Tourism Agency.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Ms. Haynes: Yes, the Estimate for 2020 was 5 million, the Revised Estimate is \$55 million. And then we have a 2021 increase now of \$1 million. If the Minister would care to explain these figures for the benefit of the public?

Mr. Imbert: The \$50 million grant given for COVID expenditure, given for assistance to the tourism industry in Tobago; that is in this Item.

Ms. Haynes: Pardon, could you—no you have to speak into the mike please.

Mr. Imbert: Sorry that you cannot hear me. There was a \$50 million grant, highly publicized, stated in this place, at least five times, for Tobago hoteliers and for the tourism industry. That represents the increase.

Ms. Haynes: Okay. And then what are you using to justify the \$1 million allocation for 2021 as opposed to the—

Mr. Imbert: Because it was for COVID—

Ms. Haynes: I understand that, Minister.

Mr. Imbert:—in 2020.

Ms. Haynes: But if you look at 2019, Minister, it was a \$5 million grant now in 2021.

Mr. Imbert: There was no COVID in 2019.

Ms. Haynes: Yes, I appreciate that there was no COVID. But if you are going back to the original allocations, then you would go to 5 million as opposed to 1 million, Minister. So if you would take the time to pay attention to the question you would understand where it is coming from.

Mr. Chairman: Right again, to both, to both hon. Members, again, it is supposed to be really through the Chair, just in case, rather than the running commentary on both sides. Right. So, Mr. Minister, your turn.

Mr. Imbert: I cannot help it if I am a little faster than the Member. I got all the questions just when you said “um.” So let me deal with 2019. There was no COVID in 2019. And Madam, Madam Chairman, sorry, Mr. Chairman, I apologize. May I be allowed to speak without interruption?

Mr. Chairman: And that goes for both sides.

Mr. Imbert: Of course.

Mr. Chairman: Lovely.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. There was no COVID-19 in fiscal 2019, even though it is called COVID-19, it was not in fiscal 2019 and that is why there is no requirement for a large allocation for this agency in 2019. There was no COVID-19 in October 2019, when the budget 2020, fiscal 2020 allocation was made and that is why the allocation remained at 5 million originally in the Estimates for 2020. Then there was COVID in March of 2020, and we gave a grant of \$50 million to the Tobago House of Assembly for assistance of hoteliers. We have not made any decision to give another grant in 2021 hence the reason why it is not \$1 million.

Mr. Chairman: Follow up, Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair, through you. I think the Minister is getting a little bit of a difficulty here. What I am asking is that in 2021, right, you are allocating—you have chosen to allocate \$1 million as opposed to reverting to the 5 million that was actually spent in 2019. I am aware that there was no COVID-19, so I am asking why go to 1 million as opposed to going to \$5 million from 2019. [*Desk thumping*] That is the question, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: You desire further clarity Member?

Ms. Haynes: Further clarity, you know, just some clarity, because the Minister is confusing the entire situation talking about COVID-19 here there and the other.

Mr. Chairman: Member, again, the Minister has answered but again, I, just for the record—

Ms. Haynes: If he does not know the answer, he could undertake to give us the answer later on.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, okay. Mr. Minister, could you share any further clarity?

Mr. Imbert: Madam Chairman, I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, I keep calling you Madam Chairman. Listen, the only confused person here is the Member who is asking the question.

Mr. Chairman: No. Okay.

Mr. Imbert: We on this side are not confused, and let me answer the questions. [*Crosstalk*] She said—the hon. Member said I was confused. I am not. The Member opposite is confused. The Member opposite is also new. If the Member had been in this Parliament before, the Member would know that. The Member would know that this agency is now fully operational and most of its expenditure is now being funded under Recurrent Expenditure. In fact, if the Member had been paying attention to the Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure—[*Crosstalk*].

Mr. Chairman: Members, please, please.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, I am still speaking. I do not know why when I am exposing their limitations they like to scream and get on.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed. Proceed.

Mr. Imbert: I should be allowed to speak. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Charles: It does not make sense.

Mr. Imbert: See?

Mr. Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Imbert: I am exposing their limitation.

Mr. Chairman: Hold on, one second. Member for Naparima, please, that outburst. Not for this meeting. Please. Go ahead, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Imbert: Madam, Sorry, Mr. Chairman. Sorry. I am sorry. I really apologize for that.

Mr. Chairman: I know the morning was hectic.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, the Tobago Tourism Agency, a lot of its operational expenditure— If the Members had paid attention, and looked into this book which we just finished, they would have seen a lot of the operational expenditure of this agency is now covered under Recurrent Expenditure. There is a difference between Development Programme and Recurrent. I know Members are new, but that is no excuse and items will appear in the Development Programme in one year and as entities become fully operational, the expenditure is transferred from capital to recurrent because the capital expenditures required to initiate the process and recurrent is required to continue it and that is why this agency is now being funded mainly under Recurrent and that is why there is a \$1 million allocation in 2021 as opposed to a \$5 million allocation in 2019 under Development. If you go in this book, you will see other money for the Tobago Tourism Agency and let me state again, there was something called COVID-19 in 2020, and we gave the Tobago House of Assembly, they got the full amount, the full \$50 million, which they have placed in a particular account in the bank. The Tobago House of Assembly is allowed to do that. When they get their quarterly release they are allowed to bank it and allowed to use it as they see fit. They have not spent the whole 50 million that

we gave them. They still have some more spend which they will give to hoteliers as we go along. That is a complete answer to all possible questions you could have.

Ms. Haynes: I would like to—

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite, just one second. Member for Tabaquite, new Item?

Ms. Haynes: No. Mr. Chair, I would just like to thank the Member for Tobago West for giving the answer to the Minister of Finance because he went all around before and never got here.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, new item.

Mr. Imbert: “Fass and out of place.” Asking foolish questions.

Mr. Chairman: Members. Listen. [*Crosstalk*]

Ms. Haynes: Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Tabaquite. Minister, Minister of Finance. Thank you. Thank you, Member for Tabaquite. G. Business. What? On this particular line item? The one I am now going to call? Tourism?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Proceed. Pages 22 and 23. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chairman. I would like to draw the Minister’s attention to line Item 298: Trinidad and Tobago Hospitality and Tourism Institute, Tobago campus. There is no allocation for this 2021 Estimate. Was there a project that was being executed by the 1 million from the previous two years that that project has been completed? And can the Minister say what that project is? Or the reason for the nil allocation for the tourism institute?

Mr. Imbert: We will provide the information.

Mr. Chairman: D: Business Services; D: Roads and Bridges; page 24. Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair, I am at Sub-Item 523: Major Improvement Works on Secondary Roads. The estimated allocation for 2020 was 1.8 million thereabout and the Revised Estimate is 26.7 million. Can the Minister account for that change from the Estimate from the 10 million to 26 million?

Mr. Imbert: More roads were repaired.

Ms. Haynes: Can you give us details on the road repair that cost the nation an additional 16 million?

Mr. Imbert: Yes.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Same line Item— Okay. We now go to H: Sea Transport; page 24. Member, for Couva North, H: Sea Transport.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Chair. Chair, under Sea Transport, Item 523, I see construction of bus shelters and bus stop. I am not sure if this line Item—I am trying to understand one, how it fits in under Sea Transport and with respect to this line Item, 300,000 was utilized in 2020 based on the Revised Estimate. Would the Minister be able to provide us the details of the bus shelters and bus stops that were constructed?

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Mr. Imbert: If the Member was a regular visitor to Tobago and took public transportation, which probably he does not, you would realize that there is a requirement for a bus stop at a port. How else are people going to get to and from the port? So that is why it is an allocation for bus stops under this Item. And we will provide the other information requested.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Imbert: I know you fly in your private jet all the time.

1.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 25 to 38. Hon. Members, Item 004 spans 14 pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups, starting with: B. Primary, pages 25 and 26; C. Secondary, pages 26 and 27; E. Special Education; G. Educational Services, pages 27 to 30. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 495: Chief Secretary's Award. It is a nil allocation for this year. Has this project been—?

Mr. Imbert: Could you give me the page please?

Mr. Chairman: We are now on page 27.

Mr. Imbert: Okay.

Mr. Ratiram: There is a nil allocation. The previous two years, we had \$450,000, 400,000, but no money is allocated to this line Item. Any reason why it was removed?

Mr. Imbert: Apparently it is being reallocated to the expenditure under "Tobago Day". So you now have Tobago Day, and this award would be expended under that Item. So there is no longer any requirement to put it here.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Another line Item, Chair, under the same Sub-Head. Line Item 515: Training in Marketing and Distribution-Adult Education Programme. There is no allocation there for this project also. Has this been relocated or has it been discontinued?

Mr. Imbert: We can get the information on that, but it is most likely covered under another Item.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: We now move to A. Hospitals, page 31; B. Medical and Dental Centres; C. Public Health Services, pages 31 and 32; B. Land Development, page 33; A. Culture, page 34; C. Sports, pages 34 and 35; A. Community Development, pages 36 and 37; C. Welfare Services, page 37; D. Youth Development, pages 37 and 38. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral & Other Services, pages 39 to 41. Hon. Members, Item 005 spans three pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. A. Administrative Services, page 39; F. Public Buildings, pages 39 to 41; G. Equipment and Vehicles, page 41.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 15 ordered to stand part of the schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Madam Minister, you are staying with us still? Okay. Thank you and other executives of the Tobago House of Assembly. Thanks for coming, safe journey back over the seas.

So we will just give the Central Administrative Services executives to grace us with their presence and we shall proceed. So, Minister, you are with us this afternoon? Lovely.

Head 16: Central Administrative Services, Tobago, \$36,073,045.

Mr. Chairman: Welcome to the Permanent Secretary of the Central Administrative Services, Tobago and also to your other senior executives at the Central Administrative Services. Tobago.

I will now invite the Minister of State in the Office of the Prime Minister to make brief opening remarks, not exceeding five minutes.

Hon. Webster-Roy: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Central Administrative Services, Tobago, plays a critical role in Tobago, ensuring that the services of the

Office of the Prime Minister are available on the island and is responsible for supporting all central government services in Tobago. This mandate is executed under three main sections: Administrative Services, which consist of the Treasury, the Weights and Measures Inspectorate, General Services, Finance and Accounting, Information Communication Technology, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Human Resource, Internal Audit and Communications Unit, Metrological Services Division, which provides reliable data on weather and other environmental conditions for aviation and the public, Registrar General's Office, which is charged to provide a range of services to public for the registration of births, marriages, deaths, business, land and other legal recordings.

The Department has a clear service-oriented philosophy, as it seeks to contribute to the development of Tobago, by effectively facilitating and providing central government services. In line with this mission, the Central Administrative Services, Tobago, aims to modernize and upgrade its technological infrastructure to ensure that the Department remains relevant and is able to meet the demands of a rapidly changing digital environment.

To this end, the Department would have successfully acquired an Automated-Weather Observance System for the Metrological Services Division. The system provides measurement of metrological elements needed for safe operations at the airport, including but not limited to, approach landing and take-off, critical metrological data such as a windshear, which is prevalent at the ANR Robinson International Airport. This data can be relayed directing to the cockpit of the aircraft and automatic runway visual range information to the aircraft.

Six towers for the low level windshear alert system was successful installed at the following sites: Fort Milford , Crown Point, Golden Grove, Canaan,

Kilgwyn Bay, Bon Accord; Tobago Emergency Management Agency TEMA, Canaan; Trinidad and Tobago Civil Aviation Authority Compound and the National Petroleum Company, Crown Point.

Additionally, a geostationary operational environmental satellite, ground station satellite dish, was successfully installed at the Met Division. Services staff were adequately trained in its operations and the Met Services can now receive reading from the device to effectively monitoring climatic patterns.

Moving forward, the modernization of systems will be priority and the executive and staff of the Central Administrative Services, Tobago, remain committed to developing and maintaining a more efficient gateway for central government services on the island. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Question proposed: That Head 16 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$36,073,045 for Head 16, Central Administrative Services, Tobago, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are on page 71 of the recurrent expenditure booklet.

Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, page 71. Item 001: General Administration; Item 02: Trade and industry; Item 005: Metrological Services, page 72; Item 007: Registrar General. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 73. Item 001: General Administration, pages 73 and 74; Item 002: Trade and Industry; Item 005: Metrological Services, pages 74 and 75; Item 007: Registrar General, pages 75 to 76. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration, page 76. I recognize the Member for Tabaquite.

Ms. Haynes: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just one quick concern under General Administration. We saw an estimate of about 450,000 for 2020 of which only 43 was expended, but we are allocating a further 200,000-something for 2021.

Mr. Chairman: Which line Item you are on?

Ms. Haynes: I am on line Item 001: General Administration, under Minor Equipment Purchases, page 76.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Item—you are just asking a general question?

Ms. Haynes: Yes, because of how the expenditure would have been going between the 2019 Actual and the 2020 Revised Estimates.

Hon. Webster-Roy: You are under 01: General Administration?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, page 76, 001: General Administration.

Hon. Webster-Roy: Minor Equipment. Okay. Under this line Item, we would have acquired additional items. You asked about the increase?

Ms. Haynes: No, because what is happening is that you would have spent just about one-tenth of what you estimated to spend in 2020. Right? So, is it that the intention is to allocate for what was not acquired in fiscal 2020?

Hon. Webster-Roy: Yes, that is what I am saying.

Ms. Haynes: That is what I just wanted on the public record.

Hon. Webster-Roy: That is what I was saying, yes.

Ms. Haynes: That is it. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 007: Registrar General. No, my apologies. Item 005: Metrological Services, page 76; Item 007: Registrar General, page 77. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions, page 77; Item 007: Households.

1.15 p.m.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new booklet Development Programme, page 43, Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 43; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 43. Hon. Members—I am hearing you through the mike.

Mr. Lee: Sorry, Chair. Just a quick question, Minister, G., under Equipment and Vehicles, 003: Equipment for the Met Services Division, 2020 Revised Estimate 7.6 million was spent; 2021, 10.9 million. Is this for new equipment or is it a continuation of payments?

Hon. Webster-Roy: It is for new equipment. [*Inaudible*] —in a statement we were acquiring additional equipment to improve the services in Tobago.

Mr. Lee: Good. No problem.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Member for Pointe-a-Pierre.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 16 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister and Madam PS. You spent more time on the flight or on the boat? [*Laughter*] Whichever one, do arrive back safely, Madam PS and the senior executives. Thank you.

Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation, welcome Madam Minister, welcome to your Permanent Secretary and also the other senior executives of your Ministry.

Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation, \$1,207,530,475.

Mr. Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five

minutes. Madam Minister.

Hon. West: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Good day to Members. The Ministry's mandate is the creation of a digital Trinidad and Tobago via the creation of a digital public service. The ultimate objective of this transformation is to improve the lives of our citizens and residents, as well as to improve the country's global competitiveness. The Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago falls under the purview of this Ministry. TATT is a net earner of revenue for the State and as such does not receive a subvention. Internet household penetration currently stands at 82 per cent, and we are working on improving that.

The provision of hub free public broadband Internet access across Trinidad and Tobago continues to be a key initiative for this Ministry. The TT Wi-Fi programme already delivers free Wi-Fi at several high traffic locations. In fiscal 2021 free TT Wi-Fi will be provided at over 60 high traffic locations, including public hospitals, health centres, libraries and government centres. Most of the TT Wi-Fi expenditure is funded through the Universal Service Fund administered by TATT, although some expenditure will be covered by the Ministry under its development programme, and we are working with the service providers to undertake some of this work as part of their corporate social responsibility programmes.

A key initiative of the Ministry during fiscal 2021 is the creation of a national e-identity. It is an electronic solution that citizens can use to gain easy access to Government services. This must be supported by interoperability that facilitates the seamless exchange of relevant information among Ministries and agencies to allow them to more efficiently serve the public. This is expected to provide a greatly enhanced service to citizens, limit duplication and increase

efficiency. Funding for this initiative is under the Development Programme.

Mindful that there are some underserved communities that do not benefit from Internet service, the Ministry currently operates six access centres to ensure that residents of those communities are kept within the development thrust. Each centre provides ICT training, computers, Wi-Fi pavilion, and printing and scanning services. The establishment of eight more access centres in other underserved communities are scheduled for fiscal 2021 under the Ministry's Development Programme, while TATT will establish five additional centres during this fiscal.

Mr. Chair, the Ministry has strategically placed five of its technical divisions at the forefront of its digital Government thrust. These are the National ICT Division, which spearheads the implementation of national ICT plan and formulates public service ICT policy; the Public Management Consulting Division, which advises on staffing and organizational structures; the Public Service Academy, which provides training and development solutions to public officers; the Modernisation and Service Improvement Division, which assists with process re-engineering, sets standards for common operations and monitors the service delivery standards across the public service, and the Property and Real Estates Services Division, which provides property management services.

The Government's ICT execution agency is iGovTT, which among other things manages the Government's IT network, as well as the ttconnect suite of services for the benefit of citizens. iGovTT, together with the Ministry's frontline technical divisions, would provide Government Ministries, Departments and agencies with a holistic suite of support services to enable improved public service delivery and e-services and the public sector efficiency.

Mr. Chair, the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation

is working assiduously to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago a digital public service which would lead to a digital nation. The team with me stands ready to answer Members' questions or to make available any written submission that may be required. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 31 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$1,207,530,475 for Head 31, the Ministry Public Administration and Digital Transformation is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the follow Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, and we are on page 214 of the Recurrent Expenditure booklet. I recognize the Member for Fyzabad, Item 001: General Administration.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon to the Minister and members of the administrative team. I just want to relate this question to 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, and, Minister, to ask in view of the increased role that the Ministry of Public Administration is expected to play in terms of increasing the efficiency of delivering goods and services, and so on, in these difficult times, can you indicate the number of vacancies in the Ministry at this time?

Mr. Chairman: Madam Minister.

Hon. West: Yes. Mr. Chair, the number vacancies with bodies is 47 and the

number of vacancies without bodies is 25.

Dr. Bodoë: If I could just follow up, Minister, in your submission to this Committee last year you had indicated that there were 23 vacancies without bodies, obviously you would have had some difficulty in filling those positions, can you give us an idea as to what challenges you would have faced?

Hon. West: Sorry, could you repeat the last part of the question?

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. Yeah. I am asking, can you give us an idea of what challenges you would have faced in terms of filling these vacancies?

Hon. West: The process has been slow. We, for example, started with an exercise to buildout the capacity of PRES D, and that is ongoing. The COVID would have slowed it down, but we are almost at the point where we are ready to fill the positions in PRES D, and there are a couple of other units that we are seeking to fill as well.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, you indicated that you had a series of individuals—I missed the number, I think it is twenty-something individuals who are acting in vacant posts, is that correct?

Hon. West: Forty-seven persons, 47 bodies in vacant posts.

Mr. Tancoo: All right. May I ask what is the keep back with regard to formally placing these individuals in the posts? Why are they still acting?

Hon. West: We are waiting on the Commission to fill the posts with permanent persons, so in the meantime we have contract people on board.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services.

Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, can you indicate the number of vacancies that currently exists within the Property and Real Estate Management Services Division?

Hon. West: The number of vacancies?

Mr. Bodoë: Yes.

Hon. West: Number of vacant posts with bodies, eight; number of vacant posts without bodies, 17.

Mr. Bodoë: Right. Are you satisfied that your current staffing establishment will be able to take you forward in terms of the projects and duties of that division?

Hon. West: We are not at all satisfied. A couple of months ago we went to Cabinet to get a revisit of the staff complement of PRES D. Cabinet agreed to some adjustments, and as I indicated earlier, we are currently in the process of filling all the positions. The intention is to fill that certainly before the end of the calendar year.

Dr. Bodoë: So just to be clear, Madam Minister, you want to increase the establishment from what—to what did you request?

Hon. West: Well, we want to—not necessarily the number, but we wanted to get some different skills that were not on the establishment as currently existed, and we certainly want to increase it from the number of actual people who are working there now as technical officers.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: No, I am fine.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Item 006: Public Management Consulting Division, page

215. I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

12.30 p.m.

Dr. Bodoë: Madam Minister, I just want to ask this question, and I will tag it to Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, 01. You did mention that the role of this division, the Public Management Consulting Division, is to look at staffing and organizational issues and so on. Can you give us an idea of what this 6.2 million that was spent in 2020, what sort of projects would have been achieved and what is ongoing in the pipeline for 2021?

Hon. West: There is an ongoing programme to look at process reengineering. We are also looking at rejigging the assessment of public officers. Those are the two big Items that we are looking at. The process was slow in 2021 because we were seeking to engage consultants, that took a while. They are about to come on board and start the work. So, that should happen shortly. We also did review of organizational proposed structure and review of Ministry's staffing.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Member?

Dr. Bodoë: Perhaps one Ministry or one agency that may have benefited from this, any specific example?

Hon. West: Well, PMCD looked at the structures of the Attorney General's Office, the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation, itself, Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries. Those were the four.

Dr. Bodoë: That is fine. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 007: Public Service Academy. I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Minister, good day. In terms of 01: Salaries and Cost of Living

Allowance, and probably the question would tie back to all three lines as well, could you tell this Committee what are the aims and objectives of the Public Service Academy?

Hon. West: The Public Service Academy is the training arm of the public service and its mandate is to train public servants so that they can better serve their representative roles within the public service.

Mr. Paray: Outside of the roles and functions of the individuals, are there any other programmes that are taught at the academy that would benefit our public servants in the delivery of their services?

Hon. West: Well, the public servants training—although the Public Service Academy is responsible for the overall training, you have individual training being offered by Ministries. We also have separate technical agreements with different countries that provide technical training to appropriate officers. We approve those all the time.

What we are trying to do with the Public Service Academy is to do a reassessment of the level of effectiveness that they currently display, and ensure that they are equipped to train public servants to move into the more digitalized world that we are going to.

Mr. Paray: Taking note of the refocus of your Ministry with a huge component on digitalization, would the academy be taking a leading role in terms of making sure that our public servants throughout the public service are well-tooled and equipped for this change that is going to be coming over the next couple of years?

Hon. West: That is correct. That is going to be a main focus for this year. They are retooling themselves in terms of getting more ready to deliver online training, and they are also retooling themselves to be able to offer training in the digitalization

space, because we know we need to prepare public servants for that.

Mr. Paray: Finally, Minister, are you adequately staffed for this new era of digitization in terms of pushing that training going forward? Do you have enough complement of staff that will be able to deliver?

Hon. West: We do not currently have enough complement. We are seeking to beef that up, and in the meantime, what we are doing is supplementing what we have with consultants and external training. We have had conversations with persons who provide training, who have access to training in that space, and we are pursuing those as different options.

Mr. Paray: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I now recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, if I may just follow up on my colleague's question on the Public Service Academy. In submission to this Committee last year, you had projected that the academy would have been responsible for 118 training courses and for training 2,596 officers. I know you would have had challenges during the year. Can you indicate whether you were able meet those targets for 2020?

