

ELEVENTH

REPORT
FROM

THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
COMMITTEE

EXAMINATION
OF

The Audited Financial Statements of the Children's
Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CAAT) for the
Financial Years 2014-2018

Public Accounts Committee

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) established by the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago in accordance with Section 119(4) is mandated to consider and report to the House of Representatives on:

(a) appropriation accounts of moneys expended out of sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure of Trinidad and Tobago;

(b) such other accounts as may be referred to the Committee by the House of Representatives or as are authorized or required to be considered by the committee under any other enactment; and

(c) the report of the Auditor General on any such accounts.'

Current membership

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo	Chairman
Ms. Jearlean John	Vice- Chairman
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Mr. Adrian Leonce	Member
Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon	Member
Mr. Roger Monroe	Member
Dr. Amery Browne ¹	Member
Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye ²	Member

Committee Staff

The current staff members serving the Committee are:

Ms. Keiba Jacob	Secretary to the Committee
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary to the Committee
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	Assistant Secretary to the Committee
Mr. Justin Jarrette	Senior Research Specialist
Ms. Celeste Reece	Procedural Officer Intern
Ms. Teneka Carrington	Parliamentary Researcher Intern
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Publication

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<https://www.ttparliament.org/committees/show/public-accounts-committee-4/reports/>

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² Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye was appointed in lieu of Ms. Charrise Seepersad with effect from October 24, 2023.

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Members of the Public Accounts Committee
TWELFTH PARLIAMENT, REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



Mr. Davendranath Tancoo
Chairman



Ms. Jearlean John
Vice- Chairman



Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy
Member



Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon
Member



Mr. Adrian Leonce
Member



Mr. Roger Monroe
Member



Dr. Amery Browne
Member



Mrs. Hazel Thompson-Ahye
Member

Executive Summary

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is the Parliamentary Financial Oversight Committee tasked with the responsibility of examining the Report of the Auditor General and Audited Accounts of Statutory Authorities and Bodies. The Committee presents its Eleventh Report of the Twelfth Parliament, which details its *examination of the Audited Financial Statements Children's Authority of the Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Years 2014-2018 (CATT)* and produced this report to highlight its findings and recommendations.

This report sets out the issues, observations, endorsements and recommendations made by the Committee to improve the relevant areas of the CATT's operations.

During this inquiry, the following issues arose:

- Outstanding Audited Financial Statements;
- The Child Protection System: Policy Framework;
- Advocacy and Attitudes towards Children;
- Infrastructural Needs;
- Human Resource Challenges;
- Digitalisation and Technology; and
- Risk Management

Based on the Committee's examination, the following observations were made:

- *The Committee notes that the CATT was in the process of implementing a new organisational structure. It is expected that this would have a considerable impact on remedying some of the existing operational inefficiencies in the Child Protection System;*
- *The Committee notes that at the Second Meeting of the Standing Finance Committee in the 2023 Session of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago held on May 5, 2023, the CATT received the sum of \$62,500,000.00 in supplementary funding which is allocated in part toward 'accommodation requirements' and the 'procurement of additional goods and services and items of minor equipment as well as the creation of an Internal Security*

Department to provide oversight and security to all Children's residences.' The Committee looks forward to seeing how the CATT utilises these funds to remedy existing challenges;

- *The Committee also notes that the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity is conducting an 'Inquiry on the Implementation of the Report by the Independent Investigation Team Appointed by the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on Reports of Child Abuse at Children's Homes' and has highlighted the licensing of children's homes and safety of children in these homes as key areas of concern. The JSC has conducted several cite visits and is working assiduously to remedy licensing related issues, the Committee looks forward to seeing the measures that will be implemented to ensure that children's homes are compliant with the prescribed standard;*
- *This is key example of the urgent need to have full proclamation of the relevant children's legislation which form the basis of the CATT. Full proclamation of the relevant legislation will assist in bringing child protection in Trinidad and Tobago in line with international standards by establishing the illegality of conduct which is otherwise non-actionable;*
- *The Committee notes that the CATT will receive almost 97% of the total amount requested from the government for FY 2023. This will significantly increase the CATT's budget in comparison to previous years and facilitate the implementation of the necessary upgrades to the CATT's infrastructure;*
- *The Committee notes that at the Public Hearing held on February 15, 2023 the CATT indicated that it was in the process of hiring new staff, with new officers expected to be hired by September 2023 which will have a significant impact on the CATT human resource challenges; and*
- *The Committee notes that many of the CATT's initiatives related to risk management will be completed in tandem with the organisational re-design which has a completion timeline of November 2024 and looks forward to the implementation a structured risk management policy.*

Based on the Committee's examination the following recommendations were proposed:

- *The CATT should provide Parliament with the following by January 29, 2024:*
 - a) *an update on the implementation of the ERP solution;*

- b) *the name of the consultant hired to implement the system;*
 - c) *the cost of retaining the consultant; and*
 - d) *the amount spent on procuring the ERP*
- *The AGD should consider delegating its audit function to an external Auditor pursuant to AGD's general practice of outsourcing audits and provide Parliament with a feasibility report on such by January 29, 2024. This should be done to ensure the timely release of the CATT's Audited Financial Statements pursuant to Section 11(2) of the Exchequer and Audit Act;*
- *The CATT's should use its Internal Audit Unit to conduct an evaluation of the CATT's operational systems and implement an organisation-wide compliance management policy which should include a regulatory framework which distinguishes the functions and responsibilities of the various departments and provide Parliament with a feasibility report by January 29, 2024;*
- *The CATT should provide Parliament with a status report on the implementation of the new organisational structure and the measures the CATT used to assess and monitor its cost effectiveness by January 29, 2024;*
- *The CATT should provide Parliament with the following by January 29, 2024:*
 - a) *a status update on the implementation of its advocacy initiatives for the period FY 2020-2022;*
 - b) *a cost breakdown of the implementation of these initiatives;*
 - c) *a status report outlining the works carried out on the unlicensed children's homes to bring them into conformity with the licensing requirements;*
 - d) *The completion date for such works; and*
 - e) *the projected cost of completing such works.*
 - f) *The CATT should provide Parliament with a status report on the implementation of the infrastructural upgrades, namely the new head office, the satellite office and the new Places of Safety in Tobago by January 29, 2024.*
- *The CATT should engage in Strategic Workforce Planning which is a management process that will assess the organisation's current staff resources and skills, predict future needs, and plan how to meet these needs cost-effectively and submit a brief report of the findings to Parliament by January 29, 2024;*
- *The CATT should provide Parliament with the following by January 29, 2024:*

- a) *the number of new employees hired given the projected number outlined at the Public Hearing was 451 persons;*
- b) *the portfolios held by the new employees; and*
- c) *a breakdown of the respective remuneration for each of these new employees;*
- *The CATT should begin implementing a ‘cost per hire’ scheme to reduce salary-based expenditure by relying on the On the Job Trainee Program (OJT) to fill existing vacancies such as entry to mid- level positions within the CATT and provide Parliament with a status report by January 29, 2024;*
- *The CATT should provide Parliament with a report detailing the extent to which the SWOT recommendations relating to technology were incorporated into its operating system considering the implementation of the new organisational structure by January 29, 2024;*
- *The CATT should provide Parliament with a status update on the new client management system including the annual cost of implementation and maintenance and the assessment markers utilized by the CATT to ensure this new system is able to adequately deal with the CATT’s growing caseload. This should be submitted by January 29, 2024; and*
- *The CATT should provide Parliament with the following by January 29, 2024:*
 - a) *A brief explanation of how the risk registers will improve the CATT’s operational efficiency;*
 - b) *The resources necessary to implement and maintain the Risk Registers; and*
 - c) *The department that will be responsible for monitoring and assessing the risk registers.*

Introduction

Establishment

The PAC of the Twelfth Republican Parliament was established by resolutions of the House of Representatives and the Senate at the sittings held on Monday November 9, 2020 and Tuesday November 17, 2020 respectively.

Committee Mandate

The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago mandates that the Committee shall consider and report to the House on appropriation accounts of monies expended out of sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure of Trinidad and Tobago and the report of the Auditor General on any such accounts.

In addition to the Committee's powers entrenched in the Constitution, Standing Orders 111 of the House of Representatives and 101 of the Senate also empower the Committee, inter alia, to:

- a) Send for persons, papers and records;
- b) Sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;
- c) Meet in various locations;
- d) Report from time to time; and
- e) Communicate with any other Committee on matters of common interest.

Ministerial Response

The Standing Orders³ provide for the Minister responsible for the Ministry or Body under review to submit within sixty (60) days a paper to the House responding to any recommendations or comments contained in the Report which are addressed to it.

Election of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman

In accordance with section 119(2) of the Constitution, the Chairman must be a member of the Opposition in the House. At the first meeting held on Wednesday November 18, 2020 Mr. Davendranath Tancoo was elected Chairman of the Committee and Ms. Jearlean John was elected Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

³ Standing Order 110 (6) in the House of Representatives and 100(6) of the Senate

Establishment of Quorum

The Committee is required by the Standing Orders to have a quorum so that any decisions made by the Members during the meetings can be considered valid. A quorum of three (3) Members, inclusive of the Chair or Vice-Chairman, with representatives from each House was agreed to by the Committee at its First Meeting.

Determination of the Committee's Work Programme

The Committee agreed to a work programme for the Third Session of the Twelfth Parliament as follows:

1. Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2022
2. An examination of the concerns raised in the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for FY 2021 with specific reference to the administering of government grants
3. The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATI)
4. The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (Issues raised in the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago) [Follow-Up]
5. The Public Transport Service Commission (PTSC)
6. The Agricultural Development Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (ADB)
7. The Police Complaints Authority (PAC)
8. The Regulated Industries Commission (RIC)
9. The Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI)
10. The Water and Sewage Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (WASA)
11. The Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (TTEC)

The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines steps taken by the PAC in developing the findings and recommendations of its examination of the Audited Financial Statement of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT) for the Financial Years 2014-2018.

The Inquiry Process included the following steps:

- I. Identification of issues in the Audited Financial Statements of the CATT for the financial years 2014 to 2018;
- II. Drafted an Inquiry Proposal on the selected issues. The Inquiry Proposal outlines:
 - Background of the entity;
 - Objectives of the inquiry; and
 - Proposed Questions.
- III. Questions for written response based on the issues identified in the Audited Financial Statements were sent to the CATT and to the Office of the Prime Minister - Gender and Child Affairs (OPM-GCA) on December 21, 2022. The responses were received from the OPM-GCA and the CATT on January 9 and January 13, 2023 respectively;
- IV. Preparation of an Issues Paper which identified and summarised matters of concern in the responses provided by the CATT and the OPM-GCA;
- V. Based on the responses received and the issues identified, the Committee agreed to have a public hearing;
- VI. The public hearing was held on Wednesday February 15, 2023. Representatives of the CATT and the OPM - GCA (see Appendix I) were invited to discuss the issues of concern and to provide evidence;

- VII. Questions for additional information based on the issues discussed at the public hearing and were sent to the CATT on February 28, 2023. The responses were received on March 31, 2023.
- VIII. Reported on the Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry;
- IX. The Report will be transmitted to the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister with responsibility for Child and Gender Affairs, as the Minister with oversight of the CATT, for written response within sixty (60) days in accordance with Standing Order 110(6)⁴ of the House of Representatives and 100(6) of the Senate;
- X. Subsequently, follow-up will be carried out to monitor progress in the implementation of the Committee's recommendations.

⁴ Available: <https://www.ttparliament.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/2245.pdf>

Children’s Authority of Trinidad And Tobago (CATT) Profile⁵

Background: Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

The Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (hereinafter referred to as the CATT) is a specialised agency with the responsibility for the care, protection and rehabilitation of children, especially those who are at risk or have been victims of abuse or neglect, in addition to a number of statutory duties contained in the various pieces of applicable legislation. The CATT operates on the basis of several domestic legislation

The principles which underpin the execution of the Authority’s functions – the promotion of and respect for children’s rights – are enshrined within the United Nations’ Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN Declaration and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Consistent with these principles, a Package of Children’s Legislation initiated in 2000 formed the basis for the creation of the Authority. The pieces of legislation complement each other and are intended to provide for a robust system to bring Trinidad and Tobago in conformity with the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

Vision Statement⁶

The Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago will champion the well-being of children, protect the vulnerable and restore childhood.