Hon. West: We were not. We had targeted about 1,000 to 1,200, and we managed to successfully complete training for about half of that, having regard to what happened with the COVID. During the COVID period, we did not continue with training. What we did was refocus internally to put ourselves in the position to convert our platform to a digital one. So we are now ready to resume.

Dr. Bodoë: Can you say how far along you are in that conversion process?

Hon. West: It is anticipated that by November we can start.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 216; Item 001: General

Administration, pages 216 to 217. I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, at line Item 16, how many persons are presently employed under this Contract Employment?

Hon. West: We have 134 positions, 42 are filled.

Mr. Rambally: And hon. Minister, in terms of the increase, there is a proposed increase. Do you anticipate taking on—is it that you are going to add on to this number?

Hon. West: Yes, we are, especially in the areas that will impact on the digitalization programme. So we anticipate increasing the number of persons in the National ICT Division, the ICT division, which is the division that serves the Ministry itself, legal department, facilities, corp coms and HR.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, do you have a number in mind, you know, a cumulative number for all of these positions?

Hon. West: We are looking at a minimum of 20 people, a minimum.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Good afternoon, hon. Minister and to your team. I would like to go to line Item 08: Rent,/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many properties are leased for rent and what is the monthly cost?

Hon. West: How many properties we occupy?

Mr. Ram: Yes, please.

Hon. West: We occupy three. The monthly cost would be—so, one of those is Government owned, the other two are not. I will have to get that information for you, Member. I do not have that with me.

Mr. Ram: Follow-up, please. So three properties currently house the entire Ministry? Am I correct?

Hon. West: Yes.

Mr. Ram: Two of those are leased or rent?

Hon. West: That is correct.

Mr. Ram: Both of them are admin and storage, or one is admin and one is storage?

Hon. West: They house two different units of the Ministry. One houses the Property and Real Estate Division and the other one is management.

Mr. Ram: In light of the digitization efforts of the Ministry, have you done a comparative analysis of the lease versus the best option for achieving the Government-owned versus leased?

Hon. West: Sorry, I missed the question.

Mr. Ram: Has the Ministry conducted a comparative analysis of purchasing a property against leasing?

Hon. West: As I would have indicated to the Member for Fyzabad, I believe, earlier, we have been challenged with the resources in PRES D. We are now seeking to beef that up, and one of the mandates of the division, as beefed up, will be rationalization of properties that the Government uses, both for the Ministry itself and for other Government Ministries.

Mr. Ram: And lastly, do you foresee, in light of your digitization efforts throughout all the Ministries, can you indicate what percentage of currently leased buildings will not be in use, and the time frame for doing so, in terms of a plan moving forward?

Hon. West: We do not have that plan yet. It is something that I have tasked them

with. But what we are hoping to do, for example, after we digitize the records, is to transfer the physical records out of the expensive space that they now occupy into a more affordable space, and therefore shrink the size of the accommodation that we need in high-cost areas. But I cannot tell you in light of that, at the moment, what impact that would have on the spend.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I now recognize the Attorney General for input.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Chair, I just would like the opportunity— my friend has raised some very important considerations. I join him in the observations made, but to remind that some of this involves legislative reform. The Data Protection Act and the maintenance of Government records right now is literally indefinite in certain circumstances. So as we digitize, something that the Attorney General's Office is looking at, is how long we maintain physical records for. Therefore, there is some legislative reform to be had, because the Government actually rents a significant amounts of storage space in Trinidad and Tobago, as we are bound to keep records indefinitely. It is not a very easy concept if you look at it at Central Bank level, or Judiciary level or other levels. Some of these records relate to criminal proceedings, financial data, personal data, et cetera, and so, it is not a very simple solution. You have to ensure that all of your data is properly digitized and then, some of the laws will in fact need to be amended. So the digitization, the rationalization of space and occupancy is also tied into the data requirements and physical record requirements under law in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Attorney General. I will now recognize the Member for Fyzabad. Asked and answered. I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Minister, can I draw your attention to line Item 12, which is Materials

and Supplies, \$70,000. Minister would any specific material and supplies be needed by your Ministry in these three or four buildings that you have, to meet with the health and safety protocols as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? Would that fall within that allocation for that \$70,000?

Hon. West: I believe it would, yes, special office supplies. So, they would cover the additional expense that we need to incur in terms of sanitizers and that kind of thing.

Mr. Paray: What financial implications would the change in the working conditions, owing to this COVID-19, have on the operations of the Ministry and the need for supplies? Do you foresee any great change in terms of what would be the demand for those types of supplies? Because keeping the level of public service within the constraints that you have, I think the focus on getting people in and out would be critical. Do you foresee any major additional requirements in terms of facilitating the public access into your facilities?

Hon. West: Well, there are a couple of things that impact on that. One is that we are still working on the half on/half off basis, so there are fewer people in the office at any one time, which means less demand on the resources. We have significantly shifted to digital meetings and therefore, there is not a lot of inflow in and out of the office.

Mr. Paray: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Members. Item 003: National Information and Communication Technology, page 217. Member for Fyzabad, I recognize you.

Dr. Bodo: Minister, if I could draw your attention to line Item 22: Short-term Employment. There is an increase of \$11,439,200. Can you give us an indication of how many people are going to be employed?

Hon. West: The short-term contract under this Item is largely to staff the access centres. We just added one new access centre. We intend to add about eight more, and we expect an increase in staff for 30 people.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up?

Dr. Bodoë: Yes. Can you identify—do you have the locations?

Hon. West: Of the access centres? Since I anticipated that question, I do. They would be Guayaguayare, Marac, Penal, Todds Road, Carenage.

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry, those are already in existence, if I may say so, Minister.

Hon. West: Sorry?

Dr. Bodoë: No, I think you are looking in the wrong direction, if I may.

Mr. Chairman: No, it is Fyzabad.

Hon. West: Yes, sorry.

Dr. Bodoë: No, no. The question I asked, Minister, is you said you intended to roll out—

Hon. West: Oh right, yes, okay.

Dr. Bodoë: And you gave me a list of those that are already in existence. I am asking for the new locations, proposed locations.

1.45 p.m.

Hon. West: We have only three agreed on so far and they would be La Horquetta, La Pastora and Beetham. The other five we still need to get signed off on.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I will now recognize the Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you again, Chair. I am referring to Item 23: Fees. There was an Estimate of \$62 million for 2020, a proposed Estimate. Sorry, a proposal but only 2.7 million was spent. My question, Ma'am, is what exactly was envisaged

which would have carried the expenditure up to 62 million in the Estimates?

Mr. Chairman: Madam Minister.

Hon. West: The Microsoft fees are very high and they would have been covered in the original allocation for 2020. Microsoft is 28 million on its own. Sorry, 38 million. Then we have Oracle Support which is 3 million, Endpoint is 8 million, so these are all largely software costs that are generally incurred by the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation, incurred by the entire public service.

Mr. Tancoo: And they have been covered somewhere else you said? The payments were made under some other Head?

Hon. West: No. This is where it is.

Mr. Tancoo: All right. But forgive my concern here. So \$62 million was supposed to cover the fees for these various services, for Microsoft, et cetera.

Hon. West: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: But only 2.7 million was spent. So my question is, where?

Hon. West: Well what has been happening over the last year, year and a half is that, iGovTT which is our implementation unit has been looking at determining whether there is an alternative solution to any of these, so we have been renewing on a short-term basis rather than for the extended periods that were contemplated in '19—in 2020. I am sorry.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. West: So they are again seeking a short-term extension, and by the end of that period they will determine whether they will need to go on for like a five-year contract or whether we will switch to another solution.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. West: You are welcome.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Caroni Central. Please put your mike.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, I would like to take you back to line 22 Short-term Employment.

Hon. West: Uh hmm.

Mr. Ram: Is this Short-term Employment geared towards a specific project? Or this is—because the increase is about 11.4 million. So is it geared towards a specific project? That the—

Hon. West: The digitalization programme is expected to cover about 9.4 million of that.

Mr. Ram: And can you indicate—follow up please. Can you indicate how long that programme is carded to run for?

Hon. West: We have a two-year window to achieve digitalization and the introduction of the—*[Inaudible]*

Mr. Ram: And can I then safely say that those persons will be employed for two years or shorter periods of time.

Hon. West: It depends on the nature of the engagement that they are brought on for, because there are several elements of the digitalization programme which require different resources at different times, so some of them will be short term, some of them may be for the two years, it will vary.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, if I could direct your attention to line Item 28: Other Contracted Services, and I see that there is a proposed increase of 29 million just close to 30 million. Can you perhaps give us an idea of what is

anticipated?

Hon. West: This also has to do with the digitization programme. We have signed or about to sign, I am not sure of the exact status, an MOU with Estonia and we expect to be engaging them to provide consultancy services in respect of the e-identity because they have preceded us in this. We have—we anticipate also engaging a programme manager. We have GovNet to address, and we have to engage local providers in respect of the provision of cloud services which will all form part of the architecture of the digitalization programme.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West. The Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much. Minister, I want to draw back your attention to line Item 23 on Fees and this is more of an accounting question. Taking into consideration that when you look at the cost of software and these licences that are usually in the millions of dollars, right? I am interested to find out why is the cost treated as an expense in our books rather than a capital asset that can be depreciated over time because that saves, accounting wise, the State some money in terms of building on the assets of the Ministry. So I am just asking from an accounting purpose, why is it treated as an expense rather than a capital asset?—because it is millions of dollars' worth of software that is being spent by the State.

Hon. West: The software is not a capital asset. It is something that you pay for annually and you use and it goes away. It is not an asset that you acquire.

Mr. Paray: Because it is more of a maintenance fee rather than for the actual asset?

Hon. West: It is the permission to use an asset that belongs to somebody else.

Mr. Paray: Okay.

Hon. West: It is like a lease rather than a purchase of an asset.

Mr. Paray: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. AG.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Software is a licence, it is a licence arrangement, it is a service-level agreement, they are properly expenses as recorded. You cannot capitalize a licence cost or a service-level agreement, it is just not done because the code and the software arrangements are owned by the provider, you merely have a licence to use it or a service-level agreement for it.

Mr. Paray: AG, just to respond to that. I am aware that when you buy a package, a software package in terms of our accounting, it can be capitalized over time.

Mr. Al-Rawi: But not in the arrangement—

Mr. Paray: Not the maintenance contract for it. The maintenance contract which is your support service, well then I understand that.

Mr. Al-Rawi: So a package arrangement is different from a whole-of-government arrangement with a multipurpose and multi-sprung arrangement for licensing structures. So it is the nature of this particular product.

Chair, I just want to ask my friend from Mayaro, nothing pejorative in this intended but just to protect himself, he ought to declare an interest insofar as he is a technology provider himself; just protecting him. I know that is nothing on toward, I know he runs a very respectable business, it is well-known in this country in the IT field.

Mr. Chairman: Thanks for the clarity bringing the information.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, AG.

Mr. Chairman: I now recognize the Member for Caroni Central. You still have a

question?

Mr. Ram: Yes, please. It was with respect to line Item—well two things. Let me just go back to that one we were dealing with in terms of fees. Has the Ministry considered some of these programmes? I know, for example, this is more for comment please, Mr. Chairman, in terms of having programmes so that citizens can develop some of the same software? So it is like, you know, that programme “Planting Seeds” where people will come forward and put ideas together. Maybe we can run a programme wherein our nationals can create a software that we are required, unless this software is required for some international purpose, something that we can look at, at the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman: Minister.

Hon. West: Our implementation arm which is iGovTT already runs a programme that they call Hackathon which engages persons involved in IT training in the three tertiary education institutions. They ran a very successful one last year. Three of the winning apps have been acquired by iGovTT for purpose of development for the use in Government to start with, and we have also engaged the persons who won the project, so it is something that is high on our agenda.

I have asked iGovTT to consider rolling that down to secondary schools and maybe even primary schools to get our children thinking about developing apps and how they can be used. And I have also had a preliminary discussion with the Ministry of Youth Development and National Services to make that a focus of that Ministry as well.

Mr. Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would just like to point out that much of the arrangements in licensing and software arrangement are now done on an

open-source basis. In fact, one of the leading providers in the world for parliamentary structures is Brazil and they operate on an entire open-source basis, so that there are hardly ever proprietary arrangements left in that kind of structure so it is actually very exciting world out there. That helps us to move away from fixed arrangements like Microsoft or Apple, et cetera, and it is a drastically reduced cost arrangement.

So from my own operations with iGovTT, and I would like to compliment the Minister, I can say for instance that the queue management software at the Registrar General's division came out of the Hackathon and iGovTT arrangement that this entrepreneurship in the local market is working extremely well as we at RG and AG's office take the lead this month on October 26th when we go live into open structures. A lot of it comes out of the iGovTT arrangements and the Hackathon arrangement with local entrepreneurship using again open-source arrangements.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Follow-up question, Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Another line Item, please.

Mr. Chairman: Sure. Proceed.

Mr. Ram: Item number 27: Janitorial Services. The hon. Minister indicated there will be a two-year programme which will attract a number of varied skills and disciplines, and yet there has to be a location where these persons are housed. So is it that it is a work-from-home arrangement? Or is it an in-house arrangement where they come to an office? And if they come to an office, then obviously you will attract janitorial services as part of a workspace environment.

Hon. West: ICT is located at the head office of the Ministry and therefore the janitorial costs are under GA, General Admin.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services, page 218. Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Pardon. I am not hearing you, Member.

Mr. Hosein: Sorry. I am at line Item 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation and Storage.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Hosein: Minister, I am seeing a very large allocation for rentals and I would assume this would be rentals throughout the public sector, \$427 million very close to half a billion dollars that we spend every single year in rent. Can you indicate to us, how many buildings that the State currently rents for this total figure?

Hon. West: Actually this figure does not relate to all the rentals by the State. It relates to buildings that PRES D is responsible for that largely comes under a BOLT arrangement, meaning that we are paying towards acquisition of the buildings. It would cover the Waterfront, the Ministry of Education Tower, the Government Plaza, and I think Tunapuna and Siparia—no. Just those three.

Mr. Hosein: Tunapuna?

Hon. West: No. So will be Waterfront, it would be MOE Tower, it would be Government Plaza.

Mr. Hosein: Yeah. And does this figure in any way—

Hon. West: And OPM at St. Clair.

Mr. Hosein: OPM? So this figure does not reflect any of the private—

Hon. West: That is correct.

Mr. Hosein:—rentals. Okay.

Hon. West: The Ministries would pay their own rent, so that cost will be reflected in the—

Mr. Hosein: In the separate line Items for each particular Ministry. So PRES D function is really just to negotiate with the various landlords on behalf of the Ministries and then the various Ministries will then pay the rental out of their allocations.

Hon. West: Yes. PRES D is supposed to find suitable accommodation, negotiate an acceptable price and then it hands over responsibility for maintenance and payment of rent to the client Ministry.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. No problem.

2.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Item 006: Public Management Consulting Division, page 219; Item 007: Public Service Academy; Item 015: Strategic Services Division, page 220. I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay, Mr. Chairman. Minister, this Strategic Services Division, I noted no allocation under Personnel Expenditure. I get the feeling that this Division is going to be absorbed in perhaps another division within the Ministry, can you give me an idea what is the current function of this Division, and whether it is the Ministry's intention to absorb it into another Division?

Hon. West: I do not think we have a current intention to change the function. The Division deals with research and planning, and assists us in terms our PSIP spend and developing outages, ensuring the projects are on board, and our relationships with our international bodies, like the ITU and the CTU. That is the function.

Dr. Bodoë: Understood. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Item 020: Modernization and Service Improvement Division. One

second, I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, I know it is a recently created Division, this Modernization and Service Improvement, so I will ask my question tagged to 16: Contract Employment. If you could just explain again what is the intention of— the objectives of this Division, and whether the allocation here represents enough for you to achieve those objectives in terms of improving public service delivery and efficiency, and so on?

Hon. West: This Division is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the public service functions the way it is supposed to. In terms of the digitalization programme, we have them looking at the reengineering of processes because they will all have to be reengineered. We are looking at the training needs and redesigning. We are looking at revisiting the supervision structure within the public service, so more efficient management of public servants. And as to whether we have enough money, no—poor change management, very important in terms of the digitalization space. Whether we have enough money, no, but we will make do with what we have because we understand the challenges that the Minister of Finance is facing.

Dr. Bodoë: I understand that, Minister, and I just want to make a comment. And I make this, you know, fairly because you are saying that because you have less money to spend, that you have to get improved service, and therefore, I am asking—I understand what you are saying. The point I am making is because you have to do more with less, as the Government sometimes say, and then therefore, the more emphasis— you would want to have more emphasis placed on increasing the efficiency of the public service. Just a comment, you do not have to respond.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 220; Item 001:

Standing Finance Committee

Head 31: Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation

General Administration; Item 003: National Information and Communication Technology, page 221; Item 005: Property and Real Estate Management Services; Item 007: Public Service Academy. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, page 222; Item 001: Regional Bodies; Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies; Item 003: United Nations Organizations; Item 007: Households, page 223; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*. So we are in the new book, and we go to 03 - Trinidad and Tobago Telecommunications Authority. We are on page 197. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, I just want to refer you to line Item 001, the implementation of the ICT plan.

Hon. West: What Item?

Dr. Bodoë: 001, implementation of the ICT plan with the Estimate of \$20 million expenditure, and we are on the same—it is page 79 I am on, Minister. [*Crosstalk*] Sorry?

Mr. Chairman: No, we are now—

Hon. West: Are you talking about the Telecommunications Authority?

Mr. Chairman: No. One second. We are now, Members, in the new booklet, *Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and for the Tobago House of Assembly*. We are on page 197. Right? Fyzabad, you are okay?

Dr. Bodoë: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, right. Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services, page 197; Item

001: General Administration. I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 08: Rent/Lease- Office Accommodation, there is a \$59,000 increase in terms of the rental arrangement for, I assume, is the TATT building. Have there been any negotiations that would allow the increase—that would have facilitated this increase in rental?

Hon. West: Yes. Sorry about that, Member. We are expecting an increased rent in Tobago. We are seeking to negotiate it down but TATT opted to cater for what they thought would be a reasonable increase in the circumstances.

Mr. Chairman: Hold up, Member for Mayaro?

Mr. Paray: Yes. New line Item, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, there is—I am on line Item 17 for Training, there is a \$1 million increase, up from \$2 million in 2020 for training. What specific area of training is TATT pursuing, and is it for staff or is it for the vendors in the industry? Where is this 2— sorry, \$3 million spent on Training? Where is it going?

Hon. West: Is it for the members of staff of TATT. There is a policy in place for TATT to keep the employees trained and up-to-date on the very technical areas that they are charged with the responsibility of regulating. The 3 million, actually, is consistent with what was spent in 2020. In 2021, it would have— sorry, in 2019, in 2020, it would have gone down as a result of COVID, so they have gone back to what was traditionally the annual spend of the organization in ensuring that its staff members are kept up-to-date.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Minister, any specific area of training for staffing, especially looking at the fact that the industry is going to like 5G, some of the other white space

digital TV—is the training focused in those areas because of what is coming down the stream in the international arena for telecommunications?

Hon. West: I do not have the training schedule before me, but I know that TATT's focus is on keeping abreast of developments, so 5G would be an area that they are looking at. Allocation of spectrum would be another important area for them. And, of course, there are several international sessions that they attend every year, either virtually or face-to-face, to keep abreast of developments.

Mr. Chairman: Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Last question, just a follow up on this. Minister, any opportunity for training of staff in the areas of identifying implements that are used in piracy for cable TV, for, you know, some of those things that are coming on stream? Any sort of training to prepare them for that?

Hon. West: I cannot say whether that is on this year's agenda, but I can look into it and get back to you if you would like.

Mr. Paray: Okay, Ma'am. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Chair, in case people are wondering why I am constantly involving myself here. Intellectual property falls under the Attorney General and therefore we have a co-relating role with this Ministry's digitalization. I can inform that the training comes from the Intellectual Property Office. We run constant programmes in relation to IP enforcement and we advise on those matters, and so, there is a very robust programme that is in gear but it is under Office of the Attorney General and Ministry of Legal Affairs.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw the

Minister's attention to line Item 16: Contract Employment. Yesterday it was pointed out to us that while certain line Item would have been allocated, the certain sum, based on the releases, certain activities were not executed. Under this line Item, I see it was estimated at 5.4 million but the Revised Estimates is 3.8 million. Can the hon. Minister advise if this is based on the releases, that they did not get the money that they requested, or it is simply that some of the contracts ended and they did not need for it?

Hon. West: TATT earns its own income and deposits the net profits into the Consolidated Fund, so it is not a wait releases. So that would not have been it.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, in line Item 28, on a point of clarity. Is this on account of some additional service that we are taking on or is it that there is some rollover? Judging from the 2020 figure and what is the proposed Estimate, is it that we are taking on some additional service or a rollover?

Hon. West: There is an increase in the number of projects and they are about to embark on drafting a new strat plan, so that would account for the increase in the need of resources under that Item. Among the things that TATT is about to embark on or has just embarked on, would be the fibre access that I mentioned to you, and very importantly, the digital divide survey that they are embarking on with CSO, which we would require some resources to get out there and get the work done.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up, Caroni Central? Question?

Mr. Ram: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I go to line Item 27, please, hon. Minister, Official Overseas Travel. We have had a Revised Estimate for 2020 of

400,000 and yet, in light of our borders being locked— we are seeing that— closed—we are seeing that an increase is budgeted for this line Item here. Can the Minister please indicate?

Hon. West: In the 2019 figure, I think a bit of optimism is being shown there. They will only spend what is reasonable in the circumstances, so it will depend on when the borders reopen.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. Hon. Minister, line Item 66: Hosting of Conferences, Seminars and other Functions. We have heard time and time again in this Chamber, the fact of being financial prudent and how we are to spend our money diligently in the next financial year, ad nauseam, from Members on the other side. And then, yet, I am seeing an increase when it comes to seminars and functions. Can that be justified?

Hon. West: Because we had committed to hosting a conference in Trinidad and Tobago in May of this year. It was called off, of necessity. But since the commitment is there, they decided to provide for it in the event that we are obliged to fulfil that obligation during the 2021 fiscal.

Mr. Ram: Has a proposed date been set or it is deferred by the one year, or is it a yearly conference?

Hon. West: It was deferred indefinitely. So, at the next virtual meeting, when things open and they see how it is going, they will determine whether it can be physical this year or whether it needs to be virtual again.

Mr. Ram: Can you indicate then whether this is a yearly function hosted by different countries or it is—

Hon. West: That is correct. It is an annual function and it moves around to the

different member states.

Mr. Ram: We had just deferred. So, the other person who would have been granted the 2021 hosting is then deferred as well?

Hon. West: I believe the decision is to who will host the next event occurs at the current year, and so, because there was not a face-to-face, no such decision was held.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Madam Minister, I just want to ask a question tied back to line number 17, under Training. At the close of the parliamentary session, last sitting, the Attorney General bought some very good legislation with regard to the Copyright Act and dealing with offensive equipment that deals with piracy. And I just wanted to find out if it is TATT'S plan any time, going forward, to offer assistance to, like Customs and Excise, to assist them in identifying these equipment that are coming into the country and it is really damaging the industry. And, as the Attorney General mentioned before, I am a player in the market as well, so I have a vested interest so I am giving full disclosure, Attorney General. Because that is a big issue for operators, the large ones, the small ones, and I would think that some collaboration between the Telecommunications Authority and Customs and Excise to help identify those equipment when it is coming through our legal ports and borders to be able to clamp down on it as much as you can to protect the industry.

Hon. West: I know the issue on tax radar because I have had discussions with them on it. As to whether there have been any discussions between them and the

Customs and Excise, I cannot say, but it is something I would look into because I think it may be worthy of consideration.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Mr. Chair, if I could just add that the Intellectual Property Office is in training sessions with Customs, as well as we operationalized the conventions, the Marrakesh and the Beijing Conventions which, in part, treat with different aspects of infringement and we, of course, think that it is imperative to do so and we recognize the merit of the contribution.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head— Member for Couva North, you have a—

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chairman. Line Item 99: Employee Assistance Programme and under this line Item, Chairman, I would like to use this opportunity to congratulate the employees of TATT and their CEO— the leadership provided by the CEO and the team at TATT for the job that they have been doing. Under this Employee Assistance Programme, I see that there has been a slight increase from 2019 to 2020 and the estimated budgeted figure is the same of 2020, but under these difficult, stressful times, these trying times and so forth, I believe this Vote here is what is used to provide that support for the employees. Would this be sufficient, hon. Minister?

Hon. West: It is difficult to say because we do not have a precedent. We will have to take it as it comes and if need be, make adjustments.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 198; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book, Development Programme and we are going to page 79,

Consolidated Fund; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 79. And I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, if I can draw your attention to 001 on page 79: Implementation of ICT Plan with an allocation of 20 million in 2021 but no expenditure in 2020. And if I might just preface my question by quoting from the Auditor General's Report of 2019 which said that:

“The...”— Ministry of Public Administration— “has not yet developed an IT Governance Framework to guide Ministries and Departments in implementing and monitoring IT governance to support the organization in achieving its strategic objective.”

Now, I am aware that there is National ICT Plan for 2018 to 2022 and therefore, the—and it is also alleged in this document that:

“The MPA has not issued an updated IT policy for use by Ministries and Departments.”

Can you Minister indicate whether this allocation is intended to achieve these objectives, whether these objectives have already been met prior to this report, if not, whether it would be achieved with this allocation?

Hon. West: We have a draft governance policy that needs to go before Cabinet for its approval which will allow us to better manage and guide the Ministries, divisions and the agencies going forward in terms of the ITC spent to get a whole of government approach. In terms of the ICT policy, we have developed an interim cloud policy and we are looking at developing—filling that out and developing a more comprehensive ICT policy during the course of this year because it will aid with our digitization approach.

Dr. Bodoë: Would any other project be covered under this 20 million expenditure?

Hon. West: Yes, definitely. As I indicated in my opening statement, there are two key focus points for the Ministry, which is the introduction of an e-identity which would require the establishment of a data centre. So we have that. We have been seeking assistance from Estonia in terms of the e-identity— the building out of e-identity and the interoperability platform connecting the various Ministries, so that there is easy exchange of relevant information to better service the citizens.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you. If I may continue—one more question, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, I just want to refer to 064: Implementation of the Business Continuity Management in the Public Service, especially in due of the current situation we are in with COVID-19 and so on, and the importance of contingency measures. Yes, can you indicate whether that project has been completed? Because I see that there is no allocation for 2021?

Hon. West: The work continues. It is being done in-house.

Dr. Bodoë: Sorry?

Hon. West: The work continues. It is being done in-house because, as you indicated, we do not have a budget to cover it is, so it is coming along more slowly than we would like, but we are continuing to do the work.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Chairman. Chairman, I would like to seek some clarification on Item 066: Digital Transformation, it is a new project budgeted for 10 million. Can the hon. Minister indicate the duration of this project and the expected completion date?

Hon. West: We have a mandate within two years to effect the introduction of the

e-identity as well as interoperability. So that is our initial target date.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, line Item 066, just a follow-up question from the Member for Couva North. We heard during the budget debate, the position that the Government has taken in terms of where it wants to take Trinidad and Tobago into the digital era and the refocusing of digitization which is being spearheaded by your Ministry. One would appreciate that the digitization is two-fold, it has to be done from government service, but also into the communities, into homes, into schools and so on. I am looking at the \$10 million allocation. Is there an opportunity—I know there is a universal telecommunication fund which is probably, I think, the last time found out was about \$135 million. Is there any opportunity that your Ministry can use some of that or tap in to some of that to do the two things at the same time, roll out your digitization in the public service but somehow get access into, especially rural communities like ours in Mayaro there, with infrastructure to assist operators, assist the schools and so on, to get their digitization on stream? So, at some in time, two years, three years, four years down the line, there can be some balance in service offering and service availability.

Hon. West: Yes, Member. As I would already have mentioned, as part of our programme for this year, we plan to do the gap analysis to determine which rural areas we need to give priority to. There are a couple of rural areas which we have already identified, which we are going to be supplying Internet service to. We are increasing the number of Wi-Fi spaces, mainly in underserved areas, as well as building access centres. So that combination of things is what—that is the

approach we are taking to widen the coverage input in Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Members. Member for Fyzabad, may I recognize you now.

Dr. Bodoë: Yeah. Thank you, Chairman. Minister, I just want to refer to line Item 065: Public Sector Performance Management Systems. I am thinking because of the naming of this programme, this Item, it refers to monitoring performance management in the public sector which is an important—even more important in our current circumstances. Can you give us an update as to where we are with this and how far you expect to get, to go with the 360,000 allocation in 2021, in view of fact that only 61,000 was spent in 2020?

Hon. West: As I indicated earlier, we have been seeking sometime to engage consultants. It took us a while to get to the point where we could bring them on board. We have now chosen them, I think the negotiations are ready to start. We will use some of that money to pay them. They are going to be looking at—the unit is going to be looking at dealing with the change management in terms of the digitalization, the balance scorecard training, and train the trainer. Those are going to be the key focuses of the unit during this period so that it aligns with what we are doing in the digitalization space.

Dr. Bodoë: How long do you envisage this project to last? And can you give us any deliverables at this time?

Hon. West: I would expect that it would last at least a year beyond the completion of the initial mandate in terms of digitalization and the e-identity, because as we bring more and more Ministries on board, the need for the training and change management and so will continue to roll on. So I would expect at least a year after.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 31 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister, for your attendance today. Also, to your Permanent Secretary and to the senior executives of your Ministry, thanks for coming. You care to say something?

Hon. West: Chair—for Service Commissions and the Personnel Department.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, all right.

2.30 p.m.

Head 06: Service Commissions, \$67,990,750.

Mr. Chairman: Welcome to again, continuing, Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation and to your Head DPA of the Commission and also the other senior executives of the Commission. Head 06: Service Commissions, \$67,990,750. I will now invite the Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation to make brief opening remarks not exceeding five minutes. Thank you.

Hon. West: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Service Commissions acknowledge the need to increase the level of efficiency so that we can have a better performing public service. They are aligned with the goals of the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation to incorporate digitalization into their plan for improved service so that the focus would be on digitalizing the Service Commissions for more efficient delivery of services, being able to communicate electronically with the various Ministries and agencies that it serves for more efficient conduct of its work. And the expenditure identified for this period is seeking to allow them to achieve those objectives. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Question proposed: That Head 06 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$67,990,750 for Head 06, Service

Commissions is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure, and we are on page 29 of the Recurrent Expenditure booklet—page 29. Item 001: General Administration, Member for Fyzabad

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, with regard to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, may I enquire how many vacancies there are still to be filled in the Service Commissions?

Hon. West: We have a total of about 67 vacancies. Of that the critical positions amount to about 30.

Dr. Bodoë: Those are vacancies without bodies?

Hon. West: Vacancies with—yes their bodies.

Dr. Bodoë: Minister, if I may draw your attention, last year you indicated in a submission to this Committee that you were proposing to fill about 20 vacant posts during 2020. Can you indicate what challenges you would have faced with would have prevented that from happening?

Hon. West: Yes, the positions were advertised but as with PRES D the COVID challenged slowed us down. So we are continuing with that exercise in the hope that we will be able to fill at least the critical positions in the short-term.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration, pages 29 and 30. Item 002: Tobago Services, page 31; Item 003: Public Service Commission; Item 004: Teaching Service Commission; Item 005: Judicial and Legal Service Commission, page 32. Item 006: Police Service Commission. Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, page 33. Item 001:

General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We are going to a new booklet, Development Programme. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund and we are on page 9. Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, if I can refer to 006: Implementation of the Electronic Document Management System. I see no allocation in 2021. Can you indicate the status of that project; has it been completed?

Hon. West: The project is ongoing. They were hoping for an allocation to be able to complete, but we are in discussions with the Acting DPA. During the course of the preparation we felt that there were two ways that we could achieve the objection even in the absence of an allocation. One, is that the software they are using is identical to the software that is being used in at least one other agency, and as we move towards a single government approach, a whole of government approach, we will do negotiations in respect of not just the each individual agency but we will try to get economies of scale for the expanded use. That is one. And secondly, as the Ministry responsible for digitalization we are in the process of setting up a unit to digitize records which we will do in respect of the documents in the Ministry itself, and we will also need to assist other Ministries and agencies to the extent that they need it, including the Service Commissions.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 06 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister, and also thanks to the DPA of the

Service Commissions and the senior technocrats for gracing us with your presence today. Thank you.

Head 17: Personnel Department, \$44,753,900.

Mr. Chairman: Head 17: Personnel Department, \$44,753,900, and we have the Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation still with us this afternoon. I would like to recognize the Chief Personnel Officer and also the other senior technocrats of your Department. Madam Minister, again, five minutes, brief opening remarks.

Hon. West: Thank you, Chair. The Personnel Department is responsible for determining and advising on pay and terms and conditions of employment for employees in the public service. The Department determines through consultation and negotiations with appropriate recognized majority unions and associations the terms and conditions of service for persons in the civil service, statutory authorities subject to Statutory Authorities Act, the teaching service, the police service, the fire service and the prison service.

The Department is also responsible for the determination of terms and conditions of employment for members of the defence force, daily-rated workers, contract employees and the provision of secretariat services and advising the Salaries Review Commission on the terms and conditions of employment for officeholders within its purview as well as providing secretariat services to the Human Resource Advisory Committee, a sub-committee of Cabinet for which the Department provides recommendations and advice to treat with organizations in the state sector.

The Department is also required to advise on a wide range of HR issues in the public service including matters related to industrial relations. These include

matters before the Industrial Court, grievances and disputes. Currently, the Department is engaged in two job evaluation exercises. One is for the officeholders within the purview of the Salaries Review Commission, and one for officers within the civil service, Tobago House of Assembly and statutory authorities subject to the Statutory Authorities Act. The leadership of the Department is strengthening the organization to improve the timeliness and quality of service delivery to all its stakeholders by implementing its strategic plan 2018—2020. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Question proposed: That Head 17 stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$44,753,900 for Head 17, Personnel Department is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. We now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and we are at page 79. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, if I can—

Mr. Chairman: One second. Item 001: General Administration, page 79. Just for the records.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Same Item, 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Minister, the Standing Finance Committee report here in 2019, it was indicated that the Department plan to fill all 124 of the vacant positions and the 187 post establishment in financial 2020. Minister, can you indicate whether the Department was able to meet this recruitment target?

Hon. West: The Department would have made some progress in this regard, but it was not able to satisfy its full objective. Positions, they advertised and they have

17 HRA is coming on shortly.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay. So that is 14 and 17, is that what you are saying? What challenges you would have faced in terms of meeting the full target?

Hon. West: COVID again delayed the engagement of the persons, but as I said they are close to the end of the process and they expect to have the people on board.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head—I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, line Item 3. Under this Item, Overtime, whilst it might appear, you know it looks good, that we do not have any projections for 2020 and 2021, is there any reasons that we can attribute to this?

2.45 p.m.

Hon. West: Because of the new accommodation that they moved into, they no longer need to provide the security that was necessary before and that is the reason for the change.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 02, Goods and Services. Item 001, General Administration, pages 79 and 80. I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Chair. I am at line Item 08, Rent/Lease/Office Accommodation and Storage. Minister, I see that there is a very large allocation for rent in the sum of \$8 million. Can you just confirm which building is this?

Hon. West: There are three different locations. One is No. 3 Alexandra Place which houses the bulk of the Ministry's staff, if not all of the Ministry's staff and there are two storage locations at Trade Zone and Chapman's.

Mr. Hosein: Can you indicate, what is the monthly rental sum for No. 3 Alexandra Place?

Hon. West: It is 676,000 per month.

Mr. Hosein: 676,000. And is that building currently occupied?

Hon. West: Yes, it is.

Mr. Hosein: With staff?

Hon. West: Yes. We have been operating out of there for quite some time.

Mr. Hosein: Has a lease been signed for this location?

Hon. West: Has any—?

Mr. Hosein: Has a lease been signed for this building?

Hon. West: No, the lease has not yet been signed.

Mr. Hosein: So it is a month-to-month arrangement that we are on?

Hon. West: We are under a three-year arrangement but the formalities are not yet completed.

Mr. Hosein: Can you indicate why?

Hon. West: I would largely ascribe it to the deficiencies of the staffing at PRES D because this is true of several of the properties rented by the State. This is probably one of the more recent ones so that is one of the things I am trying to regularize when I beef up the staff in that unit.

Mr. Hosein: Are there any indications whether or not PRES D will try to negotiate the rent downwards having regard to how expensive the building is?

Hon. West: PRES D would have been the one to have the negotiation and having regard to the valuation received from the Commissioner of Valuations, the comparative rents in similar buildings around Trinidad and Tobago, we do not see it as being exorbitant.

Mr. Hosein: When do you expect for the Ministry to enter into a formal lease with the owners of No. 3 Alexandra?

Hon. West: As I said, we are at the end of the process of recruitment of additional PRES D staff and that is one of the things I have high on the agenda. I am hoping to make a dent in that between now and the end of the calendar year.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, with regard to Item 16, Contract Employment under Goods and Services, I am looking here at the allocation of 5.720 for 2021, same amount spent in 2020. This Committee meeting in October 2019, it was indicated that there were 23 contract positions in the Department that were filled whilst there were 35 vacant. Can you indicate how many of these contract positions were filled in 2020?

Hon. West: There are 32 positions that are filled. We, again, advertised to fill the other positions and the persons are being short-listed.

Dr. Bodoë: Can you indicate how many people are expected to be brought on board?

Hon. West: The number of vacant positions are 26. I am not sure based on what kind of feedback we got in the advertising space whether we would be able to fill all of those positions, it depends on the quality of the applicants.

Dr. Bodoë: Sure. I understand. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Madam Minister, in terms of line Item 5, this in comparison and I do not mean it in any demeaning way to the other Ministries, this is actually quite low as compared to what we saw with other Ministries. My question to you is in

light of the actual expenditure for 2019, is it that there is a specific measure employed by the Ministry in this particular instance here that keeps the actual bill less than what is projected? Again I say, —this is line Item 5.

Hon. West: That is NIS?

Mr. Rambally: No, no, this is—

Mr. Chairman: Page 79 and we are under Goods and Services, line Item 05, Telephones.

Hon. West: All right, yes, sorry about that.

Mr. Rambally: So, hon. Minister, it actually looks promising. What I am asking is: Was there a specific measure taken on board to facilitate this?

Hon. West: Unfortunately, no. While we are looking at a whole of Government solution for telephone cost, that has not yet been agreed on or introduced. So what caused this simply was that the division is in a new building, it has not yet secured its PBX system so a lot of the communication was done by private cell phone.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: I am back at number 08, Mr. Chair. Minister, can you just indicate the date in which the payment of rent would have started at this building?

Mr. Chairman: Member, line Item?

Mr. Hosein: I said, 08, sorry.

Hon. West: I do not know the exact date. What I remember is that we negotiated a three-month moratorium with the landlord and therefore, we would have started three months after we agreed to rent the location, but I do not think I can tell you—oh September 2019, sorry.

Mr. Hosein: September 2019 rental started?

Hon. West: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: And this building, can you indicate who the landlord is?

Hon. West: Zaman Properties.

Mr. Hosein: Zaman Properties. Is the Attorney General a director on that company?

Mr. Chairman: I am not going to entertain that question, hon. Member. I proceed to the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, with regard to line Item 17, Training, I note that there was no expenditure in 2020 and 2021. So first question is: Does the Department have a training policy and if so, were any training activities undertaken perhaps under a different expenditure in 2020 and proposed for 2021?

Hon. West: What we will be doing in the short term is internal training as well as taking advantage of the facility offered by the Public Service Academy.

Dr. Bodoë: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases. Okay, proceed.

Mr. Rambally: Page 80 but I was still at 001.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, go ahead.

Mr. Rambally: I am grateful. Hon. Minister, in terms of line Item 23, again, this is one of the items that we see in comparison with the actual expenditure for 2019. It is significantly less. Minister, do you have an idea of what fees will actually be paid with this reduced sum in 2021?

Hon. West: Yes, Chair, we do have licence obligations under this Item in respect of software that we use. What we are hoping to do is to try to benefit from the economies of scale through the whole of Government approach using iGovTT as the key negotiator.

Mr. Rambally: I am grateful, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Sub-Head 03, Minor Equipment Purchases. Page 80. Item 001, General Administration. Sub-Head 04, Current Transfers and Subsidies. Page 81.

Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*. So new booklet, Development Programme, Sub-Head 09, Consolidated Fund, page 45. Item 005, Multi-Sectoral and Other Services, page 45. Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, with regard to Item 034, the Conduct of a Job Evaluation/Classification Exercise in respect of the Prison Services of Trinidad and Tobago, I note that there has been no allocation in 2021 but at the Standing Finance Committee of this House last year, it was explained that progress with this project depended on the completion of a restructuring process by the Ministry of National Security. An exercise which has been pending for a number of years. So can you explain the reason for the lack of allocation in 2021? Is it that the restructuring process is being completed by the Ministry of National Security?

Hon. West: We are not yet in receipt of the completed revised report from National Security and so we are unsure as to when we can get this project off of the ground.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, under 036, was a consultant engaged for fiscal year 2021?

Hon. West: 036?

Mr. Rambally: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Conduct of a Job Evaluation and Compensation Exercise.

Hon. West: Yes, a consultant was engaged in, I believe, May—sorry, July 2020.

Mr. Rambally: And, Minister, could you give us an idea of the terms of the engagement?

Hon. West: The consultants are required to do a job evaluation on, if memory serves, 1,600 jobs within the civil service.

Mr. Chairman: Follow-up question, Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman. And what is the status of this project?

Hon. West: It was only started in July of this year and so they are on number seven of the exercise and therefore the CPO assures me that they are on track to deliver within the time frame identified.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. I am on line Item 041, Compensation Administration Framework for the determination of Remuneration Packages for contract employees. Minister, does this line Item have to deal with the terms and conditions of contract officers hired throughout the Ministries?

Hon. West: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: I see that no money was spent for 2020 and no allocation for 2021. I am sure that you are aware that there is a complaint throughout the Ministries that a lot of contract officers are still awaiting their terms and conditions for employment and sometimes this would in fact, I think hinder the accessibility of their gratuities also. Can you just give an indication why no money was spent on the last fiscal and no money allocated for this current fiscal?

Hon. West: Well, the CPO is not convinced that this exercise is required. He

understands that the work of his unit encompasses advising on the terms and conditions for contract employees and he is making an effort to make that more efficient through different means, but because he was not convinced that this exercise was required that somebody needed to come in and tell him how to do his job, this exercise is currently being re-evaluated to determine whether we need the consultancy and what form it should take.

Mr. Hosein: Okay, so as we speak now, what currently is the state of that project in terms of determining the terms and conditions? Is it that the CPO is keeping that in-house and how long you think this is—

Hon. West: The conduct of the work is in-house. He is, as I indicated, seeking to engage additional staff members to try to speed it up. And what he is doing in the meantime is trying to expedite and also to prioritize.

Mr. Hosein: That contract engagement?

Hon. West: The review of contract positions, yes.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Fyzabad.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you, Chairman. Minister, can I in light of your response ask how many outstanding wage agreements are currently before the CPO.

Hon. West: Agreements?

Dr. Bodoë: Wage negotiations, how many are outstanding?

3.00 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: One second, Member. Line Item?

Dr. Bodoë: No. I was going to tie it in to the response from the Minister regarding the need for contract employees, or less contract employees.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Mr. Chairman, the CPO has a dual reporting responsibility. For

matters relating to the Personnel Department, the CPO reports to the Minister of Public Administration. But for matters of collective bargaining, wage agreements, et cetera, the CPO reports to the Minister of Finance. So, any questions relating to that, collective bargaining, collective agreements, should be addressed to the Minister of Finance rather than the Minister of Public Administration and Digital Transformation.

Mr. Chairman: Well, proceed, Minister of Finance. The question is on the floor.

Mr. Imbert: What is the question, please?

Mr. Chairman: The number of negotiations—

Dr. Bodoë: The number of negotiations, wage negotiations, that are before the CPO.

Mr. Imbert: There are a number of submissions but the CPO has not been authorized to enter into formal negotiations with some of the larger trade unions.

Dr. Bodoë: Thank you. That will be all for now.

Mr. Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. Minister of Finance, as a follow-up on that last guidance that he provided, is it that the position being that there are a number of submissions but no actual— I am paraphrasing now— wage negotiations ongoing? Or is it that we have— Minister, you have according to years— because I know sometimes the wage negotiations will arise from a particular year, is it across the board, or is it in specific relation to wage negotiations commenced from a particular year?

Mr. Imbert: The way these things work is that the CPO is given a remit by the Minister of Finance, which the Minister of Finance would, under normal circumstances, get the authorization from Cabinet to make an offer.

With respect to salaries, wages and allowances and the status at this time is that there have been submissions coming from the larger trade unions. There have been discussions, but the CPO has not yet been given a remit, in terms of making a formal offer to some of these larger trade unions. Right?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Mayaro, where are you now, hon. Member?

Mr. Paray: Item 036.