Mission Statement ⁷

The Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago is a child centred, family focused organisation, advocating for the rights of the child and working collaboratively in providing early intervention for children in need of care and protection, ensuring that they are nurtured, protected, supported, ensured, and empowered.

Functions⁸

⁵ Adapted from the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago website, Background: <https://ttchildren.org/about-us/who-we-are/> accessed March 4, 2023.

⁶ Ibid, About Us: <https://ttchildren.org/about-us/who-we-are/> accessed March 4, 2023.

⁷ Ibid

⁸ What we Do, <https://ttchildren.org/about-us/what-we-do/> : accessed May 17, 2023.

The mandate of the Children’s Authority is derived directly from the legislation. As such, the organisation will be responsible for, *inter alia*:

- Receiving and investigating reports of mistreatment of children
- Making applications to the Court for the protection and placement of children received into the care of the Authority
- Establishing and maintaining places of safety, assessment and support centres, and reception centres
- Establishing and operating a foster care system
- Assuming conduct of the adoption process
- Establishing standards for community residences, foster care and nurseries
- Monitoring children’s community residences, foster care providers, and nurseries
- Issuing and revoking licences for community residences and nurseries
- Supporting the youth justice system
- Providing assistance to the Counter-Trafficking Unit in respect of child victims
- Maintaining complete records

Legislative Underpinning⁹

The CATT has wide ranging powers as it relates to protecting children from abuse and neglect and ensuring their well-being and development. However, these functions are significantly affected by the lack of proper legislation to bring these powers. The following details the status of the relevant legislation for the CATT to properly execute its function.

TITLE	PURPOSE	STATUS
Children’s Authority Act Chapter 46:10	Will establish a Children’s Authority to Act as the guardian of the children in Trinidad and Tobago	Partially proclaimed with only certain Sections currently being in force”

⁹ Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago Legislation > accessed on May 18, 2023
<https://ttchildren.org/legislation/>

Children's Community Residences, Foster Care and Nurseries Act 65 of 2000	Will make provision for the monitoring, licensing and regulation of Community Residences, Foster Care and nurseries in Trinidad and Tobago	No yet proclaimed includes areas of responsibility for the Authority
International Child Abduction Act Chapter 12:08	Provides for the application in Trinidad and Tobago of the Hague Convention on Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction	In force. Under this Act the Civil Child Abduction Authority is the central Authority for Trinidad and Tobago and is located within the Ministry of the Attorney General
Adoption of Children Act 67 of 2000 Adoption of Children(Amendment) Bill 2007	Will replace current legislation regulating the adoption of children. The 2007 Bill proposes further amendment to the 2000 Act some of which should be pursued	Not yet proclaimed, original legislation remains in force. To be brought to Parliament
Status of Children(Amendment) Bill, 2009	Would facilitate the replacement of blood tests by the introduction of DNA analysis to ascertain parentage and possibly for other civil law purposes	To be re-laid by Parliament
Family Court Bill, 2009	Would vest jurisdiction for all family matter and juvenile matters in a Division of the High Court to be called the Family Court	Awaiting amendment before reintroduction
Children Act No.12 of 2012	Will revise criminal offences against children and procedures for child offenders	To be laid by Parliament

Trafficking in Persons Act N0 14 of 2011	An Act to give effect to the United Nations Protocol to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons, especially women and children- The United Nations Convention against transnational organised crime	In Force: requires the CATT to liaise with the Counter Trafficking Unit to provide services to victims who are children
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Organisational Values¹⁰

The values of the CATT are as follows: child-centred, family focused, customer friendly, trustworthy, transparent, respectful, innovative, and collaborative. These serve as a compass for all actions and describe the behaviour of expected of persons within the organisation.

Minister: The Honourable Ayanna Webster-Roy, MP¹¹

Permanent Secretary: Vijay Gangapersad (Ag)

¹⁰ibid

¹¹ Trinidad and Tobago Gazette No. 158 of 2020 dated September 9, 2020: [Gazette No. 158, Vol. 59, Wednesday 9th September, 2020 \(news.gov.tt\)](#)

Issues and Recommendations

During the examination of Audited Financial Statements of the CATT for the financial years 2014-2018, the following issues were identified, observations and endorsements made and recommendations proposed:

1. Outstanding Audited Financial Statements

There were significant delays¹² in the submission of the Audited Financial Statements to Parliament. These delays were attributable to the CATT's late submission of its draft financial statements to the Auditor General's Department (AGD) and the limited resources in the AGD. Generally, the AGD conducts a financial audit to provide assurance that financial statements are presented accurately and in conformity with generally acceptable principles of accounting (GAAP). Moreover, financial audit is a tool to promote accountability among the CATT's management and staff. The CATT's financial statements reflect the organisation's financial position, performance, and cash flows which are intrinsic elements to the efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation.

Section 49 of the Children's Authority Act Chapter 46:10¹³ requires that the CATT submit its *'financial statements and other such statements relating to the operations and functions of the CATT within three months of the end of each financial year.'* In keeping with this, the CATT has stated that it adheres to detailed financial management processes. These processes include the month-end close process, to ensure timely production of financial reports. The CATT has further outlined that this process ensures that relevant transactions were recorded by a cut-off date into the financial information system, Quickbooks, which is then systematically closed and substantially IFRS/GAAP compliant financial statements are generated by the sixth working day of the subsequent month. The relevant sub-ledgers (payables, payroll and receivables) were sequentially closed and reconciled, followed by the General Ledger review and closure, each month. Additionally, there is a quarterly review of the CATT's contingent liability provisions, which are assessed and adjusted where found to be necessary.

Another financial management process utilised by the CATT, is the monthly review of the management of funds by the Finance Tender and Procurement Committee. To further bolster its financial management system, the CATT also planned to implement an 'Enterprise Resource Planning

¹² Written Submission from the CATT dated January 13, 2023, page 9

¹³ *ibid*

(ERP) system or a similar solution'.¹⁴ The purpose of the ERP or like solution would be to integrate the systems which are currently in use such as spreadsheets and other individual financial systems. This will improve efficiency by automating manual and routine functions, it would also progressively cut costs by merging individual systems together. Despite these processes the CATT was still late in submitting its draft financial statements for the FY 2020 and 2021 to the AGD¹⁵.

The AGD also has a reciprocal duty pursuant to Section 31(3) of the Exchequer and Audit Act which mandates that the Auditor General 'report on his examination and audit of the accounts' and 'transmit the report to the appropriate Minister for presentation to Parliament.' However, for the period FY 2019 to 2021 the AGD did not sign off on the CATT's financial statements. Notably, the CATT's management indicated that it identified the funds to pay for an external Audit, for the period FY 2020 to 2022 with the Auditor General's permission¹⁶ pursuant to Section 48(2) of the Children's Authority Act.

Recommendations:

- ***The CATT should provide Parliament with the following by January 29, 2024:***
 - e) an update on the implementation of the ERP solution;***
 - f) the name of the consultant hired to implement the system;***
 - g) the cost of retaining the consultant; and***
 - h) the amount spent on procuring the ERP***
- ***The AGD should consider delegating its audit function to an external Auditor pursuant to AGD's general practice of outsourcing audits and provide Parliament with a feasibility report on such by January 29, 2024. This should be done to ensure the timely release of the CATT's Audited Financial Statements pursuant to Section 11(2) of the Exchequer and Audit Act.***¹⁷

2. The Child Protection System: Policy Framework

The roles and functions of the various departments of the CATT were not clearly outlined. The CATT was primarily responsible for the efficient operation of the national child protection system. The United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) defines 'child protection system' as the set of laws, policies, regulations and services needed across all social sectors- especially

¹⁴ CATT's Request for Additional Information Responses page 1-2

¹⁵ CATT's Written Responses page 9

¹⁶ *ibid*

social welfare, education, health, security and justice- to support the prevention and response to protection related risks.¹⁸ The national child protection system is comprised of Ministries, law enforcement, National Family Services, Student Support Services Division, medical and psychiatric social workers, district medical officers, non-governmental organizations, members of civil society, and religious organisations, communities and other important stakeholders. These stakeholders each have their own functions, responsibilities and operational identity and worked together to ensure the best interest of children in the execution of their duties.¹⁹

In furtherance of its mandate, the CATT has its own internal child protection policies and procedures, which included the processes for intake, case management, investigation and follow-up. Each department of the CATT was entrusted with responsibility for a specific process, which was further broken down with respective roles being assigned to specific employees. It is integral to the operational efficiency of any organization that employees understand the scope of their duties for effective execution of assigned task. Due to the nature of the CATT's operations, some processes tended to be interlinked.

The delineation of departmental and individual employee responsibilities ensures the timely intervention for the care and protection of children. 'Intervention', as it relates to child protection, refers to the Authority's Care, Legal, and Regulatory Departments' direct and indirect engagement in the provision of services that support the care and protection of children. However, the CATT indicated that *'service pathways are not well defined'* and that the organisation had trouble identifying which part of the system—from intake through investigation, evaluation, case management, and follow up—was most responsible for ensuring that children in difficult situations were duly taken care of. Due to the uncertainties in pinpointing the specific roles across departments, there were some delays in intervention.

Correspondingly, although child protection services were accessible, they were inconsistent and did not cover all issues. The Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) or protocols that outline child protection roles, referral processes, and procedures to be followed either did not exist or were specific to a particular category of children and not fully compliant with the applicable national legislation and

¹⁸ UNICEF, Child Protection Systems Strengthening. Accessed June 22, 2023: <https://www.unicef.org/media/110871/file/1.%20The%20UNICEF%20Child%20Protection%20Systems%20Strengthening%20Approach.pdf>

¹⁹ CATT Strategic Plan, 2018-2020, page 50.

international standards. These SOPs were created by individual agencies for their own personnel. There were no comprehensive, independent oversight or accountability systems for child protection. Moreover, the CATT's Analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)²⁰, highlighted that a primary challenge faced by the CATT in pinpointing departmental functions was that there were 'very few approved policies and procedures' which governed the CATT's operations. The UNICEF's Child Protection Report²¹ recommended that child protection organisations frequently map and review internal systems to ensure alignment with international standards. The lack of clear policy guidelines to inform the scope of departmental work could lead to financial waste with different departments duplicating the same processes.²²

Observation:

- ***The Committee notes that the CATT was in the process of implementing a new organisational structure. It is expected that this would have a considerable impact on remedying some of the existing operational inefficiencies in the Child Protection System.***

Recommendations:

- ***The CATT's should use its Internal Audit Unit to conduct an evaluation of the CATT's operational systems and implement an organisation-wide compliance management policy²³ which should include a regulatory framework which distinguishes the functions and responsibilities of the various departments and provide Parliament with a feasibility report by January 29, 2024; and***
- ***The CATT should provide Parliament with a status report on the implementation of the new organisational structure and the measures the CATT used to assess and monitor its cost effectiveness by January 29, 2024.***

3. Advocacy and Attitudes towards Children

There was an increased need for advocacy initiatives to address public perceptions and misconceptions about child abuse.²⁴ Violence against children is a pervasive human rights violation,

²⁰ Appendix 1, CATT Strategic Plan 2018- 2020, Strength and Weaknesses Analysis, page 87

²¹ [3. High-priority CPSS Interventions.pdf \(bettercarenetwork.org\)](https://www.bettercarenetwork.org/3-high-priority-cpss-interventions.pdf)

²² [Reduced funding for to Children's Authority | News Extra | trinidadexpress.com](https://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/2023/01/13/reduced-funding-for-childrens-authority/)

²⁴ Written Submission from the CATT dated January 13, 2023, page 8

and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes a legal and ethical imperative to bring it to an end.²⁵ UNICEF further distinguishes that violence against children may include physical, emotional and sexual abuse. The CATT's 2016 to 2018 Strategic Plan stated that public awareness and advocacy initiatives were the key to ensuring that citizens have a common understanding of the rights of the child, as well as the mandate and scope of the CATT.²⁶

The core objectives of the CATT's advocacy initiatives were to improve awareness of the rights of the child, establish a national child protection policy, and to advocate for the alignment of national legislation with international standards. These initiatives were to be implemented over a three-year period beginning in FY 2020. In furtherance of this, the CATT utilised social media platforms to strengthen public awareness of child protection issues and improve the organisation's visibility in accordance with the SWOT recommendations²⁷. The CATT's social media following increased by 500% with an overall increase in followers, likes and friend requests.²⁸

During the period FY 2018 to 2020, the CATT conducted sensitisation programs targeted at the public and key stakeholders. The CATT utilised print and electronic media to conduct sensitisation on the rights of the child to the public and carried out sensitization training sessions for key stakeholders such as the Child Protection Unit, Medical Social Workers, the Judiciary and Student Support Services. The CATT's key performances indicators (KPIs)²⁹ highlighted a 10% increase in sensitisation sessions per FY among stakeholders and a 5% increase per FY in sensitisation done through print and electronic media.

The CATT's 2018 to 2020 Strategic Plan highlighted that the CATT advocated for Children's Homes to meet licensing requirements. The licensing requirement for children's homes is outlined in the Children's Community Residence, Foster Care and Nurseries Act, 2000 which defines the term 'children home' as:

"a residence for the care and rehabilitation of children and includes orphanages as defined in the Children Act".

There are forty –two (42) children's homes in Trinidad and Tobago. As at FY 2018, thirty-one (31) remained unlicensed. This was reportedly due to budgetary constraints which prevented the

²⁵ UNICEF, Child Protection Advocacy Briefing - Violence Against Children. Accessed June 22,2023 <https://www.unicef.org/media/96686/file/VAC-Advocacy-Brief-2021.pdf>

²⁶ CATT Strategic Plan 2018 -2020, page 56

²⁷ Ibid, Appendix I

²⁸ Ibid, page 27

²⁹ CATT Strategic Plan 2018-2020, Part 3: Implementation Plan page 57

implementation of the recommendations given by the Fire Services of Trinidad and Tobago and the Ministry of Health (MOH), both of which comprised aspects of the licensing requirements. This figure was reduced to ten (10) as at June 2023.

Further, the Children's Community Residences, Foster Care and Nurseries Act, remained ineffective as the mandatory licensing provisions of Sections 3 (1) and (2), and 17 were not proclaimed. This therefore meant that the CATT had no legal basis to shut down unlicensed children's homes that continued to put children at risk due to noncompliance with health and safety requirements. Additionally, advocacy was also used as a tool to assist the CATT in generating private funding to the increase the CATT's resource pool through corporate funding.

Observations:

- *The Committee notes that at the Second Meeting of the Standing Finance Committee in the 2023 Session of the House of Representatives of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago held on May 5, 2023, the CATT received the sum of \$62,500,000.00 in supplementary funding which is allocated in part toward 'accommodation requirements' and the 'procurement of additional goods and services and items of minor equipment as well as the creation of an Internal Security Department to provide oversight and security to all Children's residences.' The Committee looks forward to seeing how the CATT utilises these funds to remedy existing challenges;*
- *The Committee also notes that the Joint Select Committee on Human Rights, Equality and Diversity is conducting an 'Inquiry on the Implementation of the Report by the Independent Investigation Team Appointed by the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago on Reports of Child Abuse at Children's Homes' and has highlighted the licensing of children's homes and safety of children in these homes as key areas of concern. The JSC has conducted several site visits and is working assiduously to remedy licensing related issues, the Committee looks forward to seeing the measures that will be implemented to ensure that children's homes are compliant with the prescribed standard; and*

- *This is key example of the urgent need to have full proclamation of the relevant children’s legislation which form the basis of the CATT³⁰. Full proclamation of the relevant legislation will assist in bringing child protection in Trinidad and Tobago in line with international standards by establishing the illegality of conduct which is otherwise non-actionable.*

Recommendation:

- *The CATT should provide Parliament with the following by January 29, 2024:*
 - a) a status update on the implementation of its advocacy initiatives for the period FY 2020-2022;*
 - b) a cost breakdown of the implementation of these initiatives;*
 - c) a status report outlining the works carried out on the unlicensed children’s homes to bring them into conformity with the licensing requirements;*
 - d) The completion date for such works; and*
 - e) the projected cost of completing such works.*

4. Infrastructural Needs

The CATT’s current infrastructural framework cannot adequately accommodate the growing caseload. There are few designated ‘Places of Safety’, insufficient child placement alternatives, few Transition Homes, a lack of one-stop places for assessments, and inadequately constructed systems for foster care and adoption. The Process Audit into the Operations of the Human Resources Department³¹ further stated that the issues arising in this regard were due to budgetary constraints and funding deficiencies. The evidence illustrates that for the first two (2) years of operations they received 40% of their requested budget, the caseload was greater than initial projections and the staff was 50% below the number needed to respond to the anticipated caseload.

The Strategic Plan 2018 to 2020 highlighted³² several infrastructural objectives such as the establishment of a new head office location that would sufficiently accommodate the organisation's staff demands by 2021. Another goal was the implementation of satellite offices for CATT’s assessment function as well as other needs of the general public. This would be done to keep core

³⁰ Children’s Authority website, What We Do. Accessed June 22, 2023: <https://ttchildren.org/about-us/what-we-do/>

³¹ Written Submission from the CATT dated January 13, 2023, Appendices 5.7 & 8.1

³² Appendix 3A, CATT Strategic Plan 2018-2020, page 45

employees together under one roof and ‘away from the public’³³ to eliminate security threats. Another key objective was establishment of New Places of Safety in Tobago and relocating Places of Safety in Trinidad to new locations, to mitigate against security risks. This is crucial to the CATT’s ability to effectively protect children as Places of Safety in Trinidad were compromised on several occasions placing both children and staff in danger.

Observation:

- *The Committee notes that the CATT will receive almost 97% of the total amount requested from the government for FY 2023. This will significantly increase the CATT’s budget in comparison to previous years and facilitate the implementation of the necessary upgrades to the CATT’s infrastructure.*

Recommendation:

- *The CATT should provide Parliament with a status report on the implementation of the infrastructural upgrades, namely the new head office, the satellite office and the new Places of Safety in Tobago by January 29, 2024.*

5. Human Resource Challenges

The CATT experienced a number of challenges such as understaffing, a high employee turnover and the staff suffered from burnout. The Odyssey Report³⁴ highlighted that the CATT’s mandate was derived from the ‘powers and functions’ outlined in Children’s Authority Act Chapter 46:10³⁵. This mandate identified and detailed the scope of the CATT’s ‘powers and functions’, which was reflected in the organisational structure, such as the various departments and employee responsibilities. However, the ‘powers and functions’ as delineated pursuant to the Act³⁶ are very broad and lead to a very wide scope of work for the CATT. Therein CATT’s human resource regime is not large enough to properly treat with the scope of work. Further, the CATT does not have the infrastructural framework nor efficient internal systems to accommodate the expansion of its workforce.

³³ *ibid*

³⁴ Appendix 8.1, The Odyssey Report, page 6

³⁵ The Children’s Authority Act 2000, s 5(1). Accessed June 22, 2023:
https://rgd.legalaffairs.gov.tt/laws2/alphabetical_list/lawspdfs/46.10.pdf

³⁶ *ibid*

The Strategic Plan for the period 2016 to 2018 indicated that the initial projections for the CATT's caseload was estimated at 2,400 cases. However, as at 2018, the CATT's caseload was over 11,000 cases and growing. While the caseload exceeded initial projections, the CATT did not hire additional staff to meet the growing demand for the organisation's services- this was largely due to budgetary constraints. To further compound the issue, the CATT did not have the infrastructural framework to accommodate an increase in staff. To combat the vast and growing caseload the CATT's management relied on creative and innovative solutions. These solutions involved CATT staff being '*placed under extensive pressure to meet excessive job demands*' by taking on larger caseloads.³⁷ This led to staff burnout, a high employee turnover rate and less than optimal methods of work and handling of cases by existing employees.

To improve staff morale and remedy these issues, the CATT has proposed several measures. Firstly, the CATT will carry out infrastructural expansion to accommodate a greater number of employees. The increase in staff will reduce the volume of cases taken on by each employee. Secondly, the CATT will rely on internal communication, which will enhance internal systems and improve how the organisation communicates with employees and how employees communicate with each other. The aim is to have a highly engaged and open work environment with both formal and informal lines of communication through email, social media and the intranet together. Effectively this will assist management in identifying staff burnout triggers and pinpoint the causes of the CATT's high employee turnover. These strategies are integral to the CATT's operation efficiency as burnout can lead to an increase in errors and mistakes which can result in additional cost to correct. Additionally, a high employee turnover means the CATT will have to attribute a significant portion of its budget to recruitment, training and on-boarding which can be expensive.

Observation:

- ***The Committee notes that at the Public Hearing held on February 15, 2023 the CATT indicated that it was in the process of hiring new staff, with new officers expected to be hired by September 2023, which will have a significant impact on the CATT human resource challenges.***

Recommendations:

³⁷ Appendix 5.7, Process Audited in the Operations of the Human Resources Department, page 76

- *The CATT should engage in Strategic Workforce Planning which is a management process that will assess the organisation’s current staff resources and skills, predict future needs, and plan how to meet these needs cost-effectively and submit a brief report of the findings to Parliament by January 29, 2024;*
- *The CATT should provide Parliament with the following by January 29, 2024:*
 - d) the number of new employees hired given the projected number outlined at the Public Hearing was 451 persons;*
 - e) the portfolios held by the new employees; and*
 - f) a breakdown of the respective remuneration for each of these new employees; and*
- *The CATT should begin implementing a ‘cost per hire’³⁸ scheme to reduce salary-based expenditure by relying on the On the Job Trainee Program (OJT)³⁹ to fill existing vacancies such as entry to mid- level positions within the CATT and provide Parliament with a status report by January 29, 2024.*

6. Digitalisation and Technological Improvements

The CATT’s ICT systems faced increasing burdens given the Authority’s growing caseload. The ICT systems in place as at FY 2018 were aligned to meet the needs of the initial projection on the CATT’s caseload, which was exceeded within months of the commencement of the CATT’s operations. As such, the ICT system is currently unable to adequately deal with the needs of the CATT leading to several operational challenges affecting the overall effectiveness of the organization. The CATT’s large caseload, combined with an inadequate ICT framework, has caused several challenges for the organisation, including systems malfunctions, bottlenecks and less than optimal process roll out. In 2018 the CATT outlined a 3-year plan, in the 2016-2018 Strategic Plan with the necessary improvements to the ICT system to optimise workflows, productivity and improve communication with the organisation.

³⁸ ‘Cost per hire’ is defined as a recruitment metric which measures the costs associated with hiring new employees. These expenses include expenses such as sourcing and recruitment advertising costs, on- boarding and other related costs. Accessed June 22 2023: <https://www.aihr.com/blog/cost-per-hire/>

³⁹ Ministry of Labour, New Training Provider Registration. Accessed June 22, 2023: <https://labour.gov.tt/employment/on-the-job-training-programme/new-training-provider-registration>

The CATT pinpointed that a critical activity under this ICT objective was the establishment of a new case management system for the organisation. The case management system previously in use was developed to meet the initial caseload, which projected significantly lower case numbers that was actually received. Correspondingly, considering the actual number of reports exceeding initial estimates, the previous case management system had to operate in overdrive. Manual systems therefore became the main means of case management. The CATT's objective was therefore to establish a well-working case management system that would link the various aspects of case management and inter-unit functioning across the organisation. The CATT also aimed to focus on establishing a records management system which would allow for the automation of workflows and ensure streamlined record keeping across the organisation.

The CATT's SWOT Analysis⁴⁰ identified technology as a strength to the organization's position and recommended the use of several technological innovations to improve operations. These include, intranet (for training & development), live website, use of technology to increase accessibility internally and externally (social media presence & 24-hour hotline), tablets/devices for field staff to input case information, automate tools for conducting assessments etc. and Child Protection Information Management System (CPIMS) risk assessment matrix.