Mr. Chairman: Proceed.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Minister, on the issue of evaluation and classification of jobs, the private sector is way ahead, in terms of classification, evaluation, compensation for very modern job positions. I have had complaints that there are sometimes in some Ministries that you cannot get—the service that you require in a specific area, there is no job classification for it in the public service and it has to go out to contract and when it has to go out to contract, it opens it up for a lot of abuse at times. My question is: What is the Personnel Department doing to raise the level of— to balance it off to what gives in the private sector? Because clearly, if we have to move the country forward, we need the best minds in the public service. So, is the Personnel Department addressing this imbalance in classifications, compensation, and so on?

Mr. Imbert: Again, that is a matter that falls to the Minister of Finance. The CPO has been engaged for quite sometime—or the CPO's Office, let us put it that way, in the classification of various offices within the public service. We are very hopeful that that would be completed shortly. That classification exercise is a prerequisite to making recommendations with respect to the levels, rates, and scales and quantum that should be associated with every post within the public service. So we are so hopeful that classification exercise would be completed

shortly and then, we go to the next stage.

Hon. West: In terms of the—finding positions that are appropriate for the need of the various Ministries, that will fall under the purview of PMCD within the Ministry of Public Administration and Digital Transformation. As I indicated earlier, they have started reviews of the organizational structures of all Ministries. They have drafted four of them and as result of that, we have started revisiting the structures in those Ministries while they continue to work with the other Ministries and finalize what they have done so far.

Mr. Chairman: I recognize the Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, in terms of line Item 038, one would imagine that under this one, we are talking about, you know, leading towards strengthening decision-making and we are talking about decreasing the number of requests as well for changes in the relativity of the positions. In terms of this job evaluation exercise, can you give us an idea of where it is at this point in time?

Hon. West: I had indicated that we have got to deliver Item No. 7 in a two-year programme. So it is on target.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Member, the question is that the—

[Mr. Hosein raises hand]

Mr. Chairman: Barataria/San Juan.

Mr. Hosein: Administrative services.

Mr. Chairman: Pardon?

Mr. Hosein: We were on A. Administrative Services. We have F. Public Buildings.

Mr. Chairman: No, no, no, no. We were on Item 005: Multi-sectoral and Other

Services.

Mr. Hosein: Okay. Madam Chair was doing it in blocks: A. Administrative Services; F.

Mr. Chairman: No. Okay. You were not recognized. When I started, then you put up your hand but I will give you the opportunity, proceed.

Mr. Hosein: Thank you. I am on line Item, category F. Public Buildings; Item 002: Customization and Outfitting New Building at No. 3 Alexandra Street, St. Clair. Minister, I see that there is an expenditure in 2019 of \$1.2 million, then an expenditure of 4.8 million in 2020 and another expenditure of \$2 million for 2021. Can you then first indicate when the customization and outfitting of this building started?

Mr. West: It started when we got possession of the property, which would have been three months from before September. That would take us to June of 2019.

Mr. Hosein: June 2019. And what is the total estimated cost the outfitting and customization of this building?

Hon. West: About 20 million, I am advised.

Mr. Hosein: \$20 million?

Hon. West: Yes.

Mr. Hosein: So, in addition to the roughly \$7 million rent every year, we have to now incur a bill of \$20 million to outfit and customize this building?

Hon. West: That is not unusual. The building would not have come with work stations and accommodation for the furniture for the conference rooms, and so on that are required. So, it is usually quite a bit of change to outfit a building, as the Minister of Finance complains on a daily basis about.

Mr. Hosein: Do you think that we get value for money for this building, having

regard to the fact that we have to do so much outfitting?

Hon. West: We would not have rented it otherwise, Member. I have indicated that in determining whether this building was appropriate, we got a valuation from the Commissioner of Valuations. We looked at comparative buildings and the rents that are paid by either the Government or by the private sector, and in all of those circumstances that were considered, the rental was more than reasonable in the circumstances.

Mr. Hosein: So, in about three years, the taxpayers have to incur a bill of about \$43 million for the occupation of this building?

Mr. Chairman: Okay. I would not entertain that question. Minister of Finance.

Mr. Imbert: Thank you. It is standard practice, Mr. Chairman, that when the Government agrees to rent a building, that the building comes quite often as a shell, sometimes with just very rudimentary fittings and fixtures. I remember when I was appointed Minister of Finance in September 2015, I discovered that the previous Government, the UNC Government, had rented a building ironically for the Chief Personnel Officer's accommodation and paid the rent for three years for a building that was not outfitted. In fact, the entire lease rental came to an end during the period of that UNC Government, without any effort being made by that UNC Government to do the necessary outfitting of that building. The building just stood there empty for three years. That is legacy of the UNC Government. And I could tell you now, and it is ironic it is CPO, eh. It is ironic that that expenditure, that millions of dollars was spent for an empty building for three years without bothering to outfit it.

However, we as a Cabinet have just taken a decision to move the courts to the old Waterfront building, where the Parliament used to be, and I can assure you

the cost of outfitting those facilities is twice the amount of outfitting the building that you are referring to. So, that it is normal. At least this Government, when we outfit a building, we use it. We do not leave it there and pay rent for years and years in the millions of dollars for buildings that are never occupied. [*Desk thumping*]

[*Mr. Young raises hand*]

Mr. Chairman: Do you have input on further—on this? Okay, 20 seconds, please.

Mr. Young: No, no, no, Mr. Chair—

Mr. Chairman: I do not want to belabour the point.

Mr. Young: Mr. Chair, to add to the point that was just made by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Public Administration, I recall when we came in as a Cabinet in 2015, ironically, a building right next door to the one that we are now discussing, a contract was awarded for the outfitting to that building to a company that had absolutely no experience in office equipment, furniture, outfitting, et cetera, for over \$120 million.

The further irony of this is that for the same period between 2010 and 2015, rent was paid for that building, a contract awarded for outfitting of a \$120 million and not a single Ministry moved into that building for the whole period.

Mr. Hosein: Mr. Chair, can I just seek your guidance in terms of relevance?

Mr. Young: We are talking about \$120 million in outfitting compared to \$120 million.

Mr. Hosein: Can we know what is the relevance of this matter? What line Item?

Mr. Young: This is in response to your same line Item. It is value for money. You waste \$120 million. [*Crosstalk*]

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Members, I am going to put the question before the House

at this time. Hon. Members, the question—[*Crosstalk*] Please, I am putting the question before the House, Members.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 17 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister. You have your departure now. And I would also like to thank the Chief Personnel Officer and also, the senior technocrats of the Ministry for gracing us with your presence. Do reach home safely.

3.15 p.m.

[MRS. ANNISSETTE-GEORGE *in the Chair*]

Head 79: Ministry of Sport and Community Development, \$301,504,178.

Madam Chairman: Members, we are starting at page 398 of the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. I will now invite the Minister of Sport and Community Development to make a brief opening statement for a maximum of five minutes. Minister.

Hon. Cudjoe: Thank you, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Sport and Community Development seeks to build our nation's human capital through the development of athletic talent and community life in Trinidad and Tobago. The vision of this new Ministry will therefore be to maximize the interconnection of the three divisions, physical education and sport, community development and mediation, to improve the quality of life for all citizens.

The Ministry's mandate will be supported by the three state entities under its purview, the Sport Company of Trinidad and Tobago, the National Self-Help Commission and the Export Centres Company Limited.

I will briefly share the functions of each division to provide a comprehensive

overview of the Ministry's mandate. Firstly, we have the Division of Physical Education and Sport, and the main objectives are: to increase participation in sport and physical recreation at all levels; to raise standards of athletic performance; to increase the quality and quantity of sporting facilities; to promote sport as an industry; to implement our national sport policy; to promote drug-free sport; to encourage national sporting organizations to have strategic approaches to sport development and become self-sufficient.

The Community Development Division focuses on a multifaceted approach to community intervention through the following programmes: working closely with community organizations, village and community councils to become registered, and to promote specialized interest relating to women, sport, youth, culture, agriculture, social and economic issues.

The Community Education Division promotes non-formal programmes to complement the formal education system in Trinidad. These programmes consist of four components: domestic support or skills training projects, entrepreneurial development projects, leadership projects, and community awareness and sensitization projects.

Then we have the Community Building Programme which entails the provision and maintenance of community centres, regional complexes and civic centres. We have the Craft Development Programme which preserves the creativity and artistic ingenuity of local artisans. It also promotes craft production as a viable contributor to the national goals of economic diversification and job creation. We have the Care Unit which promotes community action and revival and empowerment, and finally, the Community Mediation Services Division which promotes sustainable social transformation and peaceful relations. Thank you,

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Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 79 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$301,504,178 for Head 79 Ministry of Sport and Community Development, is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We are at page 398. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Yes, what had happened—so, Madam Chair, and to the Hon. Minister, when I look back at the 2019 Actual spent, the 2020 Estimate, and the 2021 Revised Estimate, based on the 2020 Revised Estimate there is an increase of \$1million allocated to Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Can the Minister indicate what is the purpose of the increase?

Hon. Cudjoe: Can you speak specifically as to where you are seeing an increase in that line Item. Because I think you are wrong.

Mr. Ram: Okay, so, Madam Chair, and hon. Minister, remember this came from Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, 01 it was —page 300—

Hon. Cudjoe: This is a new Ministry. This is Sport Division and Community Development Division so you cannot compare the figures that were previously Community Development, Culture and the Arts to what is now Community

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Development and Sport. It is two separate divisions from two separate Ministries.

Mr. Ram: Madam Minister, it says under the explanation 001 - Transferred from Head - Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts.

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes, but this is a new Ministry. This is Community Development and Sport. So it now captures the general admin of what was the Sport Division under the previous—that previous Ministry and what is Community Development. That area of Culture and the Arts have gone to Tourism. So you are making—the comparison you are making is off. It is incorrect. Apples and oranges; apples and apples.

Madam Chairman: Yes, Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: So there is no comparison? We took these from out of the air? Apple and apple, oranges and oranges, where do we pick the figures out from?

Hon. Cudjoe: No. If you listened to my introduction, this new Ministry is the Sport Division of what was previously the Ministry of Sport and Youth Affairs, and the Community Development Division. So I cannot compare figures of the previous fiscal year that was Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts, because that “Culture and the Arts” part would have gone to Tourism. And I cannot compare it with Sport and Youth Affairs, because the Youth Affairs part is now with Ministry of Youth Development and National Service. You guys need to caucus.

Mr. Ram: I understand that. In any— [*Interruption*] Pardon? What is relevance of that please?

Madam Chairman: Okay, all right. Member for Caroni Central, yes.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, can I then ask, what is the number of persons employed now under this heading, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance?

Hon. Cudjoe: The number of people in what department you are talking about here?

Mr. Ram: 01.

Hon. Cudjoe: We have 94 members of staff for general admin.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. Are there any vacancies please?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes. We do have vacancies. I can provide that, we have a total in that Ministry of 462 posts, 199 filled, 121 without bodies and 132 with bodies.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Just continuing from where my colleague left off. Hon. Minister, can you identify the number of persons who are currently at the Ministry that were hired within the last two years? Provide that for us in writing please?

Hon. Cudjoe: That was hired within the two—?

Mr. Ratiram: That were hired this year and last year.

Hon. Cudjoe: You see, you are asking me to do something that is very strange. This Ministry is about a month old. So you want the figures for the previous Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts?

Mr. Ratiram: No, I am talking about this Ministry and I can explain.

Hon. Cudjoe: This Ministry is only a month old.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes. So there are persons that will be employed at this Ministry—understand?

Hon. Cudjoe: No problem. I will provide to you the number of people hired within the last two months.

Mr. Ratiram: Not the last two months, 2019/2020.

Hon. Cudjoe: This Ministry was not here in 2019.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay, if I may please explain my question, hon. Minister? There are persons employed at the Ministry who would have been transferred from previous Ministry that would have been continuously employed for the last two years. Can you provide us with those persons? The new recruits for the last two years sorry—

Hon. Cudjoe: Let me respond.

Mr. Ratiram:—the new persons who were hired for the last two years.

Hon. Cudjoe: Let me respond.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Hon. Cudjoe: Madam Chair, I can provide the names of the people—is it the names you are asking for? Yes?

Mr. Ratiram: The positions.

Hon. Cudjoe: The positions of the people who were hired in the Ministry of Sport and Community Development? That I can do.

Madam Chairman: That will suffice?

Mr. Ratiram: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 002.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 14.

Madam Chairman: You have more questions, sorry, Couva North?

Mr. Ratiram: Item 14.

Madam Chairman: I am sorry, 14.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet-Appointed. Can the hon. Minister indicate the number of Cabinet appointed committees that this line Item facilitates?

Hon. Cudjoe: We have no Cabinet appointed committees.

Mr. Ratiram: And what the structure entails in terms of the number of committees

that this line Item will—

Hon. Cudjoe: We have no Cabinet appointed committees.

Mr. Ratiram: So there are no positions to be created or filled?

Hon. Cudjoe: I repeat, there are no Cabinet appointed committees. What if your colleagues explain to you what is a Cabinet appointed committee and how they are formed.

Mr. Ratiram: No, well then, can the hon. Minister kindly advise the purpose of this 100,000 here?

Hon. Cudjoe: If you have a Cabinet committee formed during the fiscal year, but at this point in time we do not have any Cabinet appointed committees.

Mr. Ratiram: And are there any plans to form any Cabinet committees?

Hon. Cudjoe: Well, as we proceed with the work of the Ministry if that becomes relevant, then we will go ahead and do so. But at this point in time, as of today, this date, we do not have any in train.

Mr. Ratiram: No plans, okay.

Hon. Cudjoe: I did not say for the year. I said at this point in time, today, as of right now, as of this minute, we do not have one in train.

Mr. Ratiram: I was just asking if there were any plans.

Hon. Cudjoe: That was my answer.

Mr. Ratiram: No plans?

Hon. Cudjoe: That was my answer.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Okay, so can we go on? Any other Items? That is it? Item 002: Physical Education and Sport Division. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's

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attention to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. Can the hon. Minister provide us with the number of persons at the Ministry and the number of vacant positions to be filled?

Hon. Cudjoe: The number of established offices, 144. We have 54 filled and 90 vacant.

Mr. Ratiram: And, Madam Chair, for the efficiency of the Committee, the future line Item with respect to Salaries, would the Minister give us the undertaking to provide for us the information of the number of vacancies?

Hon. Cudjoe: I just did that. We have 144 established offices, 54 filled, 90 vacant offices. That 90, you have 27 with bodies and 63 without bodies.

Mr. Ratiram: Is this for all the future Sub-Heads under this line Item 01? Or is it for just this one?

Hon. Cudjoe: No, that is just for this one. I am dealing with the line Item that we are on. We are on 002.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay, what I am asking, Madam Chair, through you to the hon. Minister, for the efficiency of the Committee, to avoid the same question with respect to the other line Items in the other Divisions within the Ministry—

Hon. Cudjoe: Madam Chairman, I want to give my information here. What I do not have, later, but what I have now I am giving it, please.

3.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North, in this particular scenario I do not think there are as many divisions as we had had on the Tobago House of Assembly and you do have the line Minister here and it seems thus far she has been able to answer the two previous Heads. Okay? So let us see how it goes. Yes. Item 003: Community Development Division. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the hon. Minister also provide us with the information, the number of persons employed and the number of vacancies existing?

Hon. Cudjoe: Community Development has 318 established offices, 145 filled, 173 vacant offices; of that 173, 99 with bodies, 74 without bodies.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Cudjoe: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Best Village. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can the hon. Minister provide us with the information under Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance; the number of persons employed and the number of vacancies under this line Item?

Hon. Cudjoe: Sure, people employed as Best Village officers under this Vote and I can always provide the vacancies for you later. As a matter of fact, Best Village Unit, we have 20 filled and 9 vacant. So the total number of positions is 29.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration, page 400. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 08: Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage. Can the hon. Minister advise us what is the number of properties leased or rented and what is the monthly cost of each of these properties?

Hon. Cudjoe: We have levels 8, 18 and 20 at Nicholas Towers. And that is rented at 310,905. We have Chepstow House, 56 Frederick Street, that is rented at 132,750 per month. We have the ground floor of Jobco at 63,000. We have the first floor of Jobco, \$57,147.39. The Community Mediation, we have a unit at Warrenville, Cunupia, an office there, and that is \$31,893.75. For the Mediation

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Office at Point Fortin, 63 Main Road, the rent is \$20,137.50. For the office at St Barb's and Laventille Road, \$3,000 per month. For the office at MTS Plaza, Aranguez, \$12,618.23 per month. For second floor, Jobco, where we have part of the Head Office and the St. George West District, \$51,750. For the St. Andrew/St. David District Office in Sangre Grande, \$12,594.35. For High Street, Princes Town, \$17,437.50. For Mayaro Road, \$8,910. For 20 Agard Road, Point Fortin, \$25,000.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Would the Minister be willing to provide in writing the list of all the landlords for these buildings? All.

Hon. Cudjoe: I can actually give to you the landlords right now. So we have the companies, so we have Nicolas Towers for General Admin. For Human Resources which is the Chepstow House, you have Chepstow Development Co Ltd. For Accounts, GV Holdings Limited. For Mediation in Jobco, GV Holdings Limited. You have Rodas Limited, Gordon Investments Limited, Morris Marshall Development Foundation, National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited, GV Holdings, R&N Sooklal, National Insurance Board of Trinidad and Tobago, Chaitram Ramrattan Real Estate Company and Aaron Richards.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Cudjoe: You are welcome.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister also indicate the number of storage of space rented or leased and the monthly cost of these storage spaces? Rent/Lease - Office Accommodation and Storage.

Hon. Cudjoe: I can provide that later.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Can the hon. Minister indicate if the Ministry intends to rent or lease any new office or storage space?

Hon. Cudjoe: Not at this point.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I go to line Item 05: Telephones. Can the hon. Minister indicate whether this line Item includes both landline and cellular bills?

Madam Chairman: 05 with 08.

Mr. Ram: Sorry, sorry, Madam Chairman, I touched Telephones so—I know my colleague on the other side.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 16: Contract Employment; if the hon. Minister can provide a breakdown on the number of contract positions for this Estimate of \$9.5 million to cover.

Hon. Cudjoe: It has 514 contracted positions, 199 filled, 315 vacant.

Ms. Mohit: 199 filled, you said?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 28: Other Contracted Services. And can the hon. Minister advise what services are paid for under this Sub-Item?

Hon. Cudjoe: Cable bills, Rentokil and those types of expenses.

Mr. Ratiram: These are new contracts entered into from the start of this Ministry, or these are contracts that were inherited from the previous—

Hon. Cudjoe: They would have been inherited for the most part from the previous.

Mr. Ratiram: All right. Can the hon. Minister indicate also the process of selecting providers under this line Item?

Hon. Cudjoe: No. We would have tendered.

Mr. Ratiram: Tendered.

Hon. Cudjoe: Yeah.

Mr. Ratiram: All right, and does the Ministry keep a register of the contracted services received, including, among other things, the contract awarded, the amount expended and the outstanding payments to contractors?

Hon. Cudjoe: Of course we do.

Mr. Ratiram: Are there any outstanding payments at this time under this line Item?

Hon. Cudjoe: I am sure there is.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the Minister indicate the quantity of that liability that the Ministry would have inherited?

Hon. Cudjoe: We can provide that for you later. Yeah, sure.

Mr. Ratiram: All right. And the contracts awarded, that would fit into this line Item? Would the hon. Minister be kind enough to provide that in writing please?

Hon. Cudjoe: To provide all the contractual arrangements we have under that item?

Mr. Ratiram: The contracts that have been awarded that this line Item would be responsible for paying.

Hon. Cudjoe: I would provide whatever is relevant and appropriate.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, just to follow-up based on the said line Item but I heard the Minister indicating to my colleague. Could she define what she means by what is—in giving, this is taxpayers’ funds and if Members are giving, or seeking information, I do not understand the terminology of “what is appropriate”. Is this division of the Ministry of Sport and Community Development now protected by legislation that does not allow—that citizens have to go via the Freedom of Information Act and so on?

Mr. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Minister is merely echoing terminology that I have used. The word—*[Interruption]* do not interrupt. I did not interrupt you.

Madam Chairman:—the Member said that he has used.

Mr. Imbert: The word appropriate means—*[Interruption]* Madam Chairman, what is wrong with him?

Madam Chairman: I think he is just wanting to see how well you stand up to banter.

Mr. Imbert: *[Inaudible]*—that kind of behaviour from him for at least five years. The word appropriate means, suitable or appropriate in the circumstances. Information can be personal and private and confidential. It may be unlawful to reveal it. And therefore, we on this side, when faced with a request like that, have to seek advice from the Attorney General as to what can be disclosed and what cannot be disclosed. And that is the meaning of the word appropriate; what is suitable or proper in the circumstances.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, is it you are telling the viewing public and the taxpayers of this country that your commitment or your Government's commitment as it relates to transparency in the affairs of the Government will be hidden behind

this curtain or this veil of always resorting or sending things to the Office of the Attorney General for it to be sanitized?

Madam Chairman: This is a question for the Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, my friend is raising an important point relative to access to information and the public interest argument, which I join him in agreeing is an important issue. Fortunately, we have guidance from as high as the Privy Council that explains that there is always a balancing of interests in respect of the public interest right. The Office of the Attorney General will always ensure that the public interest transparency argument is upheld.

Madam Chair, I can tell you for instance, we are awaiting the decision of the Privy Council in the JCC case. That is the case where the Invaders Bay opinion was not made public by the UNC, relative to the disposition of billions of dollars of state land. The court ordered the disclosure of that documentation. It was refused. What we did, Madam Chair, to ensure that this public interest argument was done properly, even though we provided the opinion in the public domain, we still appealed. I as Attorney General appealed the point to the Privy Council to settle the law. In other words then, there is no politics with this, the principle of law will be traversed and we will have a settled position on it. What I can say in resonating the Minister of Finance's position is that we must always exercise the section 35 considerations in respect of public interest. If you take the Freedom of Information formula and that the information will be released. The only time that you do not release some information is if it will affect a private or a trade secret or a commercial interest that ought not to be disclosed. There is no sanitizing, it is protection of the public formula. I will end by saying this applies for instance to

matters such as gas pricing and commercial contracts. One ought not to throw the baby away with the bathwater. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

3.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Okay. So, can we move on to Item 002: Physical Education and Sport Division? Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, I actually was trying to get your attention before you went across to the other page, hence the reason my hands waving like that, and I wanted to go back, if you allow me, to the same line Item 05: Goods and Services, if you will allow me please.

Madam Chairman: Go ahead. I did not see your hand.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. I had indicated earlier, I had asked earlier whether line Item 05 was for landline and/or cellular phones. I know it was answered as landline.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ram: Right. So I was going back to that line Item, Madam Chair, to ask the hon. Minister, if there are any travelling officers in this Ministry who have phone allowances and cellular phone allowances one and, if so, where are they covered in these line Items here?.

Madam Chairman: Phone Allowances are under “05”, because what the Minister said is that “05” is only landlines.