Recommendations:

- ***The CATT should provide Parliament with a report detailing the extent to which the SWOT recommendations relating to technology were incorporated into its operating system considering the implementation of the new organisational structure by January 29, 2024; and***
- ***The CATT should provide Parliament with a status update on the new client management system including the annual cost of implementation and maintenance and the assessment markers utilized by the CATT to ensure this new system is able to adequately deal with the CATT's growing caseload by January 29, 2024.***

⁴⁰ CATT Strategic Plan Appendix 1, Strategic Plan 2016-2018, page 85

7. Lack of Risk Management Policy

The CATT had no Risk Management Policy. The CATT stated that risk assessment considerations were integrated into the rules and procedures for each aspect of its operations, but it did not have a settled risk management policy. In the absence of a Risk Management Policy, the CATT highlighted the use of risk-based Audit Plans to monitor the entity's internal controls, based on risk assessments conducted by the Internal Audit function. The Authority also highlighted several risk monitoring procedures that it planned to implement or that were recently implemented. These included risk registers, which were initiated in January 2023.⁴¹ The other risk strategies to be gradually implemented include:

- The establishment of a risk management and oversight unit in the new organization structure;
- The continued work of Internal Audit in assessing the control environment and the Internal controls in place to mitigate both business and operational risk exposures; and
- Policy prescriptions to govern the CATT's risk management activities.

Observation:

- *The Committee notes that many of the CATT's initiatives related to risk management will be completed in tandem with the organisational re-design which has a completion timeline of November 2024 and looks forward to the implementation a structured risk management policy.*

Recommendation:

- *The CATT should provide Parliament with the following by January 29, 2024:*
 - d) *A brief explanation of how the risk registers will improve the CATT's operational efficiency;*
 - e) *The resources necessary to implement and maintain the Risk Registers; and*
 - f) *The department that will be responsible for monitoring and assessing the risk registers.*

⁴¹ CATT Response to the Public Accounts Committee's Request for Additional Information, Question No 2, Page 3

Concluding Remarks

While the CATT has only been operational since 2014, the organization has very heavy caseload, which continues to grow. Additionally, the relevant legislation which is necessary for the CATT to properly execute its mandate is partially proclaimed or not yet in force. This presents as a challenge to the CATT's core functions and operations as it often results in redundancy and inadequacy in the organization's core processes such as client management and case processing. Moreover, while the Committee commends the CATT for creating innovative measures to treat with the challenges faced by its human resource regimen, this has resulted in a lack of uniformity in the CATT's central procedures. It is intrinsic that the CATT develop and implement proper case management and risk management systems. Further, it is of integral importance that the CATT employ more staff to help address the recurring issue of staff burnout.

In spite of this, the Committee was encouraged by the initiative shown by the staff, management and Board of the CATT in getting the organisation off to a promising start. The Committee also notes that the CATT has taken many critical steps to improve the operational efficiency of the organisation such as the implementation of the new organisation structure and the planned expansion of its human resources. It is noted that the CATT continues to face challenges, and that some systems such as risk assessment and ICT systems management are not in line with international standards, it is therefore of urgent importance that the necessary upgrades be made.

The CATT's core values of integrity, transparency, accountability and value for money mirror the concerns that the PAC is mandated to examine. As the CATT continues to grow into its mandate, it is crucial that these core values remain the guide for all initiatives and undertakings.

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

Sgd.
Mr. Davendranath Tancoo
Chairman

Sgd.
Ms. Jearlean John
Vice – Chairman

Sgd.
Dr. Amery Browne
Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Adrian Leonce
Member

Sgd.
Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon
Member

Sgd.
Mr. Roger Monroe
Member

Appendix 1 - Attendees

At the public hearing held on February 15, 2023, the witnesses attending on behalf of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, the Office of the Prime Minister- Gender and Child Affairs and the Auditor General's Department were:

Office of the Prime Minister-Gender and Child Affairs (OPM-GCA)

- Mr. Vijay Gangapersad - Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Abeni James - Senior Project Manager

Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT)

- Mrs. Sharon Morris-Cummings - Director (Ag.)
- Mrs. Rhonda Gregoire-Roopchan - Deputy Director, CARE Services
- Mrs. Elizabeth Lewis - Deputy Director, Legal and Regulatory Services (Ag.)
- Mr. Steve Mulrain - Finance Manager

Auditor General's Department (AGD)

- Mr. Gary Peters - Assistant Auditor General
- Mr. Desmond Noel - Audit Director

Appendix II – Minutes

**THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE –
THIRD SESSION, TWELFTH PARLIAMENT
MINUTES OF THE TWELFTH MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
FEBRUARY 15, 2023 AT 10:06 A.M. IN THE LINDA BABOOLAL MEETING
ROOM, GROUND FLOOR, CABILDO BUILDING, PARLIAMENTARY
COMPLEX, ST. VINCENT STREET, PORT OF SPAIN**

Present were:

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo	-	Chairman
Ms. Jearlean John	-	Vice-Chairman
Mr. Adrian Leonce	-	Member
Ms. Charrise Seepersad	-	Member
Mr. Roger Monroe	-	Member
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	-	Assistant Secretary
Ms. Khisha Peterkin	-	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Justin Jarrette	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Nilijah Reaney	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Celeste Reece	-	Procedural Officer Intern
Ms. Teneka Campbell	-	Parliamentary Researcher Intern

Excused were:

Dr. Amery Browne	-	Member
Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	-	Member
Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon	-	Member

COMMENCEMENT

- 1.1 At 10:06 a.m., the Chairman called the meeting to order and welcomed those present. The Chairman informed Members that Dr. Amery Browne, Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy and Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon asked to be excused from the Meeting.

EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE ELEVENTH MEETING

- 2.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Eleventh (11th) Meeting held on Wednesday November 9, 2022.
- 2.2 There being no omissions or corrections, the Minutes were confirmed on a motion moved by Ms. Charrise Seepersad and seconded by Ms. Jearlean John.

MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE ELEVENTH MEETING

3.1 With reference to item 4.2, the Chairman informed Members that the following Committee Reports were presented in the House of Representatives and in the Senate on November 25 and November 29, 2022 respectively:

- Seventh Report on an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Securities and Exchange Commission (TTSEC) for the Financial Years 2014 to 2018;
- Eighth Report on an Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2021; and
- Ninth Report on an examination of the administration of the CAPE Scholarship Programme as reported on in the Special Audit Report within the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for the Financial Year 2019.

3.2 With reference to item 5.2, page 3, the Chairman informed Members that suggestions for the Committee's draft Work Programme were received from Ms. Seepersad and uploaded to the Rotunda for the Committee's consideration. A discussion ensued.

The Committee agreed to a finalised Work Programme consisting of the following inquiries:

- Examination of the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for FY 2022;
- An examination of the concerns raised in the Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago for FY 2021 with specific reference to the administering of government grants;
- An examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATI) for FY 2018 to 2018;
- Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (issues raised in the Report Auditor General on the Public Accounts of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and in PAC Reports) **[Follow-Up]**;
- An examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Police Complaints Authority for the FY 2015 to 2021;
- An Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Agricultural Development Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (ADB) for the financial years 2013 to 2017;
- Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) **[includes Follow-Up]**;
- An examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Regulated Industries Commission (RIC) for FY 2014 to 2017;
- An examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Caribbean Industrial Research Institute (CARIRI) for FY 2010 to 2014;

- Follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations in the 31st Report of the PAC – Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Water and Sewerage Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (WASA) for FY 2008 to 2013 [**in writing**]; and
- Follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations in the 32nd Report of the PAC – Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission (TTEC) for FY 2012 to 2015 [**in writing**].

3.3 With reference to item 10.3, the Chairman informed Members that the responses to the questions for additional information from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services were received on January 17, 2023 and used to draft the Committee's Tenth (10th) Report.

PRE-HEARING DISCUSSIONS RE: EXAMINATION OF THE AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THE CHILDREN'S AUTHORITY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (CATT) FOR THE FINANCIAL YEARS 2014 TO 2018

- 4.1 The Chairman reminded Members that the purpose of the public hearing was to examine the Audited Financial Statements of the CATT for the financial years 2014 to 2018.
- 4.2 The Chairman outlined the remit of the inquiry.
- 4.3 The Chairman invited Members to review the Issues Paper based on the written submissions received from the CATT and the OPM-GCA.
- 4.4 The Chairman invited Members to raise any issues or questions on the examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the CATT for the financial years 2014 to 2018. Members discussed the issues of concern and the general approach for the public hearing.

SUSPENSION

- 5.1 There being no further business for discussion *in camera*, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 10:20 a.m.

EXAMINATION OF THE AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THE CHILDREN'S AUTHORITY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO (CATT) FOR THE FINANCIAL YEARS 2014 TO 2018

6.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 10:30 a.m.

6.2 The following officials joined the meeting:

Auditor General's Department (AGD)

- Mr. Gary Peters - Assistant Auditor General
- Mr. Desmond Noel - Audit Director

Office of the Prime Minister-Gender and Child Affairs (OPM-GCA)

- Mr. Vijay Gangapersad - Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Abeni James - Senior Project Manager

Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT)

- Mrs. Sharon Morris-Cummings - Director (Ag.)
- Mrs. Rhonda Gregoire-Roopchan - Deputy Director, CARE Services
- Mrs. Elizabeth Lewis - Deputy Director, Legal and Regulatory Services (Ag.)
- Mr. Steve Mulrain - Finance Manager

6.3 Key Topics Discussed:

1. The mandate and vision of the CATT;
2. The proclamation of key legislation regarding the Authority’s mandate in 2015;
3. The outsourcing of the audit of the CATT’s financial statements to a private external auditor, with the approval of the AGD, from FY 2014 to FY 2016;
4. The status of progress in the AGD’s audit of the CATT’s financial statements for FY 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020;
5. The CATT’s position within the wider child protection system and the need for a collaborative inter-agency approach among stakeholders in the system;
6. The increasing complexity of the Authority’s work and the steps taken to address this matter through enhanced monitoring and evaluation in the Authority’s 2022-2025 Strategic Plan;
7. The timeline for full implementation of the 2022-2025 strategic plan by November 2024;
8. The strengthening of the operations of the Authority as part of the action plan for an enhanced child protection system developed by an Inter-Agency Taskforce and approved by Cabinet in October 2022;
9. The CATT’s budget for FY 2023 and the gradual increases in the Authority’s Subvention from the Government, since FY 2015;
10. The responsiveness to the Authority’s funding requests and the timing of the release of subventions by the OPM-GCA;
11. The funding received by the CATT from Multinational Agencies such as the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the Authority’s goal to increase funding from such sources;
12. The CATT’s high staff turnover and need for increased staffing given the higher than anticipated level of work under the Authority’s purview;
13. The staff rationalisation initiatives carried out by the Board of Directors to strengthen staffing;
14. The Authority’s new organisational structure;
15. The anticipated date for the filling of the vacant Chief Executive Officer’s position;
16. The obstacles to staff retention at the Authority due to comparatively low remuneration levels and the compensation assessment being conducted in this regard based on the new organisational structure;
17. The challenges associated with staff burn out at CATT and the measures implemented to address these issues via the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP);

18. The CATT's processes for identifying families in need of assistance;
19. The process to procure software for submission and review of reports of child abuse;
20. The challenges faced in incorporating digital solutions into the reporting process and the possible solutions to those challenges;
21. The problem of insufficient information and data available to the CATT for reviewing cases and the efforts made to overcome this challenge;
22. The implementation of the Child Protection Information Management System (CIPMS) with support from UNICEF; and
23. The Authority's public information campaigns on issues such as improving public attitudes towards fostering children and associated advertising and promotion expenses for FY 2022 and FY 2023.

6.4 The Chairman thanked the representatives from the AGD, OPM-GCA and CATT for attending the meeting and they were excused.

SUSPENSION

7.1 At 12:37 p.m., the Chairman suspended the public meeting to resume for a post-mortem discussion with Members only.

POST-MORTEM DISCUSSION

8.1 At 12:39 p.m. the Chairman resumed the meeting.

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

8.3 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to the CATT.

[Please see Appendix]

ADJOURNMENT

9.1 There being no other business, the Chairman thanked the Members for their attendance and the meeting was adjourned to March 8, 2023 at 10:00 a.m.

9.2 The adjournment was taken at 12:47 p.m.

We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

February 15, 2023

Request for Additional Information – Questions to the CATT

Examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (CATT) for the financial years 2014 to 2018

Issue: Status of Outstanding Financial Statements (pages 9-11)

Regarding the effectiveness of its financial management and related systems, the Authority explained that it was in the process of sourcing an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) or other solution to integrate the different systems in use, which include spreadsheets and various individual applications.

Question:

1. What is the anticipated timeline and cost for the procurement of the relevant ERP?

Issue: Strategic Plan (pages 12-13)

The Authority submitted to the Committee copies of its Draft 2013-2016 Strategic Plan and its 2018-2020 Strategic Plan.

Questions:

1. When was the 2013-2016 Strategic Plan approved?
2. Was there a Strategic Plan for the period 2016-2018?

Issue: Risk Management (pages 14-15)

According to the Authority’s written submission, while risk management sensitization was conducted in 2021 with members of the Board, as well as managers and team leads across the entity, “***for the period under review, no records of a risk management policy and framework were located***”.

Question:

1. What was the reason for the absence of a risk management policy during the period 2014-2018?

The Authority explained that the following strategies have been or are soon to be implemented to monitor risk management:

- The establishment of a unit in the new organization structure dedicated to risk management and oversight
- The implementation of a Risk Register
- The introduction of policy prescriptions to govern the risk management activities of the Authority.
- The continued work of the Internal Audit Activity in assessing the control environment and Internal Controls in place to mitigate both business and operational risk exposures.

Questions:

2. Which of these measures was implemented as at January 2023?

3. What is the anticipated timeline for the ones which have not yet been implemented?

Issue: Internal Audit (pages 16-18)

The Authority had no Internal Audit function during the period 2014-2018, as this was established in 2019.

The Internal Audit Unit included 2 staff as at January 2023 – the Internal Auditor and an Audit Associate.

The approved staff allocation as per the organisational structure for the Unit during the period 2014-2018 was 4 positions: 1 Internal Auditor, 2 Audit Associates and 1 Audit Assistant.

The new organisational structure approved by the Board of Management in 2022 also provides for 4 positions: 1 Chief Internal Auditor, 1 Lead Auditor - Child Welfare and Reintegration Services, 1 Lead Auditor - Finance, Governance and IT, and 1 Administrative Assistant.

Question:

1. What is the status of recruitment initiatives to fill the internal audit posts on the newly approved organizational structure?

Issue: Human Resources (pages 23-26)

Question:

1. Provide the breakdown of the categories of the posts (e.g. administrative / technical / managerial) on the Authority's new organizational structure.

Issue: Whistleblowing Policy (page 38)

The Authority explained that it planned to conduct a targeted education program is to raise employee awareness of the process for communicating their ethical concerns internally.

Questions:

1. Who will be the facilitators of this program?
2. What are the specific target goals of the program?
3. When is the program scheduled to be conducted?
4. List the ethical issues which will be addressed and explain how it will improve the overall function of the CATT.
5. What will be the structure/procedure of the review process for ethical concerns raised?
6. What systems will be implemented to remedy ethical concerns raised by stakeholders?
7. Will external stakeholders who are directly implicated in an ethical issue be informed and to what extent will they be allowed to make representations, if any?

Appendix III – Verbatim Notes

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE TWELFTH MEETING OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 15, 2023, AT 10.30 A.M.

PRESENT

Mr. Davendranath Tancoo	Chairman
Mr. Roger Monroe	Member
Mr. Adrian Leonce	Member
Ms. Jearlean John	Vice-Chairman
Ms. Charrise Seepersad	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob Mottley	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Justin Jarrette	Graduate Research Assistant

ABSENT

Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy	Member
Dr. Amery Browne	Member
Mrs. Paula Gopee-Scoon	Member

CHILDREN'S AUTHORITY OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Mrs. Sharon Morris-Cummings	Director (Ag.)
Mrs. Rhonda Gregoire-Roopchan	Deputy Director, CARE Services
Mrs. Elizabeth Lewis	Deputy Director (Ag.) Legal and Regulatory Services
Mr. Steve Mulrain	Finance Manager

OFFICE OF THE PRIME MINISTER GENDER AND CHILD AFFAIRS

Mr. Vijay Gangapersad

Permanent Secretary (Ag.)

Ms. Abeni James

Senior Project Manager

AUDITOR GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

Mr. Gary Peters

Assistant Auditor General

Mr. Desmond Noel

Audit Director

Mr. Chairman: A pleasant good morning to all, and welcome to the officials from the Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs, the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Auditor General's Department. My name is Davendranath Tancoo and I am the Chairman of today's proceedings and Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. The Public Accounts Committee has a mandate to consider and report to the House on, A, appropriation accounts of moneys expended out of sums granted by Parliament to meet the public expenditure of Trinidad and Tobago.

B, such other accounts as may be referred to the Committee by the House of Representatives or as are authorized or required to be considered by the Committee under any other enactment.

And C, the report of the Auditor General on any such accounts and whether policy is carried out efficiently, effectively and economically and whether expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it.

The purpose of today's meeting is for the Public Accounts Committee to conduct an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago, CATT, C-A-T-T, for the financial years 2014 to 2018, to assess whether expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it; to examine the challenges being faced and possible solutions for those challenges and to assist the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago in achieving the efficient delivery of services while ensuring that expenditure is embarked upon in accordance with parliamentary approval.

Based on the issues identified, the following key stakeholders have been invited to today's meeting: The Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs, the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago and the Auditor General's Department.

Please note that this meeting is being broadcast live on the Parliament's Channel 11, on Radio 105.5 FM and the Parliament's YouTube channel *ParlView*. Viewers and listeners are invited and encouraged to send their comments related to today's enquiry via email parl101@tpparliament.org, [Facebook.com/tpparliament](https://www.facebook.com/tpparliament) or Twitter [@tpparliament](https://twitter.com/tpparliament). I would now ask members of the Public Accounts Committee to introduce yourself please.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, my apologies. We are also joined by members of the Secretariat of the Public Accounts Committee today. I want to invite the Auditor General to make a brief opening statement—sorry, my apologies. I am moving fast. I want to invite the Auditor General to introduce themselves and the representatives who are with the Auditor General today. My apologies.

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. May I then ask that Permanent Secretary, acting, to introduce yourself and your representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. The key stakeholder today is the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago. Ma’am, can I ask the Director to introduce yourself and your team?

[Introductions made]

Mr. Chairman: Thank you all and welcome, again. So now we will move on to inviting the representative from the Auditor General’s Department, Mr. Peters, to make a brief opening statement.

Mr. Peters: Thank you, Chairman. Good morning to everyone, just a few things. Mr. Chairman, I would just like to inform the meeting that for the years ended 2014 to 2016, the audit was outsourced to a private company, Maharaj, Mohammed & Co. and for the years ending 2017 and 2018, the Auditor General’s Department conducted the audit, and we are very close to finishing the audit for the year ended 2019 and the review is ongoing, and we should complete it soon. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Peters. I would like now to invite the Permanent Secretary of the Office of the Prime Minister Gender and Child Affairs to make a brief opening statement, please.

Mr. Gangapersad: Chair, thank you very much again and members of the Committee. We welcome the proclamation as it contained many new options that can better respond to the needs of children and represent a new beginning in the way issues related to children would be addressed. These were the words of the then Chairman of the Board with the management of the Children’s Authority of Trinidad and Tobago in 2015, after several key pieces of legislation were proclaimed, giving powers to the Authority to begin to deliver on its mandate to care, protect and rehabilitate children who are at risk or who have been victims of abuse or neglect. This signalled the responsiveness of the State to act in the best interest of all children in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Government remains committed to a robust child protection system and to the resourcing of all agencies with responsibility for effecting the system. A recent release indicated an investment of close to \$1 billion in child, care and protection by the Gender and Child Affairs Division alone, over the period 2015 to 2022, with more than 50 per cent of this being spent by the Children’s Authority.

Since its operation commenced in 2015, with an annual allocation of \$30 million, the allocation has risen by more than 225 per cent to \$98 million in 2022. Notwithstanding, there continues to be instances where

the outcome for children were not favourable and, in some cases, children lost their lives. One child hand, in any way at all, in any way you can think of is one too many. Since 2015, there have been much interrogation of the child care and protection system, with the most recent being the independent investigation which was led by Retired Justice Judith Jones.

Following the laying of the report, Cabinet agreed to the establishment of the inter-agency task force to review the findings and recommendations and to prepare an action plan for implementation in keeping with the recommendations contained in the report. The work plan of the task force was accepted by Cabinet in October 2022. The work plan contains in excess of 150 action items towards an enhanced and robust child protection system in keeping with national and international developmental obligation.

Amongst others, one of the priority areas primarily focuses on strengthening the operations of the Children's Authority in Trinidad and Tobago. The Standing Committee on Child Protection comprising key Ministers and Deputy Permanent Secretaries and administrators of the Tobago House of Assembly, was established to direct and provide guidance and the implementation of the aforementioned action items. Implementation of the action items has commenced and it is expected to be advanced over the following months.

We thank you for inviting us here today, because we believe that much more needs to be learnt. Today provides us with an opportunity to learn through the discourse, as the audited financial statement of the Authority for the period 2014 to 2018 is examined. We anticipate that the discourse will be enabling and supportive as we work collectively to create a better future for all our children. I thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Acting Permanent Secretary. I would now invite the Director of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago to make a brief opening statement.

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, members of the Public Accounts Committee, Permanent Secretary, Acting, Mr. Vijay Gangapersad and representatives of the Office of the Prime Minister, representatives of the Auditor General's Department, representatives of other agencies, members of the Secretariat and staff, ladies and gentlemen of the national community, on behalf of the board of management and staff and, especially, the children of Trinidad and Tobago, I thank you for the opportunity to be part of the today's proceedings into the audited financial statement of the Authority for the years 2014 to 2018. The Authority is a specialized agency with responsibility for the care and protection of children, especially those who are at risk, those who have been victims of abuse or neglect.

The Authority became operational on May 18, 2015, following the passage of several key pieces of legislation. As noted by a former chairman of the board of management, Mrs. Stephanie Daly SC, in the annual report for fiscal 2015 and I quote:

The vision for the Authority, beyond fulfilling its legislative mandate, is to build an institution

which performs with integrity and earns public confidence; a body which is focused on the protection of children, but which also places a high value on customer service as well as providing an environment which is reassuring for children and adults.

That vision rings true even today, as the Authority has seen an increase in the complexity of the needs of children and their families in the cases that require the organization's attention. As a result, our 2022 to 2025 strategic plan, allows the Authority to pivot in order to provide optimal support to these clients. This will be achieved through a new fit-for-purpose organization. In fact, greater emphasis will be placed on the monitoring and evaluation of service delivery to ensure quality outcomes for children and their families who come to our attention.

I also wish to emphasize that the Authority is part of a wider child protection ecosystem that comprises multiple stakeholders, therefore, an important part of what we do is collaborate with agencies and partners as well as communities and families to address issues that affect children and put them at risk in our society.

The Authority is in its seventh year of operations and remains resolute and committed to dealing with child abuse. I would also like to point that, with the exception of one of our attendees today, most of the representatives here today for the Authority have not been at the Authority for the majority of the material period. As a result, we have relied upon available records in drafting our responses.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to today's deliberations as we seek to defend and support child's rights and make child protection everybody's business. I thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Ma'am. For the record, for the information of the public, I want to recite the answer provided by the Children's Authority when the question was raised: What is the primary responsibility of the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago? A substantial response was provided, but I want to choose just the first paragraph, because I think that highlights, basically, the function of the Children's Authority and, therefore, the basis on which we are having this discussion today.

In your response as to what the primary responsibility of the Children's Authority of Tobago is, the Children's Authority itself responded:

The Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago also referred to as "the Authority" is a specialized agency with the responsibility for the care, protection and rehabilitation of children, especially those who are at risk or have been victims of abuse or neglect, in addition to a number of statutory duties contained in the various pieces of applicable legislation.

You have also listed its specific responsibilities, but I would not want to go into those today, for this purpose though.

In your submission dated January 16, 2023, the Authority identified some key challenges with regard to fulfilling its mandate. Chief amongst those included: Staffing and resourcing; the lack of collaboration,

absence of information and data; overburdened caseloads and attitudes towards children. My first question to you, Children's Authority—this is directed to you—is since those were identified in the Authority's draft plan 2013 to 2016, and it is included in your report dated January 2023, can you advise whether those constraints, those challenges, still exist today and to what extent they still exist?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chair for your enquiry. Relative to staffing and resourcing, what we outlined at page 7 of our submission related to the period 2013 and 2016. During the period 2016 to 2018 and to today, some of these issues still persist. Relative to staffing, the Authority has been challenged by having sufficient number of staffing that is commensurate with its mandate. Moreover, when the Authority commenced, it was estimated that the Authority would receive about 1,200 cases per year and that was based on available data then from other agencies, because the Authority was now going to be set up. However, that number was far exceeded in that more than 3,000 reports were received in the first year and afterwards, we have an average of about 4,000 reports of abuse of children every year.