Mr. Ram: So, I am asking—

Hon. Cudjoe: Landlines, including the PBX and managers on the corporate plan. All that is there. So that would be some cellphones also.

Mr. Ram: Right. Okay. So that is the clarification. It includes landline and—

Hon. Cudjoe: Managers on the corporate plan.

Mr. Ram: And persons on the corporate plan?

Hon. Cudjoe: And the PBX, yeah.

Mr. Ram: And can you indicate then, please, the number of persons on the corporate plan?

Hon. Cudjoe: Sure, we can provide that to you later.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: And just to help Caroni Central, all of us, so that there would not be a recurrence. In the book, the very book on recurrent expenditure, to the front where they have those pages in roman numerals, it will tell us the classification of expenditure Sub-Items, so that we would know what telephone is and what overtime is, et cetera. So that might help orient you with respect to what you want to ask. Member for Couva North, where are you?

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: I am now—

Mr. Ram: On the same line Item?

Madam Chairman: No, I only allowed Caroni Central, because I really did not see his hand. So I am now at 002.

Mr. Ratiram: It is based on the response from the Minister.

Madam Chairman: I am now at 002: Physical Education and Sport Division.

Mr. Ratiram: First, she just corrected it and she just indicated that in addition to landline—

Madam Chairman: Member, I have not recognized you. I said we are at 002: Physical Education and Sport Division. Yes, Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 16: Contract Employment, and can the hon. Minister advise us the total number of contract persons, contract positions?

Hon. Cudjoe: Okay. For the Sport Division, we have 81 positions: 25 filled and 56 vacant.

Mr. Ratiram: Another line Item, 05: Telephone. Does this include landline and cellphones for the officers within this division?

Hon. Cudjoe: That is telephone and Internet services for our six community swimming pools.

Mr. Ratiram: Sorry?

Madam Chairman: That is telephone and Internet services for our swimming pool facilities.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central, you are still on Item 002?

Mr. Ram: Yes, please. Line Item 21 which is Repairs and Maintenance. Can the hon. Minister indicate how many buildings are envisaged to be maintained under this line Item?

Hon. Cudjoe: That will cover the swimming pools under our watch, the offices where those swimming pools are located.

Mr. Ram: Six swimming pools?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes.

Mr. Ram: And also, please, is there any—well, obviously it is a budgeted figure, what are the planned works for these swimming pools?

Hon. Cudjoe: That is not the line Item for that.

Mr. Ram: Repairs and Maintenance, it is a budgeted Item, No. 21, 100,000.

Hon. Cudjoe: The repairs on the pools fall under the PSIP.

Mr. Ram: Pardon?

Hon. Cudjoe: The repair works on the pools are under the PSIP and you will see that when we get to the PSIP.

Mr. Ram: So Repairs and Maintenance for these buildings—

Hon. Cudjoe: This would be the office space at the locations.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Community Development Division. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 08: Rent/Lease-Office Accommodation and Storage. Would the Minister be able to provide us with the number of properties rented for office and the number of properties rented for storage and at what cost?

Hon. Cudjoe: Madam Chair, I would have listed all the rentals for the Ministry earlier. Do you want me to repeat what I said earlier?

Mr. Ratiram: No, I am dealing with the Community Development Division, this line Item.

Hon. Cudjoe: Right. So, when I listed earlier, I listed all, all. I gave you all the community development buildings. I gave you all.

Mr. Ratiram: All right. Will the hon. Minister be able to identify the community development buildings that are rented?

Hon. Cudjoe: The community development buildings are: Second Floor, Jobco; First Floor, Jobco; Brierley Street, Sangre Grande; High Street, Princes Town; Naparima/Mayaro Road, Rio Claro and 20 Agard, Point Fortin.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence. Can the hon. Minister indicate the number of persons entitled to Travelling and Subsistence? The number of persons.

Hon. Cudjoe: We have 110 travelling officers to be covered there. Madam Chair, 110 is the figure.

Mr. Ram: Can the hon. Minister—a follow-up please—indicate of those 110 travelling officers what category of workers are they?

Hon. Cudjoe: They are community development officers and community development supervisors.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Asked and answered, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 004: Best Village. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence, the number of persons entitled to Travelling and Subsistence.

Hon. Cudjoe: Twenty-nine.

Mr. Ratiram: 29. And these workers are granted a travelling allowance in accordance with the Travelling Allowance Act, Chap, 23:50? All 29?

Hon. Cudjoe: Sorry, not 29. That is 41. Can you repeat your second question?

Mr. Ratiram: And all 41 are granted travelling allowance in accordance with the Travelling Allowance Act, Chap. 23:50?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes, Sir. Yes, Member.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, in respect of these Items here under Best Village, 04 and 05, I am trying to get a rationale for some of the figures, because I am looking at where it came from. So for the figure for electricity and telephone previously, by looking at the Head where it was transferred from, it was unused in 2020, Revised 2020. So I am asking, what was the reason? Did the community development department of where it was from have a plan to move to a new building or whether, you know, how did they arrive at the figure for this year?

Hon. Cudjoe: Madam Chair, that unit had moved to the General Admin Building,

so they were not incurring expenses at that building. So it was covered. The expenses they incurred at General Admin Building are covered from the General Admin budget.

Mr. Ram: Thank you. That is admirable. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Mediation Centres. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you again, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, through the Minister, if you can kindly, in terms of Mediation Centres, Item 16: Contract Employment, if you can indicate to us the total number of persons hired or employed on contract across the nation at those Mediation Centres?

Hon. Cudjoe: Madam Chair, 29 positions filled and 34 positions vacant.

Ms. Mohit: Can you also indicate, just a follow-up question, are all those centres fully functional at this point?

Hon. Cudjoe: All are not fully functional at this point. We have the north office functional right now; the Cunupia office, the Point Fortin office, the Laventille office and the San Juan office. We also have a mobile bus, two mobile buses that go about providing mediation services.

Ms. Mohit: Just one other question. Any reason why those that are not functional at this time?

Hon. Cudjoe: We are working with PRESD to identify space for the two offices that are not functional right now.

Ms. Mohit: So those two offices are two mobile offices?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yeah, it is a bus, two buses.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. And these will be roving, of course?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, Item 28: Other Contracted Services. Can the hon Minister advise what services are paid for under this Sub-Item?

Hon. Cudjoe: It is for mediators and social workers to help to augment the staff that we already have on board.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Minister. Can you also advise the process for selecting these persons or these contract providers?

Hon. Cudjoe: So we encourage those people to supply CVs to the Ministry and then we do an assessment in-house.

Mr. Ratiram: So this is something the Ministry would have inherited or the Ministry had already—

Hon. Cudjoe: Something the Ministry would have inherited.

Mr. Ratiram: Inherited?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Hon. Cudjoe: It is my pleasure.

Madam Chairman: Item 006: Dwight Yorke Stadium. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 43: Security Services. Can the hon. Minister advise which company or companies are contracted for the security service at the Dwight Yorke Stadium?

Hon. Cudjoe: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

4.00 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Again, Madam Chair, what I sought to do is

to look where it came from and look at the spent on these Items. The Estimates for the 2020—and we could take them together, line Item 02, 03 and—they were in the range of 320k, 255k, 194k, respectively, and the Items were not procured. So can the hon. Minister indicate what is the plan for those Items which were envisaged to be bought last year or acquired last year? What is the status of those?

Hon. Cudjoe: No Minor Equipment was purchased last year.

Mr. Ram: I know that, so I am saying—

Hon. Cudjoe: And if Minor Equipment is needed this year, once the releases are provided, it would be purchased.

Mr. Ram: Right. So what I am saying, hon. Minister, is that when you look at the figures that were budgeted last year, it was 320,000. This year you have 25,000, so it meant that last year when an explanation was given for Minor Equipment there was something that was needed, and—

Hon. Cudjoe: Well, as you know, I do not allocate funds to myself. However, I am sure that the Ministry of Finance would have looked at the previous spending and recognize we did not utilize from that allocation, so we have a \$25,000 allocation. So I want to repeat that I do not give allocations to myself.

Mr. Ram: Let me just reassure you, that was not my intention to indicate that you were using this money for yourself—

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes, but you keep asking the question, and I am saying we did not spend from that Vote last year. So you keep asking why, I said, “I do not give the allocation, the Ministry of Finance does.” And I also assume that based on the fact that we did not spend from the previous allocation, hence the reason for the lower allocation this year.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Physical Education and Sport Division; Item 003: Community Development Division; Item 004: Best Village; Item 005: Mediation Centres; Item 006: Dwight Yorke Stadium. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 005: Non-Profit Institutions. Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you. Item 04: Regional Complexes. Minister, can you identify how many complexes would receive funding under this allocation for this fiscal year?

Hon. Cudjoe: Seventeen.

Ms. Mohit: I do apologize, I did not hear?

Hon. Cudjoe: 1-7, 17.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. As well as 04—

Hon. Cudjoe: As well as the—

Ms. Mohit: As well as 05: Contribution to Community Based Organizations, can you identify those community-based organizations who would receive contributions under this line Item?

Hon. Cudjoe: This is used for programming at the community centres, so for furniture and whatever they may need to run their programme. So it is not given to a community entity like a group, this is just to run—to pay for their furniture and whatever they may need to operate to be of service to the groups within their communities.

Ms. Mohit: Okay. Under this allocation, how many community centres you have identified?

Hon. Cudjoe: We have 250 community centres.

Ms. Mohit: 250. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, which line Item was the hon. Minister responding to? I am sorry, I did not pick up the question from my colleague. Item 05 or 06?—04 and 05. I would like to ask, related to Item 06: Operational Expenses for Community Facilities, and can the hon. Minister indicate what is the number of community centres that receive funds to pay operational expenses from this allocation? And can the hon. Minister provide a list of community centre boards that receive funding from this allocation?

Hon. Cudjoe: Sure. The same 250 community entities, community centres, and we would be happy to provide to you a list.

Mr. Ratiram: The both. Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair, my colleague asked already.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am at line Item 15: Non-Profit Institutions. Can the hon. Minister indicate which non-profit institutions will receive funding in fiscal 2021, and two, can you provide a listing of those non-profit institutions?

Hon. Cudjoe: Sure. I would be happy to provide a list of all the non-profit institutions that are— No, this Vote takes care of expenses incurred by—entities, by community groups that may have applied by some schools that may need to travel or host community events, so it is for non-profit institutions conducting sporting. So I do not know who is going to apply within the fiscal year until the application is received. All right?

Mr. Ram: I understand, but—okay, so why did you not double the figure then if you do not know— So basically, how did we arrive at the budgeted amount?

Hon. Cudjoe: Well, we look at our previous spending. I do not know what they

would have done at Finance but this is the allocation they gave us this year, and we have at least 34 sporting entities under our watch so the NSOs moneys would have come from there and that Vote also. And when community groups apply, this Vote also hands out funding for elite athletes, for athletes within your community who would be participating in a Development Programme. That is where that funding comes from.

Mr. Ram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households; Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 011: Transfers to State Enterprises. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book, and we are starting at page 167. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund, page 167; Item 004: Social Infrastructure. Members, this Item spans three pages so I will announce the project groups: A. Culture; C. Sports—Member for Chaguanas East.

Ms. Mohit: Madam Chair, Minister, 001: Upgrading of Swimming Pools. Can you identify those pools for the fiscal year 2021 that would be receiving upgrade under this allocation, as well as what is the percentage of completion at this stage?

Hon. Cudjoe: This will speak to—this is not building of new swimming pools—

Ms. Mohit: Upgrades.

Hon. Cudjoe:—these are swimming pools that are already under the watch of the Ministry. So we have six swimming pools under this Vote, so what I can really answer for you is the swimming pools that are going to be given priority in fiscal 2021, and that is Diego Martin, La Horquetta, Siparia and Couva.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you. As well as, Madam Chair, 002: the Improvement of Indoor Sporting Arenas, can you also identify those arenas that would be receiving improvement under this allocation?

Hon. Cudjoe: Under this allocation we propose to work in St. Paul Street, Eastern Regional and Mayaro.

Ms. Mohit: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 004: Sports Social Programmes, can the hon. Minister advise which communities will this programme target in fiscal 2021?

Hon. Cudjoe: This is throughout all of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Ratiram: And will this allocation be sufficient to fully implement this project?

Hon. Cudjoe: Well, right now this would have to work for us. It would be supplemented by the moneys that we give to groups under the recurrent that we recently just got in. So if 800,000—if we use up the whole 800,000, I am sure we can vire from another area.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister. Can you identify if there is any monitoring mechanism that is being utilized by the Ministry for these programmes?

Hon. Cudjoe: Any what—mechanism?

Mr. Ratiram: Monitoring mechanisms.

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes, it is being developed because it is a new programme also.

Mr. Ratiram: And how would these programmes be administered? Is there a specific division within the Ministry that is administering it?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yeah, the division of Sport.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair, thank you very much. Minister, 001: Upgrading

of Swimming pools, and I heard you say—

Hon. Cudjoe: So you are going back?

Mr. Indarsingh: No, I “eh” going back.

Hon. Cudjoe: We are now on to 004.

Mr. Indarsingh: No, no, no, based on my turn this is the Development Programme, and I am just asking a question. Simple as that.

Hon. Cudjoe: Are we going back to 004?

Madam Chairman: And Member, we are at C. Sports, so either 001—

Mr. Indarsingh: Yes.

Madam Chairman:—002—

Hon. Cudjoe: Okay, you are going back to 001.

Madam Chairman:—or 004.

Mr. Indarsingh: No. The Minister is saying that I am going back, it is not that I am going back, this is a Head that is currently under examination.

Madam Chairman: Right, and you are where?

Mr. Indarsingh: At 001.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Indarsingh: So fall in line.

Hon. Cudjoe: You fall in line.

Mr. Indarsingh: So, Minister—thank you very much—Upgrade of Swimming Pools, it is good to hear that work will be done on the Couva swimming pool which has been down, non-functional, for the last two years. Could you tell us, outline what remedial works is going to be done at this swimming pool?

Hon. Cudjoe: Mechanical, electrical and plumbing works.

Mr. Indarsingh: And based on mechanical, electrical and plumbing, nothing in

relation to the actual pool itself?

Hon. Cudjoe: Any mechanical, electrical or plumbing works that needs to be done, those would be addressed at the pool.

Mr. Indarsingh: So within this fiscal year the pool should be operational?

Hon. Cudjoe: These are the plans for this fiscal year.

Mr. Indarsingh: It will be operational?

Hon. Cudjoe: I said these are the plans; that is my answer. These are the plans for this fiscal year.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Madam Speaker, it was answered before, thank you. I will wait for the next Head.

Madam Chairman: Item 007: Households, Item—I am sorry, A. Community Development at page 168. Member for Caroni Central.

Mr. Ram: Thank you, Madam. For ease I will refer to Items 001, 002 and 003, can the hon. Minister indicate what is the scope of refurbishment works proposed for these projects for 2021? Which centres and complexes are proposed to be refurbished and what is the estimated completion dates of these projects for all Items, 001, 002 and 003?

Hon. Cudjoe: To purchase equipment for training and the production—no, we intend to undertake plumbing, electrical, fencing and roof upgrade work at the export centres located at Piarco, Mausica—that is the production centre; Tunapuna, Bon Air, Mount Hope, Bourg Mulatresse, Morvant, Diego Martin, Fyzabad, Palo Seco, La Brea, Point Fortin and Laventille.

Madam Chairman: Member for Caroni Central.

4.15 p.m.

Mr. Ram: Yes, and the estimated completion dates of these projects within the financial year? Completion dates?

Hon. Cudjoe: It is proposed to take place in this fiscal.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister indicate the completion date of this project, please?

Hon. Cudjoe: It will be completed—we hope to do significant work during this year. We do not expect to complete this during this fiscal year because whenever work starts, the Estimate is about at least 10 months from that day. If the RFPs have not gone out yet, then you have to have some time for assessment and so on. So 12 months would have passed.

Mr. Ratiram: So during the next fiscal year perhaps it should be completed?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Infrastructure Development Fund; Item 004: Social Infrastructure.

Hon. Members, Item 004 spans two pages, therefore, I will also announce the project groups. C. Sports; A. Community Development.

Mr. Paray: Minister, line Item 001: Construction—

Madam Chairman: One minute, please. We are now on to Infrastructure which is at page 246, and we are now on to Community Development, which is at 247.

Mr. Paray: That is on 247, Ma'am? Community Development, section A.?

Madam Chairman: Yes, Community Development.

Mr. Paray: Minister, line Item 001: Construction of Community Centres. I see

Standing Finance Committee

Head 79: Ministry of Sport and Community Development

there is an allocation of \$30 million. Can you identify whether the community centre that was demolished, earmarked for reconstruction, at Warwick Street in Guayaguayare, if that has been considered for reconstruction in this fiscal?

Hon. Cudjoe: The proposed work for fiscal 2021 is to complete the centres at Morvant, Cascade, Belmont, Tacarigua and Maitagual.

Mr. Paray: That is five community centres?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Paray: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, on this same line Item, 001: Construction of Community Centres. The list that you just called out did it take into consideration one at Lisas Gardens in Couva?

Hon. Cudjoe: I want to repeat, Madam Chair: Proposed works for 2021, the priorities centres where we are going to complete work: Morvant, Cascade, Belmont, Tacarigua and Maitagual. Continue construction—once funds are available, we continue construction at 19 other community centres at Arima, Diego Martin south, Morvant, Cascade, Tacarigua, Belmont, Caiman, Harmony Hall, El Socorro, Lisa's Gardens, Corinth Hills, Diego Martin north, La Horquetta, Quarry Village, Maraval, Edinburgh 500, Pelican Extension and Enterprise.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you.

Hon. Cudjoe: You are welcome.

Mr. Indarsingh: Minister, just on the issue of Lisas Gardens, because the sod for that was turned prior to—just before the general elections. Could you or are you in a position to tell us or tell this meeting, what will become of the lands that housed the old community centre within the Lisas Gardens community?

Madam Chairman: I will not allow that under this exercise. Member for Couva

South, I am sure you will have another opportunity to find that information out.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, I know you mentioned Enterprise Community Centre. Did I hear correct? That was the last one you mentioned?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes.

Ms. Mohit: I noticed works would have restarted at that centre a couple of months ago. Can you indicate when is the proposed completion date of this project?

Hon. Cudjoe: I can provide that to you at a later date.

Ms. Mohit: I would also like to take this opportunity to ask—

Hon. Cudjoe: Because the work at that centre had just started. Work at that centre had recently started you said, so I can provide that to you at a later date.

Ms. Mohit: Minister, just one follow-up. Can you identify the contractor at that particular project?

Hon. Cudjoe: Sure, we can provide to you at—that is UDeCOTT. We can provide more specific details at a later time.

Ms. Benjamin: Madam Chair, I would just would like to ask the Minister if she could itemize or provide some kind of clarity with regard to line Item 005: Implementation of the Self Help Programme. This 15 million, how is it to be utilized? Is it still to provide the vouchers to go to the hardware, and would that be sufficient to clear out the arrears that is owing by Self-Help?

Hon. Cudjoe: This is done by taking the bills to the hardware as we stated, and \$15 million is not sufficient, but that is what we have to work with based on the times we are in.

Ms. Benjamin: I understand that, Madam Minister. The reason why I asked the question in such a way is that hardwares are even turning away persons from giving them the invoice, which is making them hard to apply for the grant, and

persons are coming to my office.

Hon. Cudjoe: Mine too, but do you suggest anywhere that we should take the moneys from to put it here?

Ms. Benjamin: No, I understand what you are saying. I am just itemizing the difficulties that the citizens are experiencing with the programme.

Hon. Cudjoe: Thank you very much. I note that. Our reality is we have \$15 million to work with this year and we will do our best to make the best of this \$15 million.

Mr. Ram: Madam Chair, I do not know if you would allow me. I was a bit clumsy in turning the page, even the Minister was asking which page we were on.

Madam Chairman: Excuse me?

Mr. Ram: I was a bit clumsy in turning the page to 246, and I wanted—

Madam Chairman: No, we are on 247.

Mr. Ram: Right. And I am saying—

Madam Chairman: We have been here for a while.

Mr. Ram: I am asking you whether you would allow me to go back to 246—

Hon. Members: No!

Mr. Ram:—seeing that we were changing the page, and even the Minister was confused—

Madam Chairman: One minute, please. I know there are many chairs physically in here, but I think the Chair only embodies one person. Member, unfortunately, regrettably, I am sure you will have another opportunity. We are going forward.

Mr. Ram: Thank you for that ruling, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Do you have anything under Community Development, project A.? If not, we go on to D. Youth Development, which is at page 247. Yes,

Member for Moruga/Tableland?

Ms. Benjamin: Madam Chair, I would just like the Minister to itemize how the \$10 million is to be utilized?

Hon. Cudjoe: What is the question?

Madam Chairman: The \$10 million under 001.

Ms. Benjamin: To complete works at the facility. I know that the facility was recently opened, so I was of the view that it was completed. So, if I could get further clarification as to what additional work will be done.

Hon. Cudjoe: Of course, there are outstanding bills. So, we have to pay the outstanding bills and if there is any fine-tuning to be done—[*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Chair, can the Minister provide us with a list of the outstanding bills and who the contractors are?

Hon. Cudjoe: Yes.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 79 ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister. Thank you, Madam PS, and thank you all representatives from the Ministry.

Head 67, Ministry of Planning and Development—that is Head 67. Members, you are guided to page 326 of the recurrent estimates.

Head 67: Ministry of Planning and Development, \$270,637,350.

Madam Chairman: I will now invite the Minister of Planning and Development to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Madam Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. The Ministry of Planning and Development is a key collaborative Government Ministry providing

the necessary policy guidance, and development and technical support, advice and feasibility assessment for national advancement.

Our principal mandate is national development concentrated on four main pillars, which are economic development, social development, spatial development and environmental development.

We also serve as the focal point for international and regional agencies such as the Inter-American Development Bank, the United Nations system of agencies, the European Union and the Caribbean Development Bank.

Madam Chair, the Ministry of Planning and Development also facilitates national development through the following: coordinating all stakeholders in the development of Trinidad and Tobago's National Strategy for Development, known as *Vision 2030*, coordinating national statistics, the environmental policy planning and management, national monitoring and evaluation, socio-economic planning and coordinating and monitoring, spatial development and technical corporation on special projects and programmes.

There are a number of supporting statutory boards and agencies all working in unison to achieve the objectives set by our mandate. These are: the Environmental Management Authority, the Institute of Marine Affairs, the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute, the Chaguaramas Development Authority, the Green Fund, the Advisory Town Planning Panel, the National Trust of Trinidad and Tobago and the National Archeological Society.

Madam Chairman, we of the Ministry are aware that in a period when resources are at a premium, we have to get the most out of any investments that we make as a government. Moreover, as you are probably aware, it is to public investment that managers of the economy turn, to get the growth process restarted.