So, therefore, although the Authority was established with a certain understanding in terms of this is the size of your mandate, based on the actual experience when the Authority was operationalized, it showed that more resources, additional resources were required, and that includes staffing, because this is a human services agency.

Primarily, the Authority has to be staffed with a sufficient number of case workers who will investigate complaints about abuse of children, determine what is to be done in terms of interventions for the children. At times, that investigation leads us to the conclusion that that child has to be removed from the home environment and placed in another safe environment. Also, the court may make orders for the child to be removed from one environment and placed into the care of the Authority.

So, in relation to staffing, the challenge has been to keep up with the mandate in terms of the actual experience of the Authority, based on the cases that we are receiving. They are increasing in number and they are increasing in complexity and COVID-19 has added another layer of complexity into an already complex situation.

One aspect of staffing is that of the compensation level. So, I can park that aside, because that has always been an issue in that, very early in the reports, the annual reports of the Authority, you saw reference to the fact that the rate, the salary ranges, were a bit low compared to other agencies and that still persists to today.

Mr. Chairman: All right. If I may just respond to that, because we are dealing with staffing at this point, it is obvious staffing and resources, if you are not adequately staffed or adequately resourced, your ability to do the job that you have identified as your responsibility would have been compromised at some form or fashion, and we are seeing that based on the reports that have already come out. Are you saying—because I want to be very clear—that those concerns, those challenges identified since 2013 to 2016—2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016—

identified during that period that those challenges still exist today in March 2023?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes. I am saying yes in the context of the growth of the actual mandate of the Authority, based on the increase of responsibilities, which could not have been anticipated when the Authority started up. However, over the years, we have realized an increase in the number of reports coming to the Authority. So, therefore, it is a dynamic situation, and in terms of the organizational response, over the years, there have been attempts to do organizational rationalization restructuring in order to treat with staffing.

So, based on the reports from 2018, the annual report, there was an intervention by the board then, in that the board redesigned—produce a new design of the organization, which called for in excess of 700 workers or so. So, there have been attempts over the years to treat with it and, as it stands now, the Authority is in the midst of a transitioning in that there is a new organization structure that has been approved by the board of management in June of 2022, and steps are being taken now to staff and populate the organization consistent with that vision, consistent with a recognition that there is a need for more staff in certain areas.

Mr. Chairman: Ma'am, would it be fair to say that because of the shortfall in resources you were not able to effectively fulfil the responsibilities of the Children's Authority in terms of protecting children and that that may have been a contributing factor to the increase, as we are now—I want to make it very—let me clear that up, because I do not want to ascribe it as a blame. Is it fair to say that the fact that you have been under-resourced for this period of time would have contributed to your being unable to treat with the 1,200-odd—which is what you expected—and as a result of that, may have had an increase in occurrence of violence against children, issues against children, et cetera?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: So Chair, what I am indicating—I do not know if I have been very clear—is that we are anticipated 1,200 cases in the first year of operations. However, that was based on data from other agencies, because the Authority was now coming into existence. So, in terms of the under-resourcing, one can say that it is under-resourced, because you do not know the numbers. So, initially, you started out making projections based on a number that was greater than you could have appreciated. And, over time, as the Authority evolved, you now have a greater sense of what that number is. In terms of reorganizing for that, that itself takes a number of initiatives in order to realign staffing, resources with the existing requirements.

So, I would not say is because we were under-resourced we could not get to the 1,200. The notion of having a Children's Authority, it is a very bold step that was taken by the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and no one actually knew the enormity of the issues that laid out there. But now that we are seeing it, we are having a greater appreciation of what resourcing we require, and through the new organization design, we have so indicated that we require about 900-plus workers in order to address the various areas of need, various areas of care and protection and the various areas that require advocacy on behalf of the children of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Ma'am for that contribution. Given—let me ask it differently. You said that you need, on average, about 900 individuals to fully execute the responsibilities assigned to you. Is that correct?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: That is our assessment now, yes, based on our latest organization structure.

Mr. Chairman: Right. And that is a moving target, so it may increase depending on other issues that may have come up. But can you advise when that determination took place? When did you realize that you needed to have, at least, 900 individuals manning your organization?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: There was always a recognition that you needed an increased number of staff members, and you saw that in the 2018 report, in that the organization structure that the Board approved in 2018, catered for about 797 workers. At that point, the number of approved, Cabinet-approved numbers, was in the vicinity of 331. So, in the establishment of the Authority, there were projections—and I have to say based on the best available data—and so the organization was configured in that regard. However, the experience of the organization has shown differently and so it is dynamic.

So, in the new organization structure, we have catered for other areas of endeavour, other areas of child protection that will help to fill out and build out the ecosystem much more robustly than it is now, and some of these new areas are based on what was contained in the Judith Jones Report and our own assessment of what is required.

Mr. Chairman: Let me allow my colleague to raise a couple questions and then I will come back to this issue.

Mr. Leonce: Thank you very much, Chair. I was basically following up on what you would have asked. Now, I do appreciate—first of all, the Children's Authority is an Authority that I consider to be one of the critical authorities for the development of our nation. As we know, children are the future. Right? I understand the formation of the Authority initially would have catered for 1,200 cases and, as such, at the initiation of the Authority, there were many more cases that came to you. I also understand it is a new organization and the dynamics of the structure would change based on your learnings, right, which I am hearing from you.

What I am a bit concerned with is, initially, in your opening statement, you spoke about a number of the persons here were not here from the beginning. You also spoke about the salary structure being quite low. Is it that you have a high attrition rate at the Authority? One. And two, with respect to the board approving a new structure to facilitate the dynamics that you all are experiencing, have those salaries positions—the salary compensation of those been considered to increase? And, thirdly, what is your success in filling those positions?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Thank you, member. With respect to the attrition rate, the turnover rate, the average turnover rate from January to December 2022 is 1.41 per cent. Having regard to research, in the child protection industry, figures of 20 to 31 per cent, they are like average figures, because in the child protection sector there is usually a high attrition rate.

For the period January 2022 to December 2022, there were a number of resignations, 40 in particular,

and the staff head count as at the 15th of February, 2023 was 236 members. So, relatively speaking, I would say you have—the turnover is a challenge in that when someone leaves, especially when they leave with a lot of experience, because you are actually part of an ecosystem in which you are networking with different agencies—you know your way around the health sector, other government agencies, the Ministry of Social Development, et cetera—so the loss of one person who has that experience, it is very difficult to replace. Because a new person coming in, assuming even though they have experience from another place, it takes time to know our system and to become familiar with all that you require. You have to have a point at which you have to be trained up into the responsibilities.

With respect to salary increases, the new transitioning structure, it requires one to do a compensation assessment. So that is being done as well, an assessment of the compensation levels. But there has not been any adjustment in that we are all part of the Government system. So, there has to be a representation made and a process to be followed before you can increase salaries across the board.

11.00 a.m.

And you asked a question about the filling of positions. In the context of the transitioning, we are looking forward to the new structure. So that effort is underway, however in respect of the filling of vacancies, the low salary has not really attracted a number of people to come into the organization over the years on average. So when persons are interviewed and they understand that this is the salary, some of them decline. So we have those challenges but we understand that we exist in the context of a government system and a particular way in which processes have to be rolled out before you move from point A to point B.

Mr. Leonce: So, I mean, the mere fact we could—thank you—sorry—thank you for your response. The mere fact we identified that we can describe the compensation as low, you know—I heard you with respect to the process of increasing compensation with the compensation assessment. I was just thinking in terms of strategy, because for all that you would have said before when you lose somebody you lose the networking, you lose institutional knowledge, et cetera. With the challenge of the compensation being low, in terms of how low and what is acceptable, and what can be suggested there is a process for—however, it is a challenge you are facing now and is there a strategy or to do we wait until that process is completed? And if we are waiting for the process to complete, how soon would that compensation study be completed and how do we plan to address, in the interim, the challenges you are facing now?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: In the context of the transitioning, enhanced compensation packages are expected when the new positions are filled. So there is a process to get those enhanced compensation packages. In the interim what we are doing, we have indicated to staff that this new structure is coming on board and there are many opportunities there. So in the sector, in the Children’s Authority there are many dedicated child protection workers who—I do not want to put **it on**, but their heart is in the job. So even though the salary

has been low since 2015, a number of workers are still there rallying on a daily basis to serve the children of the nation. Yes, we need more resources; yes, we are not perfect; yes, we make mistakes but they persevere in spite of that.

When I saw the CPO and the issue of the 4 per cent, you know, so I have asked the Finance Manager to find out how do we get that 4 per cent in the interim. So, I do not have the answer in terms of increasing salaries in the interim but I know with the new org structure a compensation framework that calls for enhanced packages, enhanced terms of service; that is what is on the table and it is being addressed at the Authority.

Ms. Seepersad: Thank you, Chairman. You mentioned the strategic plan and objectives in the process of being rolled out, when do you expect it to be fully implemented?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Within two years from November, 2022, so by November, 2024.

Ms. Seepersad: It is going to take you two years to implement everything?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: The entire transitioning process; that is the estimated time frame, but in terms of different aspects, like, for example, recruitment, it will not take two years.

Ms. Seepersad: How long do you anticipate the recruitment exercise to take?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Based on the latest estimate that I have before me, by September, 2023, we should have a bulk of staffing based on the transitioning exercise.

Ms. Seepersad: What about the position of the CEO because that position/person would drive your strategic plan and objectives?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes. I—

Ms. Seepersad: Is it filled? Is that position filled by a permanent position or—

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: I am Director, Acting. So Director, Acting, has been changed because there is some change in nomenclature in the new organization structure and that is the CEO position. So, in essence, I am the CEO at this point in time acting.

Ms. Seepersad: “Uh-huh.”

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes.

Ms. Seepersad: But is—because I think I saw ads for the position and I was wondering how you would transition into that position or is it going to be filled by some other person?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: I cannot say. It is a competitive process. The position has been advertised and persons who are interested can apply.

Ms. Seepersad: Do you know when that position would be filled?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: The estimate is by April or May this year.

Ms. Seepersad: This year?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes. That is the estimated timeline.

Ms. Seepersad: But you will remain in the organization?—because I am concerned about—let me tell you where I am getting at. You mentioned loss of institutional memory and to drive this process you need somebody who knows what is going on and your turnover rate is not low; you have issues with retaining people. So in order to have the organization properly functioning and committed to fulfilling its mandate, which is very crucial—I mean, this is a life and death-type environment. You want institutional memory to remain, so that is where I am getting—I am really very concerned about the loss of institutional memory and the driving and implementation of your new strategic objectives.

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes. Well, we are also very passionate about what we do at the Authority and we understand the value of the institutional knowledge, because, especially in a system that needs to be restructured, because the Judith Jones report has said so. We accept that, but even before that there was a recognition by the board, and I dare say, successive boards, that there needed to be some restructuring of the Authority. So it is important to have that institutional knowledge to help drive the process. So I quite agree with the sentiment that you are expressing.

Ms. Seepersad: Chairman, can I ask—if we could just switch to resources, financial resources, from what I have been reading it seems that you are not getting the full resources that you require to completely implement your functions. How is that going to affect the implementation and the full roll-out of your strategic plans, objectives, programmes, et cetera?

Mr. Mulrain: To respond to your question, during the period under review the response rate was approximately 47 per cent in terms of the total amount of funds requested by the Authority versus the total amount that was allocated. All right? In the intervening period between 2019 and 2022, the response rate has grown to 67 per cent. So right now, we are in the region of 61 per cent. I went a bit ahead of ourselves.

Member: Yes.

Mr. Mulrain: So right now, we are in the region where we are closer to achieving what our financial requests are. Year one of our strategic plan, we have gotten a commitment that our funding would be closer to achieving year one of our strategic plan objectives.

Ms. Seepersad: But there is still a shortfall?

Mr. Mulrain: There is a shortfall. As I said, the movement has, from 2018, moved from 47 per cent to 61 per cent in 2022. We have an assurance that our strategic plan—our year one strategic plan will be funded close to 97 per cent of what is required to achieve the objectives of year one; our strategic plan will be funded.

Ms. Seepersad: Could you just tell me, year one would be what period?

Mr. Mulrain: Year one would be fiscal 2023.

Ms. Seepersad: Which is this—

Mr. Mulrain: Which is this current period. Yes.

Ms. Seepersad: So you are going to get nearly 100 per cent for this year?

Mr. Mulrain: The indications are, yes, we will get 97 per cent; not 100 per cent.

Mr. Mulrain: Ninety-seven per cent?

Mr. Mulrain: Yes, close.

Ms. Seepersad: And if you do not, do you have any strategies to deal with those fallouts if you do not get full funding?

Mr. Mulrain: One of the strategies is to increase our project funding. Project funding would be funding provided to the Authority by sources other than the Government, so multilateral agencies and the like. Currently that is in the region of 4 per cent. We hope during the strategic planning period to increase it closer to 15 to 20 per cent.

Ms. Seepersad: And that would mitigate some of the shortfalls?

Mr. Mulrain: That will provide the Authority with some level of discretionary funding that will allow us to be a bit more responsive and decrease the reliance on Government funding, which is currently 96 per cent of our total recurrent operations.

Ms. Seepersad: And what is the projection to increase the non-governmental funding over the period of your strategic plan?

Mr. Mulrain: Well, as I said, it is currently in the region of 4 per cent. Over the period of the strategic plan, we hope to move it closer to between 15 to 20 per cent.

Ms. Seepersad: Thank you, Chair.

Mr. Monroe: Thank you very much, Chairman. Question to the Children's Authority: Given the present situation in which the Authority stands, the strength, the weaknesses, the challenges, maybe funding issues, I would like to know in terms of percentage, where would you say the Authority stands at this time in terms of achieving its goal and mandate successfully in terms of in the best interest of our nation's children? One, and two, given the response by the Director in terms of the resignation of some 40-odd persons, is it only a low remuneration or salary package was one of the reasons or the main reason given for persons retiring from the Authority, or if not, could you please share what are the other reasons? Thank you.

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Thank you, member, for those questions. In terms of our long-term strategies, I think we are well on our way to achieving those goals in terms of an organization restructuring which is pivotal to what we can achieve in future as we try to have a more nimble, agile, responsive organization; part of that is the increased staffing. So it is difficult to give a percentage estimate now, because even our estimate of 942 staff members in terms of our requirements in a fully restructured organization, we cannot do that in one year, and this is why the plan is for two years. So our estimate for this year is to have at least 451 bodies, warm bodies in places, incrementally ramping up our capability in targeted areas. And those targeted areas include

care, case management, and also licensing and monitoring, and also we have established new positions in the new org structure. Consistent with the requirement to have more oversight of children in homes, we are having caseworkers in our new structure who will do more oversight of the cases of children, the handling of those cases in partnership with the homes.

We also have a position for a child advocate, a child advocate who will treat with the complaints from children. So that person is a person almost like an auditor who will report directly to the board, and that person will be responsible for going out to the homes and taking the complaints of children and reporting to the board, in addition to what management would be doing in respect of complaints. In the Judith Jones report there are also mechanisms for complaints. There are also a number of recommendations to enhance the ability of children to lodge complaints, including the use of technology. So a number of those recommendations are under our active consideration, so we have our own assessment of what should have been done, plus we also have the task force recommendations that would be interwoven with what we are going to do. And all of those things are under our active consideration right now in tandem with the Office of the Prime Minister and the mechanism that PS Gangapersad spoke about in order to ensure that those recommendations are actually realized in a very short time frame as possible.

You also asked in relation to the reason for turnover, I do not have the reasons for the exit interviews, but based on some that I have been privy to, persons have moved for better opportunities. I know of one young lady; her husband is from a different nation, from Ireland, and she migrated for personal reasons. You have persons who would have left the organization and they have been taken up by other organizations into higher positions. So persons move for their own personal development and we communicate now with them; they are managers. Before they may not have been managers at the Authority but they have moved on to greener pastures. So they may leave because they get better job opportunities.

There is also an element in the Authority in the sense that, you know, there is burnout and we need more staff. So some persons have left because of the pace at which we are required to do the job, and they have left, again, for personal reasons and lack of job satisfaction. So it is a mix of reasons. I do not have all of the reasons for these 40, but typically those are the reasons, family, personal, and for persons to go on to greener pastures and take up promotional opportunities.

Mr. Monroe: Okay. Thank you very much for your response.

Mr. Chairman: I turn over to member John.

Ms. John: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you. Thank you, Director. I was happy to hear you reference just now the children's homes because you all are part of a bigger system; meaning not only the state sector is involved, you have the privately run children's homes where your clients or your customers they—well, where they repose or where you house them, as it were. I had seen where you had projected and you mentioned it,

1,200 in the projection—the earlier projection, 1,200 children, vulnerable children, but it ended up being 5,522. Now, that is an increase of over about 400 per cent. That is hard but how do you—how do you intend to kind of bridge that gap, and that was way back when, 2015 to 2017? Because one does not have the numbers for beyond 2018, what I saw was that there was a caseload of 10,211 with a throughput per month of about 600 children. These are vulnerable children who were affected by sexual abuse, physical abuse, mental abuse; some are lost, you know, a number of issues. Now, I think—what is the question, the question is, I was wondering, in terms of the subvention, is it that it comes—or the releases every month to these homes, where does it come from, the Children’s Authority or the Office of the Prime Minister?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: The OPM, please.

Ms. John: It comes from OPM. Now, I do not know, there is another committee on which I sit, we were visiting the homes—maybe you know about that—up to yesterday we visited two and we have visited five so far. So it was very—I think it was a good thing, very positive that we were able to see this in action, you know, at the actual homes—looking at the actual homes, and it was not a complaint because the people are generally mild-mannered and they are really committed to what they are doing. The releases tend to be late and given that these children already are vulnerable, one, then to me there is an insufficiency of spaces, because if you have a throughput at the time, the writing of the report, that report, of about 600 a month, what is happening now?—because it means—and one is not blaming you. We are not a society where children are valued, cared for or protected; given in this small country we have 600 reported cases, maybe coming through the court or coming to you directly, and I am sure you would have some kind of projection of the under-reporting or the under-reporting in this system of abuse, you know. So in terms of this subvention being late, on top of everything else, what is happening? How can you assist with that? Having you been looking into that?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: I would respectfully ask PS to perhaps take this.

Mr. Gangapersad: So, member, I would attempt to answer your question. Not “attempt”, I will answer the question. This is something that the Authority would usually follow up on and as soon as they have information pertaining to the late payment of what we would call, the payment per child, those private homes are being paid via a system called the payment per child. The saints, as we would call it, and the bigger homes receive a subvention, and that was recently brought to my attention. All attempts are usually made to make sure that the time frame is shortened as it relates to making sure that these payments are made. The payments are made the month after based on reports that are submitted to the division by the Children’s Authority.

Ms. John: There are homes complaining that they have not received it since October of last year, you know.

Mr. Gangapersad: Yes. Yes. So I am getting to that point there. So recently that matter was brought to my attention, based on my checking all of the homes were paid up to December. The moneys were sent into their accounts. One of the homes—and I was part of those site visits as well, I would have indicated to them that

they needed to check their bank accounts to ensure that the money is there and get back to me. They have not gotten back to me as yet. But the information that I have with the Ministry is that all the homes were paid up to the month of December. The only payment that is outstanding right now is the payment for January which was processed and should be made soon.

Ms. John: Thank you. Thank you. Director, some of the homes, we have a few, the larger homes that remain unlicensed, not for any fault of their own, based on what we heard, I believe—however, it means they have some redundant capacity because they are not licensed and they do not want to take the risk. Now, the demand for your service is great, so basically in looking at your budgeting, would it be a good idea to sort of encourage—find some—because this is a big task we have, a big issue we have in terms of these children. In terms of how do we kind of train families to be kinder, how to look after the children, because again, what we were hearing is that none of the children want to be there. They come there and they say, “We do not want to be there”, and the professionals are also saying—the people who manage these homes, they are saying, it is not a good thing for them to be there or to be there for such a long duration; more harm is done than good. So how can we kind of short circuit that, circumvent it and ensure that they are going into safer spaces?—which brings me to this interim period where in terms of what is happening in terms of a cohesive plan to have children who are then moved from adolescent, teenagers to—well, 18-year-olds when they must exit by law?

There is an issue there in terms of where do they go, are they prepared enough. Is it that is it the responsibility of the Children’s Authority to ensure that there is a cohesive plan where everybody, all the homes know this is this plan? Day one starts when you are maybe 16 years old in terms of what do you like, what can you do, how can we train you to go out and face the world because you go out at 18 years old? And we are told that 50 per cent of the children who are now there would have had relatives in there, you know, so they would have an aunt, a mother, et cetera, and 60 per cent of the females, within two years they are pregnant, sometimes on their second child. This is dismal; this is a cycle, you know, of just—a cycle of abuse. These are the things to me, this is what the numbers are not telling us, the qualitative issues that are so painful, you know. So we need to pick up on these, because the same thing I heard just in one little two-hour visit, I am sure you are hearing it over and over because members of your staff were there. They appear to have a good relationship with the homes, but it has to move beyond that. And I know your hands sometimes must be tied but we really have to do more for these children, quite frankly, because I think the number you are admitting is not the number knocking on your door; there are many more, and so what is that shortfall and what are you doing for those going out there? I know it is plenty questions I am asking at the same time but it was just such a major issue we were seeing as we visited.

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes. I thank you for your questions, and the fact that they are rolled up it is only natural, because one thing is connected to the other, and we can say again, it takes a village to raise a child.

With respect to the number of children and the number of placements, as you can see from the earlier reports, the 2014 to 2018 period, the lack of placements has always been an issue. We have also taken the position that we have to do much more work with our sister and brother agencies to reduce the number of children who are coming into the system for care and institutionalization. We firmly believe that children thrive best in loving home environments and we have taken a number of initiatives to increase the number of placements that are outside of an institution. And, in that regard, I would like to call on my colleagues, Ms. Lewis and Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan to elaborate on both those aspects in terms of the initiatives that we have been taking relative to placements and the challenges, if I may, Mr. Chair. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: Thank you. Good morning, everyone; Rhonda Gregoire-Roopchan, Deputy Director, CARE Services. I would like to address or react to the area with respect to who helps to manage these cases, who helps to respond to the children and support the families in terms of being better in caring for their children and offering them a place at home. The Authority's case management team, our Intervention and Investigation Unit is responsible for that. We go out to investigate the relative cases that come to us, substantiate the allegation, but the follow-on role there, once a child is received and secure, even if the child is not, is to provide support for the family.

Like the Director said, that is in collaboration with our stakeholder agencies, our brother and sister partners, the National Family Services, the Student Support Services under the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health to be able to provide those wrap-around services that the family needs in order to be able to effectively receive their child back into care. And that is one of the tenets that is captured in our strategic plan going forward and has been one of the key areas for performance indicators, even amongst the case management team, conferencing cases, brokering resources. We have also adjusted, in the last two years, our case management model where we had a very specific truncated model where the client went from one unit at the Authority to another in order to receive different services. We have amended that and so we have one case manager managing that case and brokering and advocating for our clients from beginning to the end of that case, and that too is one of the other strategies.

In addition, with respect specifically to the community residences, we have embarked upon our second round of what we term our community residence reintegration project. That is currently underway where we partner with the universities to bring on interns. We train them so that they can go with us into the community residences and examine all of the children who are resident there to understand, one, how we can further support their families, how we can push towards reintegration, and also how we can identify children who may be appropriate candidates for adoption. In addition, we are looking at kinship foster care, providing an alternative to institutional care.

We do have a foster care system where we have 90 children currently housed in foster care with

different approved foster carers after the relevant processes have been conducted, but we are looking as well at embarking upon kinship foster care where we examine the family's ability to care for the child and where there is a financial need that would prohibit that kind of arrangement that we seek to support them to ensure that the child remains in the home with the relevant support. So these are among some of the initiatives that we are working on to ensure that we reduce the number of children in institutional care but also increase the number of children who are experiencing the family-type environment.

I would pass over to our colleague as well. "Oh", just to speak specifically to transitioning, the transitioning responsibility is also with the case management team; at the age of 16, quite rightly indicated by the member, is our target age. Once we have a child that comes in and we are aware that they are on the path towards aging out within the system, separate and apart from reintegration, which should happen before the child turns 16, we always look at how we can get the child back with the family. At the age of 16, we begin to build out what we call a transition plan and that plan looks at all aspects of the child's readiness to be able to move into adult life, be it with a family member or be it on their own where housing is required. And that is done as well in collaboration with our stakeholder partners, particularly the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services who are geared forwards taking on the case management role after the child becomes an adult at the age of 18.