Private investment tends to adopt a wait and see posture. The Ministry will therefore act robustly in carrying out the evaluation of all PSIP submissions, and in ensuring that PSIP projects do in fact succeed.

Madam Chair, central to this are collaborative discussions with all other Government agencies to ensure that their proposed plans, projects and programmes are in keeping with the National Development Strategy, *Vision 2030*.

Madam Chair, I could say much more, but I am very anxious to be examined by the Members of the Committee.

4.30 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Thank you very much.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I want to thank my Permanent Secretary, the members of the executive team and the members of staff of the Ministry of Planning and Development. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Question proposed: That Head 67 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$270,637,350 for Head 67 Ministry of Planning and Development is comprised of moneys proposed for expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*, the *Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly*, and the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*.

We shall now proceed to consider of the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration page 326. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to

draw the Minister's attention to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. The actual figure for 2019 was 17,900,000 however, the Revised Estimates indicate an increase to 18,200,000. Can the hon. Minister advise if additional persons were hired at the Ministry?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, the Ministry has a total of 762 posts on its permanent establishment, 389 posts are currently filled, 373 remain vacant, 170 of these vacant posts have bodies comprised of either acting or temporary incumbents, leaving a total of 203 posts without bodies. There have been no changes, Madam.

Mr. Ratiram: If in fact there were no changes, can the hon Minister indicate, well the difference between the Actual and the Revised Estimates?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yeah. Madam Chair, the increased allocation is due to arrears of acting to be paid.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Chaguanas West. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Hon. Minister, you indicated that there were several individuals, I believe the figure was about 203 persons, sorry 203 positions which were still vacant and that there were no bodies attached to it.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, 203 posts without bodies.

Mr. Tancoo: If the Minister may be inclined, I am curious as to find out how that has affected that the functioning of the Ministry?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It has not.

Mr. Tancoo: It is a significant amount of persons, posts that are vacant.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: But it has not. We have public officers permanent, 398;

contract employees, 133; associated professionals, one; on the job trainees, 28; short-term employment, 34 and it has not affected the functioning of the Ministry.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We are still very, very effective.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Technical Cooperation. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I draw the Minister's attention to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. And can the Minister identify if the increase in the actual from 2019 to the Revised Estimates of 2020 is similar to what was explained earlier?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The increase of \$17,000 is to facilitate the payment of Salaries and COLA inclusive of the expected increments.

Mr. Ratiram: Seven.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We expect increments to be paid, so any increase there is because of that.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. I am looking at the line Item 27 where you had budgeted—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry. Sorry. Could you repeat?

Mr. Tancoo: Line Item 27.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: You had indicated an intention to spend \$69,000 on government contribution to group health insurance but you only spent an estimated 38,000 and you budgeted 39,000 for this year. Can the Minister indicate what was the reason for this difference?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: There is an increase of \$1,300 and the increase allocation is to facilitate inclusion of eligible officers to the group health plan. A total of 146 persons contribute towards the group health plan at this time.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Item 004: Central Statistical Office. Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, I notice a pretty steady wage amount for the entire period 2019 to the Estimates for 2021. I know your Ministry has a number of initiatives in terms of new statistical projects over the next year or two, and I am wondering if in keeping with your desire to ramp up the Central Statistical Office, if the staffing is adequate to meet the demands that your Ministry is pushing for to, you know, bring up the quality of the data that you require?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The staffing is adequate however, for the surveys that we have to do which will be the multiple indicator cluster survey and the household budgetary survey and eventually the national census, we will bring on short-term staff to do the enumeration and so on.

Mr. Paray: In terms of the quality assurance of the data when you bring on these short-term contractors, if you want to call them that, is the staffing sufficient for that as well in terms of that quality assurance going forward?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: If what is sufficient? Sorry.

Mr. Paray: If the staffing would be sufficient for the quality assurance of the data when it comes back in?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: This is how we have always done the work in CSO. You would notice that often times we have advertisements asking for people to become

field workers, they are properly trained. In many instances the same—we have some of the same people who come on board. Some of them have to submit to a secrecy declaration, and so we are quite comfortable with this mechanism, and it is a mechanism that is used worldwide. We have had training from the IDB, Statistic Sweden, from the UN and I think we have also had some training from the CDB. So we are quite comfortable with the mechanism that we have used.

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would just like to say that, and I am sure my colleague has traversed it already, that part of the staffing arrangements will involve the NSITT as we bring it forward, the National Statistics Institute. I do hope bearing in mind the enthusiasm expressed by Mayaro that we will have the support of the Opposition in such a critical and important measure, because I noticed that my colleague is using the words “ramp up” and “secure” and “ensure”, and he clearly understands on behalf of the Opposition the central position on this. So I would love it if there is an undertaking today by the Opposition that they would, in fact, support this legislation. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Just one minute.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I want to respond to what the Attorney General said. In the Eleventh Parliament you do know that there was a joint select committee to deal with the NSITT, and the Opposition was quite strident in their non-support for it. So maybe this new team will support.

Mr. Paray: Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you. Madam Chair, I want to give you the commitment that we on this side will support good legislation every time it comes to this Parliament.
[*Desk thumping*] Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: He does not have anything to say, Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Indarsingh: Madam Chair—

Madam Chairman: Are we carrying on that conversation, that little banter? Or are we going on to a new Item?

Mr. Indarsingh: Can I respond to the Minister of Planning and Development and the Member for Arouca/Maloney?

Madam Chairman: In terms of more than what Mayaro responded?

Mr. Indarsingh: Well, I find it and I also am taken aback with the remarks of the Attorney General. The Joint Select Committees are part of the parliamentary process, and any time the Government brings legislation that is in the interest of people of Trinidad and Tobago, the Opposition will certainly make strident [*Desk thumping*] overtures in ensuring the legislation is passed in the Houses.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I am referring to line Item 01 again, Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: I note that there has been a \$1.4 million decrease in allocation.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister indicate why? What has caused this decrease?

Madam Chairman: Decrease?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Decrease? The decrease is in the amount of—he did but it is a decrease in the amount of \$1,366,000. This is inadequate for the payment of Salaries and COLA however, the Ministry is quantifying the relevant data for outstanding arrears and a supplementary request for funds will be made upon the completion of this calculation.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Supplemental. Can the Minister indicate the number of persons employed at this point in time? And the number of vacant positions? Can the Minister indicate the number of persons employed at this point in time at the Central Statistical Office for which this allocation would make provision?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Just one second, I am checking. We will provide you with that information.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Also a follow up: Is the Minister comfortable that this allocation—well you said it is insufficient for the purposes but are you comfortable with the current staffing of the CSO in terms of getting the job effectively and efficiently done?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: At this time, as I said in answer to your colleague from Mayaro, at this time we are comfortable.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima, you have a question? Okay. So we go. Item 005: Urban and Regional Planning Division; Item—Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Madam Chair. Minister, again 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, there is this perennial issue of building inspectors and so on in terms of rogue developers and so on and there is always the cry that there are not enough inspectors to go around. I am looking again at your salaries and wages, the question is on staffing. You know, what has the Ministry been doing in terms of

addressing its ability to deal with some of these rogue developers, persons who are constructing without proper permits and so on, and that keeps causing a problem leading to flooding and so on. What is the Ministry's plan to deal with that?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Go ahead, Madam? Shall I go ahead and answer? First of all, let me indicate that building inspectors do not fall under the remit of the Ministry of Planning and Development. Building inspectors are a local government grouping not Town and Country Planning. The Town and Country Planning has development control officers who do go into the field to see whether construction is taking place as it should.

As you probably know, the Town and Country Planning Division is digitizing and we have developed what is called DevelopTT. By that mechanism you can submit your applications online and the time that it takes to have an approval because all agencies dealing with approvals will now be able to access this information. The time that it takes will be reduced from approximately 56 days to 30 days.

In addition to that, persons in the communities can in fact go online and indicate if someone is making a development without approval. They can make their complaints online anonymously, and that will also help us to be able to make sure that people are acting in a way that they should in accordance with the law.

We do have a situation where sometimes people are trying to build without approval and we have in fact been trying to make sure that this is curtailed. As a consequence of this, our Development Control Officers have brought a number of matters, enforcement matters, to the Ministry and to the courts of Trinidad and Tobago.

4.45 p.m.

Madam Chairman: Member for Mayaro.

Mr. Paray: Minister, is there any coordination or communication between the Town and Country Planning Division and the Local Building Inspectorate at the Regional Corporations to make sure that, you know, whatever has to be done is being done, or if there is feedback that goes back and forth between these two organizations?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That happens as a matter of course, because one cannot take place without the other. And you do know that with the CAF Act, that small simple developments will be undertaken—approvals for simple developments will be undertaken in future by local government bodies.

Mr. Paray: Okay, thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 006, Green Fund Executing Unit. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Through you, to the hon. Minister, I note that there has been—well, let me say it this way. In 2019 Actual you had \$220,000 expended. Your Revised Estimate for 2020 is 528,000 on which the 2021 Estimates are built. I am curious as to find out why has there been this difference? What prompted the difference from 2019 to 2020 to 2021?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: First of all let me indicate that by Cabinet Minute No. 663 of April 04, 2019, we agreed to the appointment the seven persons to the Green Fund Advisory Committee for a period of two years with effect from the date of their letters of appointment, and that was April 18, 2019. Provision is therefore made for the payment of fees and travelling allowances for these seven Members, and that is \$44,000 per month for seven months. That is to say October 2020 to April 2021. The current provision allows for an increase in membership to nine,

with effect from May 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Just a follow-up. Can the Minister provide a listing of the membership of this committee?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Certainly.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: They are: Chairman, Mr. Ewart Williams. Members: Clarence Baccus, Tricia Ford, Camille Mohan Cayenne, Steve Jordan, Carlton Roberts and Maurisa Pierre. And we can now appoint two more.

Mr. Tancoo: Do you project appointing those two individuals soon Ma'am, within this fiscal?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The current provision allows for an increase in membership to nine with effect from May 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Item 008, Project Planning and Reconstruction Division. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the hon. Minister's attention to line Item 01: Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance. The actual spent for 2019 was 2.8 million, and the Revised Estimate 3.2, it is now budgeted at 3.5. There has been a significant increase there. Can the hon. Minister explain why that increased?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: \$226,300, and that is because officers are expected to receive their increments both in substantive and acting positions.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Item 009, Environmental Policy and Planning Division.

Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you again, Ma'am. Item 14: Remuneration to Members of Cabinet Appointed Committees. Again, 2019 you had an actual of 114,000, it doubled based on your Revised Estimate to 259,000 for 2020, with again another increase in 312,000. Can the Minister indicate why we have had this increase?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The increase is in the amount of \$52,300. This is to facilitate payment of fees to Cabinet Appointed Committees. These committees are as follows: The National Coordinating Committee to Guide the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol; the National Project Working Committee for the GEF UNIDO Project; the National Coordination Committee to Guide the Implementation of the National Bio-Diversity Strategy and Action Plan for Trinidad and Tobago 2017 to 2022. Additionally, we have the National Coordination Committee to Guide—I gave you that already? Right. Do you want the membership?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes thanks.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay. The Membership of the National Coordination Committee to Guide the Implementation of the National Bio-Diversity Strategy and Action Plan for Trinidad and Tobago is as follows: Mr. Kishan Kumarsingh of the Ministry of Planning and Development, who chairs it; Mr. Hayden Romano of the EMA, who is the Deputy Chair; Ms. Albada Beekham of the Research Division of Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, who is a member; Mr. Denny Dipchansingh of the Forestry Division, Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries; Mr. Darren Henry of the Tobago House of Assembly; Ms. Patricia Turpin of the Council of Presidents of the Environment; Mr. Courtney Park of the Zoological Society of Trinidad and Tobago.

For the National Coordinating Committee for the Implementation of the Montreal Protocol in Trinidad and Tobago, the membership is as follows: Dr. Maurisa Gary of the Ministry of Planning and Development, who is the chair. I would take this opportunity to indicate that Dr. Gary received an international award for environment issues. Ms. Renee Abass who is a member of the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards. Who is a member, but she is from the Trinidad and Tobago Bureau of Standards; Mrs. Maltee Beedasee of the Ministry of Trade and Industry; Mr. Hasmath Ali of the Ministry of Health; Mrs. Dianne Ramroop of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Food Production—or really the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

The National Project Working Committee for the GEF UNIDO Project Development and Implementation of a Sustainable Management Mechanism, for persistent organic pollutants in the Caribbean. Persistent organic pollutants are effluents that may be toxic or hazardous, and the Ministry in conjunction with this team is working on ensuring that we deal with this situation, and also we are working on a remediation of the Guanapo Landfill. The persons who are on this committee are as follows: Mrs. Kema Gardner who is the chair of the Ministry of Planning and Development; Ms. Giselle Joseph, of the EMA; Ms. Maria Joseph-Along, of the SWMCOL; Mr Terrence Cornand of the Ministry of Health, Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Control Board; Mr. Deon Brenner of the Tobago House of Assembly, and Ms. Jewel Batchasingh of the Basel Convention Regional Centre for Training, Technology Transfer for the Caribbean Region—and as you know, this Basel Centre is located in Trinidad—and Ms. Maurisa Mc Millan of the Water Resources Agency.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima. Sub-Head 002: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. This is where you are at, Member for Naparima. No? Yes? Yes?

Mr. Charles: Yes. Item 08: Rent/Lease Office Accommodation, I see an increase of 941,500, and I suspect that is to make up for a short payment in the Revised Estimates for 2020. The question I have, if it is not, could you clarify? And there is a follow-up.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We do have arrears of rent, and that is for that purpose.

Mr. Charles: Right. Could the Minister then give us the properties? List the property lease or rented and the monthly cost attached to it?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We rent at the following locations: Capital Plaza Levels 2 and 4 to accommodate the Accounts, Internal Auditor and Human Resource Divisions. The monthly rent is \$147,072.38. The Sterling Building, Upper Floor to accommodate the National Trust Council, at a monthly rent of \$79,140.38. May I just mention here, Madam Chairman, that the National Trust will be moving to Mille Fleur Building shortly. The Nicholas Towers, Level 22, to accommodate the Technical Corporation Unit and functions of the CDB, and this is at a monthly rent of \$126,489.38. The total annual amount is \$4,232,433.12. And this expenditure is facilitated under this Head, so we have outstanding bills.

Mr. Charles: Yes, thanks. Follow-up question: Are you aware, Minister, of any negotiations with the landlords with respect to reduction, or in context of our straightened circumstances, and/or possible reduced requirement given ICT and the digital economy in using those things to store equipment, et cetera?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: At this time we do not have a reduced requirement, and if

there are any negotiations going on it would be done by PRESID. At this time we are not aware of any.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. So, the Ministry has not role in initiating our suggestion?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We do not initiate, no.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. 01, Travelling and Subsistence. Your 2020 Estimate was 2.3 million, your Revised Estimate was 1.4 million. Can the Minister indicate why there was this difference of 1-plus million?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry, could you—you are talking about an increase of \$24,000?

Mr. Tancoo: No, Ma'am. I am speaking specifically for the difference between your Estimate and your Revised Estimate for 2020.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: What we have is an increase of \$24,000, and that is for the payment of Travelling and Subsistence for scheduled Travelling Officers due to promotions and appointments in the Ministry—of staff in the Ministry.

Mr. Tancoo: Ma'am, if I, may—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Any expenses incurred for official travel, site visits, meetings in Tobago, inclusive of accommodation, ground transportation by the Minister, Permanent Secretary, and Director, Town and Country Planning are also taken up in this, under this line Item.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay. So, Ma'am, if I may, these figures as we have them here, are the first time that they are being brought to this Standing Finance Committee. So my query was specifically for an explanation for the difference between your 2020 Estimate and your 2020 Revised Estimate. I understand that would have based

your 2021 Estimate on the Revised Estimate for 2020. I am curious as to find out why there was a 1 million difference between what you had estimated for and you have actually revised to spend in 2020.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: This is actually what happened. Subsistence, the allowances, the payment of travelling, those are actually what we had to pay at that time.

Mr. Tancoo: All right, I would leave that there for now, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

5.00 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 05: Telephones. The actual spent for 2019 was \$999,167. It was estimated at 1.5 million but what you actually spent was 3.6 million. Was there any additional equipment that was installed?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, Member, we had arrears. So we paid off the arrears and the decrease is therefore because we were able to do that in fiscal 2020.

Mr. Ratiram: So if it is that we are looking at arrears hon. Minister, clearing off the arrears, the last actual figure that we had was 999. It is budgeted at 1.5 million for this year which still indicates an increase in the figures. Is it that the telephone bills have increased over the period?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We still have arrears to clear off.

Mr. Ratiram: We still have some arrears there. All right. Does the Ministry intend to implement any cost saving measures with respect to telephones or is there any mechanism in place to monitor these—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: There is a mechanism in place.

Mr. Ratiram: I would like to move on, Madam Chair, to line Item 22: Short-term

Employment. And—draw the Minister’s attention to the estimate of 3.3 million for 2020 Estimate, whereas the Revised Estimate was 5.2 million. Can the Minister explain this increase from the Estimate to the Revised Estimate?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes. What we put in place was the Ministry’s implementation of the six-year contract plan and the renewal of contracts in the Environmental Division for a further period of three years and that led to the decrease.

Mr. Ratiram: That led to the decrease?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, to a decrease. You are on 22, eh, Short-term Employment.

Mr. Ratiram: Yeah. What I am seeing there is that the Revised Estimate is close to 2 million more than what the Estimate was.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: What happens is, previously they would have been under short term but now that we have brought them into the system they are no longer short term, so that would account for the difference. So previously when we did the estimate those persons would have been under short term contracts. But now that we have made them on actual contract and it is not short term that is the difference that you are seeing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister. I would like to bring the Minister attention to line Item 23. The estimates for 2020 was 268,000 whereas the Revised Estimate was 1.3 million for fees. Can the hon. Minister indicate why this significant increase in fees and what was budgeted for in 2020 to what took place?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: At the time we had to pay legal fees for the EMA in respect of a court order.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Item 17. Madam Minister, given the fact that the Ministry of Planning and Development has to be at the cutting edge of approaches, technologies, systems, et cetera, particularly national statistical institute, you have indicated you get help from the UN, EU and other body but still it seems to be very, very, low, nothing was spent in 2020 and only 76,100 allocated in 2021. Is there a reason for this, what seems to be a small budget for such a critical part of the Ministry?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The budget is adequate. If we have to make any changes, we will vire money to do that. However, given that a lot of the training now because of the COVID-19 is being done online, the budget we think is quite adequate. So you are of the view that in preparation for the national statistical institute that we are ready in terms of the knowledge base—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well as I said, we have been getting training, we had got assistance from Statistics Sweden, we have got training from the UN, we have got training from the CDB, from the IDB and we have got training from UN agencies, and in many instances this training is not at a cost or it is at a very small cost. And you would recall that the Ministry of Planning and Development is responsible for Technical Cooperation. So we do have a way with being able to get training done at a minimal cost.

Mr. Charles: Minister, we are— World Bank reports and what not talked about the deficiency of the statistical information, the data that is available, yet you are saying that you are satisfied that they are well trained, they are capable of providing what they are required, their remit, what they are required to do. So

staffing and training is not a problem in terms of the deliverables of the Ministry and in particular the Central Statistical Office.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay, I would say that for what we are trying to achieve at this time we are at an adequate level. It is not optimal, but when the NSITT comes into being we will, of course, have different staff requirements. But we have trained our officers to be able to meet the requirements of a developing country. And with the advent of the NSITT, given what we anticipate we have already been training the staff to operate as though the NSITT were already in existence. And the information from the fund and the World Bank is that we are doing the right things.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I want to return to Item 23: Fees. The Minister indicated that some of this payment in 2020 would have been for a judgment. I am curious as to what the rest of the cost of the fees are? What else comprised these fees?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It was only for the EMA. We transferred money from the Ministry to the EMA to pay legal fees.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay, so 2021 Estimate of 268,000 would not therefore include any payment for that purpose.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No. It has been paid.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair.

Madam Chairman: Attorney General.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. On the issue of fees at the EMA, I can indicate that the EMA not only was required to pay fees pursuant to court order, but the EMA is also pursuing fees in a number of matters pursuant to court order as

well. As the situation becomes clearer we would have an idea as to where we actually stand. So by way of mid-year reporting I am certain we can come back to this Item if necessary. But the EMA has been the subject of a significant amount of litigation and therefore must always be on standby to meet court order obligations.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 27: Official Overseas Travel and the 2020 Revised Estimate is slightly higher than the 2020 estimate, it is 555,000 for the period. Can the hon. Minister advise why such a high overseas travel expenditure especially during this time when the borders were closed.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We had arrears to members of staff from 2019 to 2020, to members of staff who went on overseas travel and needed to be reimbursed because they did not, at the time that they were going on the overseas travel, get their per diem and other allowances that were due to them. As a matter of fact, we had to pay 62—either 62 officers or agencies for overseas travel and that is what we used the money to do.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, thank you, Minister. However, this being the Ministry of Planning and Development I would anticipate that in the process of planning the 2020 Estimate if it is that we had outstanding arrears we would have seen something a little higher than what the 2019 figures. So what I am seeing in 2019 is 692 and there is actually a decrease in the 2020 Estimate. Is it that we were not aware of these overseas travel when we were putting it—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, no. As you rightly said as a Ministry of Planning and Development we plan quite effectively and quite stringently. It would mean that

there would be times when it is not every year that we would be going to every conference or overseas travel that may be offered. But we look quite closely at what is offered and where we need to go to make sure that our officers can attend. But in this instance we did have officers who, because they are so committed to the work of the Ministry, attended overseas without their per diem being paid, they paid for themselves and the Ministry reimbursed them thereafter. And that is what I am talking about when I told you that there were 62 officers or agencies that we owed and we made that payment. There are still some 12 officers who have payments that are still outstanding, but we tried to make sure that those officers who diligently went to do the work of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago we were able to reimburse them.

Mr. Ratiram: And would the 50,000 be sufficient to reimburse the outstanding liabilities?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It would pay in the main for most of them.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Mr. Ratiram: I would just like to move to Item 34: University Graduate Recruitment Programme. This programme was budgeted in 2020, 1 million was placed in this line Item. However, it was not utilized and no money is being placed under the University Graduate Recruitment Programme. Has this programme been discontinued at the Ministry?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It has not yet been implemented. But we have said that for all the Ministries that that question has been asked. It appears in all the Ministries, it has been asked on each occasion and we have given the same answer.

Mr. Ratiram: That is—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It has not yet been implemented.

Mr. Ratiram: That is not accurate, Madam Minister. What was explained in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries is that the programme was discontinued because the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries felt that the OJT programme will pick up the slack and that there were other agricultural programmes for university graduates. So the hon. Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries explained that this programme was discontinued in that Ministry. What I am asking—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That is not what the hon. Minister said. He said that in the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries they have been using OJTs because the programme, there was a need for the Ministry of Finance to determine what the programme should entail and that had not been done. Consequently, even though for each Ministry we budget the sum of \$1 million because it has not been detailed, we have not implemented the programme, and consequently in agriculture they were using OJTs with university qualifications. That is what he said.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Minister, this year no money is budgeted for this line Item, so is it that it has been shelved then?—because if it has not been implemented while it was budgeted for last year and it was not implemented and no money is allocated for this year—

5.15 p.m.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It has not been implemented, and consequently we have not budgeted for it.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Minister.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. Just a follow-up on the same issue. Since we have the

Minister of Finance in our midst, can the Minister indicate what the keep back is with regard to implementing this particular programme?

Madam Chairman: Recruitment programme.

Mr. Imbert: What is the question?

Madam Chairman: Keep back in its implementation.

Mr Tancoo: If I may, Mr. Minister? We are on line Item 34: University Graduate Recruitment Programme.

Mr. Imbert: Are you seeing an allocation there? If there is no allocation, why are you asking about its implementation?

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, let me help you to—

Mr. Imbert: I really wish the Member for Siparia was here to give you the necessary guidance. If there is no allocation, there is nothing happening there.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, perhaps if you were paying a little bit more attention you would have heard your Minister colleague behind you indicate that the reason that this programme was not—no money was expended last year was because the programme had not yet been implemented. There was quite a bit of discussion between my colleague from Couva North and the Minister with regard to this. The Minister indicated clearly that the programme has not yet been implemented. My question was why has it not yet been implemented so that university graduates would have been able to have a job at this point in time.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Could I indicate just as the Minister of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries said, the OJT Programme also allows us to employ university graduates, and in many instances two things; we either employ people through the OJT Programme who have university level qualifications or we have a returning scholars programme and a number of them have been employed at the Ministry of

Planning and Development, and at this time the University Graduate Recruitment Programme is not yet implemented.

Mr. Imbert: And may I say, Madam Chairman, that the fact that there is—

Madam Chairman: Your mike.

Mr. Tancoo: It is on, he is just too far from it.

Mr. Imbert: The fact that there is no provision in this year's Estimates should lead to the conclusion that there is no intention to operationalize this Item in fiscal 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: Which follows to the same point that my colleague raised, whether the programme has in fact been scrapped.

Mr. Imbert: If there is no funding, how can you operationalize?

Madam Chairman: Item 002: Library Service Unit.

Mr. Imbert: Siparia should really be here to guide you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Indarsingh: Diego Martin North/East, do not worry about it. We are in the House.

Mr. Tancoo: Careful what you wish for, Minister.

Madam Chairman: I would like to hear Member for Oropouche West, please.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Item 28: Other Contracted Services. Can the Minister indicate what exactly constitutes—what falls under this Head, Other Contracted Services for the Library Service Unit?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It is to cover the upkeep of the library's database. You said that for the library, correct?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It is to cover the upkeep of the library's database and

training.

Mr. Tancoo: And what Fees would have been considered under this Head, Ma'am, under Head—sorry, Item 23: Fees? What Fees would have been relevant here?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The annual subscription to the Universal Decimal Classification for librarians. That is what it is for.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: Technical Co-operation; Item 004: Central Statistical Office. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: I refer to Item, again, 08 and I note that the Estimate for 2021 is \$15 million. The largest single Item in this Sub-Head, \$15 million. And before I ask the question, when I compared training, only 11,000, but 15 million in rent and you have no residual value. I have a concern about whether this is the best allocation of taxpayers' resources at this time. But the question is: What are these properties leased or rented, and the monthly cost of these properties?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, first of all let me indicate that for several years between 2010 and 2015, the CSO had no home. So now they have home. And I have already indicated all the office accommodation—

Mr. Charles: That is—okay.

Hon. Robinson-Regis:—and the CSO is located at Plaza 47 on Frederick Street. Thank God because for many years they were without a home.

Mr. Charles: Could you indicate the companies, the persons from whom that property is rented?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Just one second please. Could I indicate what?

Mr. Charles: The companies/persons from whom that property is rented.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Dr. Achong Low.

Mr. Charles: Okay. Thanks.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 05: Telephones. The Actual spend for 2019 was 478,000; this increased in 2020 to 852. Can the Minister indicate the reason for this increase?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: This is Telephones?

Mr. Tancoo: Telephones?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yeah. Payment of arrears.

Mr. Tancoo: In 2021, the figure remains the same, is it that the arrears are being distributed over a period of time?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, it is.

Mr. Tancoo: And when will we complete paying off those arrears?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: This year.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I refer to Item 01: Travelling and Subsistence. I note that in 2020, we had budgeted \$2.7 million but only spent 1.782—the Revised Estimates. You budgeted based in 2021 for 1.8, but the Minister indicated an intention to pursue several surveys including the household “budgetable” survey, et cetera. Would this allocation be sufficient to cover that initiative or those initiatives? I think there are several surveys to be done this year.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The amount that you see here is for officers who are in established posts. So it would not be covered under this line Item for those surveys. The survey itself will have a special budget and travelling will be covered under

that budget.

Mr. Tancoo: Then can the Minister explain why there is this significant difference between the Estimate, in fact between Actual 2.4, 2019, which sets the trend for your complement of staff? 2.4 in 2019, you estimated 2.7, but you have only spent 1.7 in 2020.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We had to pay arrears and now we have to rationalize those persons who are on delegated authority, and consequently that is what you are seeing there.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Line Item 22, the Actual spend for 2019 was 552,639, and this figure increased in the 2020 Estimate to 704,000, and a further increase in the Revised Estimate to 1.2 million, Short-term Employment. It now holds at 1.2 million. Can the Minister advise how much additional persons have been employed with this increase?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We have not employed any additional persons. The actual increase is an increase of \$4,200 and this increase will be absorbed in employers NIS contributions.

Mr. Ratiram: That is not what I asked, hon. Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: What did you ask?

Mr. Ratiram: If I may once more?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: "Um-hmm."

Mr. Ratiram: In 2019, the Actual spend for this line Item was 552,000. This figure increased—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: And the line Item you are talking about is line Item 22:

Short-term Employment.

Mr. Ratiram: Line Item 22: Short-term Employment. For 2019, the Actual spend was 552, from 2019 to what is proposed for 2021 is now 1.2.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You would notice that the Revised Estimate is 1,213,800. The Estimate for 2021 is 1,218,000. And so the increase really is \$4,200.

Mr. Ratiram: I am not speaking about that increase, hon. Minister. While you are correcting what you are saying I am not sure—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The Short-term Employment is really for the provision of certain types of surveys. And so when we have to do these surveys we bring people in under Short-term Employment.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister advise the number of persons that have been recruited with this—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We will give you that in writing.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are most welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I want to return just to belabour the point a little bit. There was \$704,000 budgeted but actual spend was twice that. I think what my colleague was trying to discern—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Which line Item are you on, please?

Madam Chairman: Short-term Employment.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Short-term Employment.

Mr. Tancoo: Short-term Employment still. I think what my colleague was trying to determine is exactly what caused this doubling almost of the figure between what was budgeted and what was the Revised Estimate because it does not reflect

on the Actual 2019 either.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We employed in the order of approximately 26 additional persons under Short-term Employment hence the increase, but if you want more detailed information we can provide that in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Item 005: Urban and Regional Planning Division; Item 006: Green Fund Executing Unit; Item 008: Project Planning and Reconstruction Division; Item 009: Environmental Policy and Planning Division. Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to line Item 16: Contract Employment.

Madam Chairman: We are at page 334.

Mr. Ratiram: Yes, Item 16: Contract Employment. From the Actual spend of 2019 of 1.2 million, this figure is what was budgeted for in 2020, however, the Revised Estimate was 3.3 million, a significant increase in Contract Employment spending. Can the hon. Minister indicate the reason for this increase?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, we had a number of persons on short-term employment but when we implemented the six-year employment plan we were able to move some persons from short-term to contract employment and consequently by this regularization, the amount would have increased. So you would see a decrease in short-term and an increase in contract employment.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Can you provide us with the details perhaps in writing of these positions?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The positions, certainly.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001:

Standing Finance Committee

Head 67: Ministry of Planning and Development

General Administration; Item 002: Library Service Unit; Item 003: Technical Co-operation; Item 004: Central Statistical Office; Item 005: Urban and Regional Planning Division; Item 006: Green Fund Executing Unit; Item 008: Project Planning and Reconstruction Division; Item 009: Environmental Policy and Planning Division.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. We are at page 338. Item 001: Regional Bodies.

Item 002: Commonwealth Bodies. Member for Couva North.

5.30 p.m.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to Item 01: Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. The Actual spend was 1.7 million, this has been reduced to 954. Is this sufficient for what we would have achieved in 2019?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The annual amount is 954,000 but we were in arrears and consequently you see that increase and we have been able to pay off the arrears.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome. And so, sometimes the rates are subject to change based on the rates because it might be a UK payment so the pound sterling also changes.

Madam Chairman: Item 003: United Nations Organisations. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 12: United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the Actual in 2019 was 70,000; Estimates, 76. The 2021 Estimate is 81, so it seems as if the consistent annual contribution is in the range of 70,000 to 80,000. Could the Minister therefore explain the 2020

Revised Estimates which seem to be double the estimated 76,000 when all the payments seem to have been made?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We paid off our arrears.

Mr. Charles: But that could not be for 2019?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes, we were in arrears and we paid them off. We paid off all outstanding arrears in the last fiscal.

Mr. Charles: Okay.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Follow-up question on the same Sub-Head, Ma'am. Can the Minister indicate why we were in these arrears to this very important institution?

Madam Chairman: I am not going to allow that in this exercise, that has already gone.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay then, if I may move to Sub-Item 11, you had estimated 102,000 but you spent nothing last year. You are, again, estimating 102,000. Can the Minister indicate why there was no spend last year and if this 102,000 budgeted for this year would be sufficient to cover whatever was not expended last year?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: What happens is, in most instances, we await the UN in the sending of the documents to us to make the actual quantification and if they do not send it before the close of the year, the fiscal, then we do not make the payment until we receive their documentation. So the payment coincides with their documentation which may not necessarily coincide with our fiscal.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Based on the Minister's explanation, Madam Chair, I will pass.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Item 004: International Bodies; Item 005: Non-Profit

Institutions; Item 006: Educational Institutions; Item 007: Households. Member for Couva South. Page 339.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much, Madam Chair. Minister, 03: Settlement to Cane Farmers re-2007 transition. In your 2020 Estimates, Minister, there was an allocation of \$5 million and apparently only \$600,000 was paid out and now in 2021, you have an allocation of \$1 million. Based on the allocation here, could you indicate if this will settle all outstanding liabilities to the former cane farmers?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chair, for fiscal 2019 to 2020, a total of 33 cheques were created and paid out to a value of \$631,147.55. Over the period 2014 to 2015, a total of the 2,567 contracts were processed by the Ministry of Planning and Development under the tranche one regime, with total expenditure to cane farmers of \$19,343,504.89.

Between 2015 to 2016, a total of 237 cane farmers received payments for tranche one, consequently as at September 2016, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago revised the transitional payment of tranches two and three where cane farmers now have the option of accepting 53 per cent of the total of both tranches. A total of four cane farmers accepted the offer during that fiscal and the total expenditure amounted to \$2,223,399.88. 2016 to 2017, a total of 164 tranche one payments were made whereas 491 accepted the offer with the total amount paid out being \$14,437,993.78. 2017 to 2018, a total of 55 tranche one payments were made and 173 cane farmers accepted the revised offer under tranches two and three, and the total expenditure was \$4,336,928.92. 2018 to 2019, a total of 34 tranche one payments were made and 76 agreed to the offer with the total expenditure being \$1,461,393.81. 2019 to 2020, a total of 33 tranche one payments were made and 26 cane farmers agreed to the offer with a total payment of \$631,147.55.

Madam Chairman, between 2014 and 2015, the number of farmers that accepted the tranche one payment was 2,567 and the total amount paid out was \$19,343,504. The total number of cane farmer contracts as audited by Ernst & Young is 3,481. Under this programme, the compensation packages to former cane farmers was calculated based on an assessment of their average production tonnage. Currently, pay-outs are made in three tranches and the Government is offering 100 per cent of tranche one and 53 per cent of tranches two and three combined.

The cane farmers programme has slowed down significantly with fiscal 2019 to 2020 being the slowest year in terms of the number of persons coming in to sign up for their settlement packages. This is due to the fact that many cane farmers have taken legal action against the Government of Trinidad and Tobago and they are challenging the validity of the revised 53 per cent offer.

The next court hearing for all collective matters is expected in November 2020, and trial is expected in January 2021. Once this happens, Madam Chairman, the Ministry will be in a better position to anticipate the flow of cane farmers accessing the programme.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva South.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you, Madam Chair. I notice that the Minister, while we are dealing with 2020 and 2021, the Minister skilfully went back to 2014 and so on. I hope that we are given such latitude and so on.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, if I may just—

Madam Chairman: Just one minute.

Mr. Indarsingh: I am just merely asking the Minister because statistically I just want to know out of the initial number, how much have been settled and how many

farmers are still awaiting their settlement. That is all.

Madam Chairman: Okay. Member for Arouca/Maloney.

Mr. Indarsingh: So the long run-up what—[*Inaudible*—]—to deceive.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, I would not accept that from the Member for Couva South.

Madam Chairman: It was—excuse me? What was the word? I cannot hear.

Mr. Indarsingh: To deceive, Chairman. To deceive me.

Madam Chairman: No, I would really ask that you withdraw that word.

Mr. Indarsingh: All right, I will retract it.

Madam Chairman: Because even what you say is contradictory because you just said it was helpful.

Mr. Indarsingh: No, I said that I am still trying to prise out from the Minister.

Madam Chairman: All right, but in any event, I would really wish that you withdraw that word.

Mr. Indarsingh: I retract it, Madam.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much.

Mr. Indarsingh: Could the Minister be so kind to tell the meeting how many farmers are still awaiting their settlement based on tranches one, two and three?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The number of cane farmers that were supposed to be paid was 3,481 farmers. The total number of cane farmers who accepted tranche one under an amount of \$12,000 was 1,153 farmers. The total number of cane farmers whose contracts were for tranche one and the amount was over \$12,000 is 2,328 farmers. The total number of farmers who are supposed to be paid in tranches two and three is 2,328 farmers. Thus far, 770 of the 2,328 have accepted.

Mr. Indarsingh: Thank you very much.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are most welcome.

Madam Chairman: Item 009: Other Transfers; Item 010: Other Transfers Abroad.

Sub-Head 06: Current Transfers to Statutory Boards & Similar Bodies. We go on to another book. Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Statutory Boards and Similar Bodies and of the Tobago House of Assembly* and we are at page 471.

02 - Institute of Marine Affairs. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. Item 001: General Administration.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration.

Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Item 001: General Administration. We are at page 472.

Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies. Item 007: Households.

49 - Chaguaramas Development Authority. Sub-Head 01: Personnel Expenditure. We are at page 480. Item 001: General Administration.

Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services. Item 001: General Administration.
 Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I am at Sub-Item 23: Fees. I note a significant increase in the Fees proposed for 2021 relative to the Revised Estimates for 2020. Can the Minister indicate what would have caused this \$1.3 million increase in the Fees?

5.45 p.m.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The issue there, Madam Chairman, was the payment of judgment debts.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister provide a breakdown of those payments?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We do not have them with us, but we can.

Mr. Tancoo: Follow-up, if I may. I would like to move to Item 61: Insurance. There was a \$239,000 difference between the revised Estimates 2020 and the Estimate for 2021. Can the Minister indicate why, what would have constituted the reason for this difference?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The decrease of 239,000?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes, Ma'am.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It was based on the age of the insured items and depreciation. Consequently, the cost of insurance has decreased.

Mr. Tancoo: I turn to Item 16: Contract Employment. Again, there was an increase of half a million dollars between 2020 Revised Estimate and the 2021 Estimate. May I ask what caused that increase?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Additional contract staff.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister indicate how many persons were brought on?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We can provide that in writing.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you very much, Minister. I also note that at Item 04, there is again a Revised Estimate of 1.3 million in 2020 but a 1 million allocation for electricity for 2021, which leads us to a reduction of \$300,000. Can the Minister indicate what prompted this reduction?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The circumstances in which we find ourselves.

Mr. Tancoo: For electricity, Ma'am? Are you suggesting that we will be incurring arrears or we will simply not be using electricity?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It might be a combination of both.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases, Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies, Item 007:

Households. Item 009: Transfers. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Can the Minister indicate what exactly these bank charges are, because it is twice as high as the actual for 2019?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: These charges accrued with the normal course of business.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I ask you for a breakdown, Ma'am?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: A breakdown of—?

Mr. Tancoo: Of the charges that accrued.

Hon. Robinson-Regis:—bank charges?

Mr. Tancoo: Yes Ma'am.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: If it is possible, but I mean as an authority does its business the bank will charge for different things, for a letter, for a transfer of money from one place to the next. We will see if that is possible.

Mr. Tancoo: I appreciate that very much, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, we will now move on to the *Draft Estimates of Development Programme*, new book. Sub-Head 09: Development Programme, Consolidated Fund. We are at page 138. Item 001: Pre-investment. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I am Item 005: The Implementation of the San Fernando Waterfront Redevelopment Programme. You had an actual spend of \$257,314 in 2019. But there has been no allocation in 2020 or 2021. Can the Minister indicate the status of this San Fernando Waterfront Redevelopment Programme?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Previously the Ministry of Planning and Development oversaw this project. It is now being done through the Office of the Prime Minister by UDeCOTT. Consequently there is no allocation under the Ministry of Planning

and Development. However, the project is being implemented and we spoke about that previously.

Mr. Paray: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman. Minister, line Item 003: The Seismic Microzonation Study. Based on the increase in seismic activity over the last couple years, what is the status of this particular project study?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: This particular project is one where we have been working with the UWI, their seismic department. What the project does is maps Trinidad and Tobago in order to determine where are the areas most likely to be affected by seismic activity. And as a consequence of the increase in the level of seismic activity that has in fact been taking place, we have found that the mapping has been working in our favour, because we have a sense of where the activity could possibly take place and which are the areas that we might be most subject to being affected by seismic activity.

Because of this project, we have been able to zone certain parts of both islands and we are now working on making sure that we can zone the island in terms of the level of expected activity if there is a seismic occurrence. And the project is going along quite effectively. UWI has been working very closely, well we have been working very closely with UWI and we have been placing motion sensors in different parts of the country.

Mr. Paray: Minister, do you expect when this plan is eventually implemented into our urban planning systems, we may find large areas that may become prohibitive for construction? Or would emphasis be placed on building codes if you have to build in those areas? How do you envision this being implemented?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: I think it would be the latter. Because given the fact that we are an island, we will have to utilize land space as effectively as possible.

As a consequence of that fact, the Town and Country Planning Division has been working on re-examining our mechanisms that we are using for building footprints and the heights that we have been giving to developers. Because we need more and more development construction, but also have to take into consideration the fact that we are an island and consequently we will have to go up rather than across.

Mr. Paray: Minister, do you see any opportunity to engage like insurance agencies, and so on, companies that may have to now insure buildings in these areas, in terms of, you know, reducing the options for them not to want to insure your facilities, your buildings if you do build in those areas? Any plans to have discussions from an insurance perspective?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The thing is that because of the fact that there are several countries which experience seismic activity, there are a lot of codes already in place in several countries which would give persons who do construction the capability to be able to construct even in areas that may be more prone to seismic activity. But of course if that becomes necessary we will have that discussion. But right now, as the project proceeds, we are seeing that it has been working in favour of both the Ministry of Planning and Development, particularly the Town and Country Planning Division, and UWI.

Mr. Paray: Finally Minister, this 1.4 million allocation, would this complete the cost of the survey, or is it something that would be in continuum going forward beyond this?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Now, two things. This allocation of 1.4 is for the purchase of ground motion sensors and an adjustment to the original allocation of 1 million from previous years and for remuneration to the steering committee members. It is

a 10-year plan, and so over time there would be changed amounts allocated. But it is a 10-year plan and we think that the plan, it has been going quite well.

Mr. Paray: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Madam Minister, I am very glad that this study has been going so well. My query stems from the fact that there was no expenditure registered for 2020 under this Head. Can the Minister indicate why? You had budgeted \$1 million, but you spent none.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Okay, it would depend on what the seismic unit asks for, and if they did not ask for anything then there would be no expenditure. But we, of course, put an amount in the budget to ensure that we are ready for any eventuality.

Mr. Tancoo: I move on to 007: Relocation of the PTSC Maintenance Facilities. Your actual spend in 2019 was 13 million. You had no estimate for 2020, but you ended up spending \$5.6 million. Can the Minister indicate, why was there a deficit in the allocation to start with?

Madam Chairman: Deficit?

Mr. Tancoo: Well, there was none allocated, but there was some spent.

Madam Chairman: I did not understand the term “the deficit in the allocation”.

Mr. Tancoo: All right, so there was no allocation in 2020. There was no money budgeted for this figure. As you said, there was no budget for 2020. But there is a Revised Estimate of 5.6 million actual spend. Well not actual, projected. I am asking you for the difference.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: What happened was—this is all part of the Waterfront Project and what happened was—despite the fact that it had been transferred to

UDeCOTT there was not a record of it in UDeCOTT's records and we had the allocation. So, consequently we transferred the funds later on to make sure that the payments could be made.

Mr. Tancoo: Has the relocation been completed, Ma'am?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The relocation is ongoing but it has almost been completed to the Tarouba site.

Mr. Tancoo: All right, but we have no estimate for 2021.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: As I said, it has been removed from the Ministry of Planning and Development to the Office of the Prime Minister to UDeCOTT.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Consequently you would see nothing under the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you Madam Chair. Item 007: Relocation of PTSC Maintenance Facility. From what the Minister would have just explained, the 5.6 million would have been to pay liabilities that might have been engaged by UDeCOTT, the execute agency, which is why no moneys were there. No?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It would have been to pay PTSC, through the Ministry of Works and Transport.

Mr. Ratiram: To pay PTSC?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes because it was a PTSC project. It was the movement of PTSC's bus depot. It was in a certain location where the San Fernando Waterfront—where we wanted to ensure that we did that development. And so part of the Waterfront development was the relocation of the PTSC and so we wanted to make sure that that was done.

Mr. Tancoo: Madam Chair.

Mr. Ratiram: However, the—if I may? However, the Item was under this Ministry from 2019.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: And 12 million was spent under this Ministry for this project.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yes.

Mr. Ratiram: Another 5.6 million spent to pay expenses incurred by the PTSC for this project.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Exactly.

Mr. Ratiram: Can the hon. Minister provide us with copies of all those contracts that were paid out for this Item?

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, could I please?

Madam Chairman: Just one minute, Member for San Fernando West.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Sorry. Madam Chair, we would not be in possession of those documents. So I cannot give that undertaking.

Madam Chairman: Maybe Member, just one minute, if the Member for San Fernando West be allowed to come in and maybe he might—

Mr. Al-Rawi: Perhaps I may assist, yes. Madam Chair, just to make this—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Before the Member for San Fernando West comes in. The Member for San Fernando West is playing an integral role in this, because it falls within his constituency and that of the Member for San Fernando East. And we are very proud of the fact that we at last been able to move this project along, because it was languishing for many years. But now please, Member for San Fernando West, through you, Madam Chairman.

6.00 p.m.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, as the Member for San Fernando West where this project is located, I am obviously keenly interested in seeing its progress flow, and I thank hon. Members opposite who—some of whom come from the southland themselves and who know of the decades of non-development in San Fernando. I am very pleased to see that they are now animated and interested in this project, as my colleague, the Minister of Planning and Development has so capably pushed it.

By way of assistance, the project for the relocation involves movement to two locations. The first location is the movement of the bus yard into the facilities where OAS Construtora once had their facilities. That is just opposite C3 mall. The second is for a movement across to the Tarouba site. This involves a decanting of the facility into the OAS Construtora site and a build out of that facility. It was originally located in the Ministry of Planning and Development, which funded the PTSC's involvement because the Ministry of Planning and Development did the multiple developmental arms of the San Fernando Waterfront comprising some 11 projects. This is just one of them, all of which are very far advanced in terms of work.

This particular site was located and situated—has been located and situated now into UDeCOTT. It involves movement of a project which has been awarded to the Karamath group, which is the construction of over \$750 million worth of accommodation and housing, and that project has already been approved and started.

So this \$5 million left represents a legacy payment from the Ministry of Planning and Development to the PTSC. The PTSC has also been funded by UDeCOTT, as UDeCOTT has possession of the site and the land has actually been

vested in UDeCOTT.

Again, this is just a part of the redevelopment of the San Fernando Waterfront. The other parts are of course the Plaza San Carlos, the reclamation of land, the thousand car parks on the site, the 241 homes on the San Fernando Ministry of Works and Transport site, et cetera. So there are multiple elements. It will not appear in the books here because this is a UDeCOTT funded project as of now, and it will already have been analyzed under the Ministry of Works and Transports where we had PTSC's position come before us under that Ministry's Head. I hope that this has helped somewhat in clarifying the issue.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you. Thank you, hon. AG, for sharing that bit of information with us and identifying that there are other agencies that would contribute to the spending for the activities that have already been completed. However, what I am seeking at this point in time from the hon. Minister is some level of accountability for what falls under her purview and her watch. And if it is that 12 million was paid out from her Ministry for works completed, whether it was done by UDeCOTT, or PTSC, or private contractors, I am just seeking some accountability for the spend of the 12.9 million and for the 5.6 million.

Mr. Al-Rawi: Madam Chair, as a matter of law, that question would have to be put in the usual way to the entity that has that accountability. That is the PTSC, not the Ministry of Planning and Development. This is a subvention which goes simply by way of a payment out from the Ministry of Planning and Development to the PTSC. They fall under the Auditor General. A question can be asked in relation to that, but the alacrity that one has to have in approaching this issue is brought about when you consider that that came already under the Ministry of Works and

Transport when PTSC was here under examination. So, unfortunately, I do understand my hon. colleague's position, but it is not proper to ask the Ministry of Planning and Development for that because it is merely a subvention payment paid to the corporate entity or the entity that is the PTSC.

Madam Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Ratiram: Chair, from my understanding, Madam Chair, for the moneys to be released from the Ministry's planning to be sent to the PTSC, the PTSC would have—details would have been required and—

Madam Chairman: All that I am hearing is this, not that you are not entitled to interrogate this figure, or for accountability, but it is not from the Ministry of Planning and Development. And I think apart from what the AG said, the Minister herself said we would not have those records, it will be the PTSC. All right. So that, I do not think you could go any further at this stage. I also do not think that your issue is dead. There are going to be a lot of other opportunities to interrogate, and what we are being guided, and maybe it was not clear to you then, was that PTSC—the accountability may have been under PTSC when we did Ministry of Works and Transport. Okay. So, I will go on.

Item 004: Social Infrastructure, pages 139 and 140. This Item spans two pages and therefore, I will announce the project groups. So, I start with M: Central Statistical Office, and I recognize the Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I am on Item 045: CSO Physical Transition to the New Facilities which the Minister spoke about earlier, I believe. An Estimate in 2020 of \$1 million was budgeted for but we have a figure here, I understand that this is a revised figure, so this is just a nominal amount. But I am curious as to why then there was this nominal amount placed in of \$169?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, we suspect that might be an error.

Mr. Tancoo: Can I then appeal to the Minister to correct this at some point in time for the records?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Totally.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. So what we do with the 600,000 then? Estimate for 2021—

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are on 045?

Mr. Tancoo: Has this move been completed?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Right, yes. The funds allocated will be used to outfit the ground and fourth floors of the CSO's premises at Plaza 47, that is on Frederick Street. And the outfitting will include the installing of Internet infrastructure, assembling and wiring of cubicles, and the procurement of shelving and furniture. And it is an increase of \$599,831, Madam Chair.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister. I turn to Item 053: Conduct of Pre-Census Activities for the 2021 Population, Housing and Agriculture Census. I see we have estimated 1.5 last year in the 2020 fiscal but none was spent. Can the Minister indicate why?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Because of COVID, Madam Chair. But I can go on to say that in fiscal 2019/2020, the hiring of a census administrator was, unfortunately, not achieved, and activities that would have been undertaken by the census administrator such as staffing the census unit, hiring field enumerators and supervisors, purchasing of equipment, et cetera, was not achieved. The allocation of 1 million, of course, because of COVID we could not do it, but we will apply that amount to fiscal 2020/2021. And in September of this year, approval was granted for the purchase of servers and other equipment to the value of \$226,255.

And we will be making that purchase. May I also say, Madam Chairman, that the Caribbean region has determined that this national census will occur in 2022.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. Just to follow up, you had estimated that to kick-start the process, it would have cost 1.5 million in 2020. You are now estimating that it will cost 1 million to do the same initiation of the project? Is that correct?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That is because we lost—we would have lost three months because we would be starting in 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: That is fair.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Early 2021.

Mr. Tancoo: All right. Can the Minister indicate what is the anticipated completion time for this census?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: 2022.

Mr. Tancoo: Maybe I am pushing my luck a little bit more. If I may, Mrs. Minister, I would like to find out when we will be able to get the results of the census published?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are pushing your luck.

Madam Chairman: Member, I would not allow that here, please.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Yeah. You are pushing—

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Asked and answered.

Madam Chairman: Asked and answered. D. Chaguaramas Area Development. Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: 036: Upgrade of the Chaguaramas Golf Course - Phase 1. And I see so far, in 2019, close to 700,000 and last year 800,000, so that is 15 spent based on the data here and a million, again, for a golf course. Could the Minister tell us—

and it is only Phase 1— what is involved in Phase 1, the total cost of Phase 1, and the cost of the other phases to complete this Chaguaramas Golf Course?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, as you know the Chaguaramas Golf Course is the only free golf course in Trinidad and Tobago, and therefore, it allows the ordinary citizen to have access to the game of golf without having to pay any exorbitant fees. As a consequence of that, this administration and other PNM administrations have always felt that it was necessary to ensure that the Chaguaramas Golf Course was kept at an optimal level and modernized. So, the upgrade of the Chaguaramas Golf Course Phase 1 is to provide a modern golfing facility of world class standards for use by the general public of Trinidad and Tobago.

The Phase 1 involves critical upgrade work and includes the restructuring of the operations of the golf course, fittings and fixtures, and refurbishment works. However, for this phase of the project the upgrade works will focus on the following and that is: refurbishment and upgrade of the golf course clubhouse; the improvements of the golf course will result in increased revenue for the CDA as golfers return to the greens; the refurbishment of the golf clubhouse will also provide an opportunity for the CDA to generate additional revenues and at this point, the project is 95 percent completed.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Just to correct the Minister a little. There was a free golf course in Petit Morne Pond in the constituency of San Fernando East, and it was closed three months ago by the PNM administration, but thanks for the information.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That is why we have to make sure and upgrade Chaguaramas Golf Club.

Mr. Charles: Is there any intention to have a similar facility down south?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: [*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. I would like to take Items 039, 040 and 041 together. That is the Renovation to CDA Police Post at Williams Bay, the Construction of Access Roads and Drainage at Agro Park, and the Refurbishment of Vending Booths at Phase 1 Boardwalk Williams Bay. I know that there was an Estimate for each of these items but no expenditure took place in 2020, and no expenditure is projected to take place in 2021. My question is: Whether these infrastructural works which would have been important for access for all citizens, golfing and not golfing, if these projects have been sacrificed in order to facilitate the upgrade of the Chaguaramas Golf Course?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, this would never happen. We do not make a habit of sacrificing these things for another. Madam Chairman, these projects have all been tendered. However, due to the COVID pandemic and the consequent restrictions, they have been affected, and the timely completion of the tender evaluation and contract award has been affected.

The CDA requested no allocation for any of these projects, but as I said, they have all been tendered and as soon as possible, they will be dealt with.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you, Madam Chair. Item 040: Construction of Access Roads and Drainage at Agro Park. It was budgeted for 895,000 in 2020; no money was spent and no money estimated for 2021. Is this project completed?

6.15 p.m.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: This was answered.

Madam Chairman: And Members it is getting kind of late, so I will ask that people put on themselves in high alert. And let us use our time productively. Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am. At Item 03: Improving the competitive advantage of the Food and Beverage SMEs; "oh sorry." We passed that? No, we have not. So, in 2019 we budgeted and spent \$291,290.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No, we going back, Ma'am?

Madam Chairman: We are in Chaguaramas Development.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We passed that.

Madam Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Tancoo: Okay, then allow me to ask one under that head Ma'am? 035: The development of five car parks at Chaguaramas. There was a \$1 million Estimate, but none was spent and none budgeted for 2021. Can Minister indicate why?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: This project is ongoing but no allocation was requested. The CDA has been trying to be very efficient with its collection of revenues. And so in this instance, for now, no allocation was requested.

Mr. Tancoo: A similar question for item 006: Motor Vehicles and Equipment Upgrade. A 1.2 million was estimated but only 100,000 was spent and none budgeted for 2021. Can you advise, what is the status of that project?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: No request was made by the CDA for funding.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Ma'am.

Madam Chairman: A: Administrative Services, C. Member Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: I am at Item 056: The establishment of a results-based management system. In 2020, \$300,000 was budgeted but none was expended. May I inquire as to why?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Because of the COVID restrictions this project entailed a consultation, a national consultation and because of the COVID restrictions we were not able to do it. May I just indicate Madam Chairman that this project is the—lead by the NTU and it is the lead agency for monitoring and evaluation. And as a consequence of this, the objective was to institutionalize results-based management in the public sector that is throughout the public sector.

The allocation will be used for the revision of the National Monitoring and Evaluation Policy of Trinidad and Tobago, that is, in order to support a culture of results-based management throughout the public sector, and to support evidence-based decision making and improve the performance management within the public sector, Madam, and as a consequence of that, we are expecting that we will develop a new national performance framework and conduct final evaluation of this national performance framework. The objective, Madam Chairman, is to ensure that Ministries operate in such a way as to make sure that the public sector investment is achieved and achieved optimally as we move into this post-COVID period.

Mr. Tancoo: Just as a follow up, can the Minister indicate a timeline for completion of this, well a proposed timeline given that we are still in the COVID?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: As I said, we are developing a new national performance framework and that would be between 2021 and 2025. Madam Chairman, you may recall that last year's budget we presented from the Ministry of Planning and Development a performance framework document, and we are working on improving this document as we work with Ministries to ensure, that they outline what are their performance targets, and that they are in fact achieving those targets. That will be thrust of the Ministry of Planning and Development.

Mr. Tancoo: Minister, is this being done in-house or with the assistance of an external consultant.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: It is both. Both.

Mr. Tancoo: Can the Minister indicate who the external consultant is?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: We do not have the person on board as yet, because as I said, we are setting up the framework for it.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you. I am now at Item 049: Integrated Public Management Information System. You had budgeted 1 million, you spent none and you budgeting \$500,000 in this period. Can you advise why none was spent last year? I am assuming the response will be the same for COVID? **Hon. Robinson-Regis:** Same thing, COVID.

Mr. Tancoo: But then why only 500,000 this year?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: This year all we will be doing is purchasing server as part of the digitalization programme, for the project planning and reconstruction division to meet the pending requirements, for the implementation of the integrated financial management information system which is, developed by the Ministry of Finance through the IDB.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: You are welcome.

Madam Chairman: Member for Couva North.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, Item 087: Establishment of the Economic Development Advisory Board. 83,000 was spent in 2019, no allocation. Is this project completed, Minister?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: The Economic Advisory Board is no longer in existence.

Mr. Ratiram: Item 088: Development of a Strategic Plan for the Ministry.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: That has been completed.

Madam Chairman: Member for Naparima.

Mr. Charles: Thank you. Item 096: Implementation of Vision 2030 Strategic Plan. 2024, 400,000 estimated, none spent. Is it that the Ministry wisely decided that they will terminate this project?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Madam Chairman, unfortunately—the development of *Vision 2030*, unfortunately for those who are opposed to us, continues apace. [*Desk thumping*] Even though when we laid that strategic document, they refused to appoint Members to the Joint Select Committee so that we could debate that document in such a way as to make the people of Trinidad and Tobago part and parcel of that vision document. Fortunately, the people of Trinidad and Tobago, in conjunction with understanding what that vision document is trying to achieve, and with the Road to Recovery document, and the Manifesto of the People's National Movement chose the People's National Movement to again, govern the country of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Chairman, what we are working on now is the National Development Strategy for the period 2021 to 2025. You will recall that when we laid that document, we had done so in 2016. And we continue to work assiduously and ensuring that we achieve what this document has suggested that will take us to developed country status and we are doing that in conjunction with the SDGs, Madam Chairman. So, sadly for you Naparima, the people of Trinidad and Tobago understand what a vision for a country is.

Mr. Charles: Thank you, thank you for the enlightenment, but you have not answered the question, 400,000 allocated and nothing spent. Could you know give us the reasons why nothing was spent?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Because, Madam Chairman, and during COVID it is very difficult to have consultancies, consultations sorry.

Mr. Charles: So you could have said that?

Hon. Robinson-Regis: Well, I could have said wanted to say.

Mr. Charles: Without the long run up.

Hon. Robinson-Regis: If you will allow me, I continue indicate that the people of Trinidad and Tobago have made the choice of a party with a vision.

Mr. Charles: And they chose—[*Inaudible*]

Madam Chairman: Excuse me, what did you say? They chose what?

Mr. Deyalsingh: Madam Chairman Standing Order 48(4) please.

Mr. Charles: I withdraw the statement.

Madam Chairman: Thank you so much. C: Foreign and Technical Assistance; F: Public Buildings; B: Administration; The Infrastructure Development Fund; Item 003: Economic Infrastructure; Item 004: Social Infrastructure; Item 005: Multi-Sectoral and Other Services.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 67 ordered to stand part of Schedule.

Thank you, Madam Minister, Madam PS, and all the other technocrats in the Ministry of Planning and Development, you are relieved. Thank you.

Head 38: Environmental Commission, \$5,855,930

Madam Chairman: We are now at page 234 of the recurrent books. I will now invite the Minister of Finance to make a brief opening statement not exceeding five minutes. Minister of Finance.

Hon. Imbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman. The Environmental Commission of Trinidad and Tobago is empowered by the Environmental Management Act of

1995. It is a superior court of record designed to settle environmental disputes. The Commission is required to provide quality service, promote fairness and integrity, and uphold civil freedoms. The purpose of the Commission is to hear and determine among other things, appeals from the decision or action of the Environmental Management Authority. Applications for deferment of decisions by the EMA to undertake certain emergency response activities and applications by the EMA for environmentally sensitive areas or environmentally sensitive species and administrative civil assessments.

The Commission comprises a full-time chairman, a full-time deputy chairman and three part-time members. The part-time members are appointed on the basis of their knowledge of, or experience in, environmental issues engineering, natural sciences or social sciences. The Commission is designed to ensure that the Commission is comprised of persons with qualifications, training and experience who are able to guarantee impartiality and make proper decisions in matters brought before the agency.

Madam Chairman: Are you finished?

Hon. Imbert: Long time.

Madam Chairman: Yes, thank you.

6.30 p.m.

Question proposed: That Head 38 stand part of the Schedule.

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, the sum of \$5,855,930 for Head 38: Environmental Commission, is comprised of moneys proposed of expenditure under the following Sub-Heads and Items to be found in the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure*. We shall now proceed to consider the *Draft Estimates of Recurrent Expenditure* and as advised before, we will start at page 234. Sub-Head

01: Personnel Expenditure; Item 001: General Administration. Sub-Head—Sorry, Member for Oropouche West.

Mr. Tancoo: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, you have an allocation of \$1.3 million for Salaries and Cost of Living Allowance, is this sufficient for the purpose of the Commission conducting research and so on, on issues raised with them?

Hon. Imbert: I hope you are not mixing that up with the Environmental Management Agency. This is a court.

Mr. Tancoo: My apologies, you are correct, Sir. Sorry.

Hon. Imbert: I am always correct.

Madam Chairman: Sub-Head 02: Goods and Services; Item 001: General Administration. Member for Chaguanas West.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Madam Chair. Hon. Minister, under line Item 16, this is on page 235, how many positions are we seeking with this proposed amount in 2021?

Hon. Imbert: They are seeking to get persons for IT and corporate communications.

Mr. Rambally: Hon. Minister, would you be in a position to tell us how many persons are being sought under those headings you called out— those categories?

Hon. Imbert: One by one, two; one each.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, hon. Minister.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, Item 08, I saw a reduction of 200,000. I do not know if the hon. Minister would not mind explaining, 08.

Madam Chairman: We are still under Goods and Services, and we are at

Rent/Lease-Office Accommodation and Storage.

Hon. Imbert: Question, sorry?

Ms. Benjamin: 08, I know it is for Rent/Lease. I do not know if any rental agreement would have changed because I saw a decrease of 200,000.

Hon. Imbert: What I am told is that the Environmental Commission is in the process of regularizing its accommodation and dealing with its spatial requirements, and that if there is need for them to get additional funding, they will come back to Cabinet and it will be dealt with in the mid-year review.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you. Hon. Minister, line Item 22, page 235. The proposed increase is 150,000, are we seeking additional Short-term Employment here?

Hon. Imbert: Before I ask the accounting officer, I would just make the point that the original Estimate for that Item for 2020 was 700,000, of which 350,000 has been estimated as having been actually spent in 2020. It is now an allocation of 500. That 500,000 is, in fact, less than the original allocation.

I am advised that they have some consultancy services that they need to procure for the drafting of new court rules in fiscal 2021, that is why there is an additional 150 over the 350 spent for 2020.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Madam, I am not sure if we are finished with page 234?

Madam Chairman: Actually, we are not just going on pages. Once you are within Sub-Head 02, which spans 234 and 235, we will take the question.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you very much. Page 234, 02; 08: Rent/Lease-Office Accommodation and Storage. Would the Minister be able to tell us which accommodation is this? Where is the address for this?

Hon. Imbert: The building is located at the corner of St. Vincent Street and New Street where it has been for quite a long time. That is where it is; corner of St. Vincent Street and New Street. It has been there for years.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Who is the landlord?

Hon. Imbert: It is the Telly Paul building where this organization is being housed for a very, very, long time.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Can you be kind enough to repeat?

Hon. Imbert: Pardon?

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: The name of the landlord. Would you repeat please?

Hon. Imbert: The Environmental Commission has been housed in the Telly Paul building at the corner of St. Vincent Street and New Street for years, including all the five years when you, hon. Member, were Prime Minister. I am just refreshing your memory.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: I thank you very much.

Hon. Imbert: You are welcome.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Page 235. I am looking at Item 23—still under 02—23, referring to fees paid. Would the Minister be kind enough to tell us what these moneys were applied for, what fees?

Hon. Imbert: The accounting officer is going to give some clarity. I am told it is for subscriptions to databases such as LexisNexis, Thomson Reuters, et cetera.

Mrs. Persad-Bissessar SC: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Ratiram: Thank you very much, Chair. I would like to draw the Minister's attention to Item 22: Short-term Employment, and we recognize from discussions with other agencies that in 2020 figures were budgeted—with the agencies like the local government authority that was here yesterday—the figures that were

budgeted were not actually released. What I am seeing here is 700,000 budgeted for 2020, but only 350,000 in the Revised Estimates. Is it that the funds were not released for this agency and that there is an outstanding liability?

Hon. Imbert: No.

Mr. Rambally: Line Item 20. I know you had advised that the increase contemplates drafting or moving along with some rules for the court, has that actually started?

Hon. Imbert: Are you referring to 20? There is no 20 here.

Mr. Rambally: Sorry, 22.

Madam Chairman: What you are asking is if the consultancy services have begun?

Mr. Rambally: Yes.

Madam Chairman: Because what I heard, the response was for consultancy services for drafting of rules.

Mr. Rambally: Yes, please.

Hon. Imbert: That is what I said. They are very close to procuring the consultant. They have sent out tenders, they have received submissions, and they are about to employ the consultant.

Mr. Rambally: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Ratiram: Madam Chair, the Minister, under Item 22, the increase of 150,000, I believe, indicated earlier that there was some outstanding bills to be cleared, that is what the 150,000 represented. I stand to be corrected.

Hon. Imbert: That is not correct. I never said that.

Mr. Ratiram: Okay.

Ms. Benjamin: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, I would like to draw the

Minister's attention to Item 28. I saw in the Estimates of 2020, 300,000 was requested but I saw an additional 200,000 was spent in the revised. If the Minister could explain why the need under this line Item?

Hon. Imbert: I think the question was asked and answered already.

Madam Chairman: I do not have it noted that a question was asked under Contracted Services which is line Item 28.

Hon. Imbert: My fault, Madam Chairman. What I am told is that there is a requirement to have virtual hearings because of the COVID-19 restrictions, and this will require an upgrade to the IT infrastructure and other audio-visual infrastructure in the court, and that is what that is for.

Madam Chairman: So, Sub-Head 03: Minor Equipment Purchases. Sub-Head 04: Current Transfers and Subsidies; Item 007: Households.

Question put and agreed to.

Head 38 ordered to stand part of the schedule.

Madam Chairman: Thank you Acting Accounting Officer, thank you other representatives of the Environmental Commission.

Hon. Members, the Standing Finance Committee is suspended to Thursday, the 22nd of October, 2020 at 1.30 p.m.

6.43 p.m.: *Standing Finance Committee suspended.*