Spaces for children to be accommodated, you are quite right, they are limited, and in some respects our hands are tied, but we do have a very passionate team that drives towards looking for alternatives. And with the existing alternatives in terms of transition facilities, we look to ensure that children are there placed. We also meet with any NGOs or any budding organizations, vet and approve them so that we can explore placement beyond 18 with these facilities as well. Thank you.

11.30 a.m.

Mr. Leonce: Chairman, thank you. You just gave us a whole mouthful there. I just wanted to, based on what I have been hearing, first of all let me salute the persons, your team for doing the work that they are doing. As I said initially that this is critical for our nation and the future of our nation. You spoke about co-ordinating with various agencies, and you also spoke about children even being able to lodge complaints through a digital platform. I saw in one of your— you called it a barrier, or that ICT, the lack of technical systems, and I am just thinking that with turnover and stuff, the digital platforms or technological solutions can mitigate against some of these issues, and also assist with efficiency. What are these challenges that you are facing and where are you with the solutions of incorporating digital solutions in your operation?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: In terms of our operations, we have the child protection management system, and it is a new version that has been funded by UNICEF, and we thank UNICEF for that, one of our partners in child protection. So we are also looking at an enterprise-wide system to improve our efficiencies as the

organization. The OPM has also sphere headed a National Child Registry project. So there are a number of initiatives on the way that will help with the digitization process and improve our efficiencies across the ecosystem. Relative to the children complaining, the recommendation as to include the use of technology and the examples given have a one-way phone, have some digital mechanisms through which children can complain.

So let us say for instance they are a caregiver and they are afraid to report, they can do that through that mechanism, and this is why we have also included in our new structure a child advocate. So that advocate is not connected to anyone. It is not connected to the authority's normal staff, or will that person not be connected to the staff of the CR, and the child can reach out to that person in addition to the caseworkers who visit to follow up on the child's care. In terms of the children reporting the complaints, we also have to think about the children who are differently-abled. So that is still under active consideration, what mechanism can be used, for instance, for a child who cannot speak in order to lodge the complaints. So we have to think about it to ensure that every child has a voice.

Mr. Leonce: Thank you for your response. Where are you in terms of the allocation, the budgeting? So, for example, you had mentioned an enterprise-wide software, have you all purchased it? Are you in procurement process with this? Where are you with this?

Mr. Mulrain: We are in the procurement process. We have written the request for proposal which has been issued. We expect to retain a consultant who will guide us, take us through the process of completing the RFP, doing the evaluation and the selection of a suitable application. And that selection should take place by July, projected to. Yes, so that will consume our allocation in this fiscal for the selection of the RFP, and it is the hope that in the next fiscal the implementation would then take place.

Mr. Monroe: Thank you very much, Chair. Question to the Acting Permanent Secretary, and maybe the answer could be combined as well, I will welcome that. But my question here is based on a real life situation that would have confronted me in the region of Sangre Grande, where I was messaged sometime earlier on, January 2023, the 26th, and whom in that area requesting my intervention to get payments for the months of September, October, November, December, January 2023. And I know you mentioned earlier on that some homes were instructed to check their accounts, payments were made up to the month of December, 2022. But my question here to you at this time is, given the fact that all our children of this nation is one of the greatest assets to this country what are the steps or what steps would be put in place to ensure a more timely manner of funding to these homes to ensure that there is no disturbance in the care of those children that are placed in those homes? Because I am just asking this question given the conversation based on that message that I received. What would happen if the homes do not have the necessary funding? What will take place with those children that are in those homes for those periods when the funding or the releases are not forthcoming as it should?

Mr. Gangapersad: Thanks for the question member. I think the concern system is what hinders the, or retards an early payment being made. And I think as I attempted to do earlier on, these homes are paid at the end of the month where from data at the end of the month that is provided to the division by the Children's Authority. On average when I looked at the dates, this comes in the early part of the second week in the following month. That is not really acceptable having already spent money to care for the child. What we propose to do, and director would have mentioned a system before, called the Children's Registry.

The Children's Registry would eventually be a system that contains information on all children in Trinidad and Tobago, including children who are at these homes. We are proposing, and in fact these are discussions that we are having that the information from the registry will be utilised to pay the payment per child, the subvention rather than to wait on the Authority having to go and compile this information and send it. So the long and short we are hoping to use the technology that was—we launched that system in November of last year, October the 30th in fact, and we are currently inputting the data. So we intend to use the technology to enhance and reduce the payment.

Mr. Monroe: Thank you very much for your response. Given the fact that you just indicated that you all intend to use the technology to make the response for payment within a shorter timeframe, how soon would that be in full effect?

Mr. Gangapersad: Well what we are doing right now is doing the data entry. Again, with the help of UNICEF, they gave us some assistance to hire some data entry clerks for a period of six months, which expires in this month, in fact. So what we are doing is collaborating with all of our stakeholder agencies, the primary one being the Ministry of Education, because they have all of the information on children, and other agencies with information. And the data entry, we hope that by possibly in the next three months all of this data would be fully incorporated into the system, and thereafter we will have a good idea of how the system is performing to be able to give a definitive timeframe on when such an initiative could take place. However, I am also open for discussions subject to any policy changes that might be required to reduce the timeframe while we are waiting on the technology. So that is a discussion that is certainly underway and hopefully something would come out of that.

Mr. Monroe: Thank you very much for your response, and I do look forward to a timely discourse with that matter in the best interest of the nation's children.

Mr. Gangapersad: Sure.

Mr. Chairman: I just want to include the Office of the Auditor General, engage you for a few seconds please. You indicated that you were working—in your opening statement you were working on the 2019 audited for the Children's Authority. Our colleagues from the Children's Authority indicated that they are fast progressing towards restructuring into a new institutions and organizations, my concern is that based on the responses

based on the audits that were done there are several missing auditing pieces at the Children's Authority as it exists today, and we have outstanding 2019, 2020, 2021, and we are now in 2023. What is the reason for that lag in the provision of the financial statements, the audited financial statements of the Children's Authority?

Mr. Mulrain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Historically we outsource the audits of the Children's Authority until funding became an issue and we were no longer able to, so we started scheduling the audits. We started with 2019 last August, I think it was. So we are on the verge—we had some logistical problems with that one, staffing and so on, but we are close to completing that one. Now, fortunately we got some new staff over the last year into this year, some audit seniors. So we are in a position to schedule the balance of the audits of the Children's Authority, probably after April. We had some discussions with the finance manager on that same thing. So hopefully we will be able to complete those outstanding audits in a short space of time.

Mr. Chairman: So I want to go back to the 2018 - 2020 strategic plan, because we have had several strategic plan so far developed and proposed and approved by the Children's Authority and submitted to Cabinet, I believe, for support. Based on that plan, the 2018 to 2020 plan, it identified the following among the barriers that my colleague referred to, affecting its policy implementation as, and I quote:

Lack of ministerial/government support.

—what exactly does that mean? Because this was in your strat plan 2018/2020?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Mr. Chairman, because I was not there personally, I really could not say. But I can imagine perhaps they are speaking about maybe funding, but I have not experienced lack of government support in my role as director, acting PS, and we speak very often on many issues, it goes beyond 4.00 o'clock because it is not an 8 to 4 job. It is not a Monday to Friday job either. So we are always in contact with each other, and the Minister has, in her representations for budgetary increase, the Minister has robustly advanced arguments to support the Authority, so I could not speak to that, but I can say now, I cannot say there is lack of support. There is a lot of support coming from the OPM and hon. Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Well I do not want to be unfair to you so I do not want to belabour the point. But you also advised that from 2015 to 2018 the Authority received on average about 45 per cent of the money that it wanted, that it requested, about 45 per cent, that has a substantial impact on the ability of the organization to function, but I want to ask a question to give you the opportunity to respond. So, what is the Authority's overall assessment of the quality and level of support provided by the OPM, Gender and Child Affairs over the period? Now I realise that you can only speak for the period during which you were present, but you would have been familiar with what has gone pass because those would have been in the financials that you would have inherited. So I am trying to get an idea of what you feel? How comfortable are you with the level of support that have been provided by the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs in providing support and resources to your organization for the implementation of this mandate?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Now or in the 2014/2018, please, Chair, or generally?

Mr. Chairman: Generally. If I may I know that because you received only—because the organization received only 45 per cent of what was requested during the period 2014 to 2018 that it could not have been a happy situation, so let us look then at moving forward, 2018 to current, as best as possible?

Mr. Mulrain: Well, in our earlier response we had indicated that the rate was between 45 and 47 per cent, yes, in the period 2014 to 2018. In the period 2019 to 2022 there has been some progression, and that progression has brought us now to a response rate of close to 61 per cent. So in 2019 the rate increased to 57 per cent, 2020, 53 per cent, and 2021, 56 per cent; 2022, 76 per cent in terms of the allocation that was received in relation to the original request. And the expectation in fiscal 2023 is that the allocation would be close to 97 per cent of what our original request has been, and that is in relation to fulfilling the mandate—the goals of year one of our strategic plan. So there has been a consistent improvement over the period, it is not yet 100 per cent, but it has been tended in that direction.

Mr. Chairman: All right. So if I may, let me say it like this. You are very optimistic and I thank you very much, I think we need some optimism going forward. But if I may target my response, my question to the Office of the Prime Minister, Acting Permanent Secretary, in effect what we are hearing here today is, and I am repeating this because I started with that issue. The organization has not been able to get the funding required to execute its mandate, and we are looking at 45 per cent, and 50 per cent, and 51 per cent and 52 per cent, et cetera, and we are now hoping we will get to something like 90-something per cent in a new entity, but in the current entity over the last several years we have had a substantial underfunding of this organization which deals with children, which we all admit is critical, critical to the development of our country and going forward.

My question, Sir, is what is the prevention—what is preventing the Office of the Prime Minister from putting the needs of funding this organization at the forefront of its operations? What is the difficulty in prioritizing the Children’s Authority given the mandate and the responsibility, including some of the fact that clearly it underestimated the amount of problems that exists outside there affecting children. What is the restriction that the Office of the Prime Minister, that office, what is the restriction being faced by that office in terms of implementing the Children’s Authority as a priority going forward?

Mr. Gangapersad: Thank you, Chair, for that question. I would just answer the question, put a “lil” context to my answer. I think that at some point in time the director would have indicated that child care and protection system is made up of much more than the Children’s Authority. And at some point in time we have to agree that we should not be overinvesting in a system that expects the worst outcome for children. And this is what we are faced with currently, children are being abused, children are even dying, and we have no other choice but to invest in this system. But the long-term goal should not be following the same trajectory. It should be a reduction on the number of children who are being abused. A reduction in the number of children who are

being placed at homes, and I think what we need to do is to work a whole lot more in the prevention area to avoid families from being disintegrated, to avoid children coming into the system. And the long run to that is that maybe the amount of money that is spent on remedial work would be much less, and the outcome for children would be better.

And just to get straight to answering your question, Chair. Over the period 2016 to 2018 there have increases in the allocation to the Children's Authority. In 2016 it was \$28 million; in 2017, \$38 million; in 2018 it was \$56 million; in 2019 it raised to \$65 million, and my colleague would have indicated that the sum would have increased over the years. He would have also indicated that representation was made to the Ministry of Finance, and which is something that is being processed right now to ensure that, from what my colleague said, to take the funding up to almost 97 per cent to what is required this year. So I do not see it as there being any impediment at this point in time. Minister would have made representation, I would have made representation, and those matters are being processed to ensure that the Authority is fully resourced. Added to the fact that, at the Ministry, at the Division a number of efforts are being made through advocating for the Authority to international organizations as well as local organizations to get funding and other technical support to efficiently run the Authority. So I am hoping that answers your question.

Mr. Chairman: It actually does not, Sir. Just to be clear, no one, I think, is suggesting—I am a “lil” concerned with a phrase that you used, but no one is at all suggesting that we invest in the Children's Authority at the cost or at the loss of any other entity that is involved in trying to put measures in place to prevent children from being abused. That, in fact is not either/or. So the fact that the Children's Authority is not receiving sufficient funding to do its job should not be, and that is what I got from what you were saying, that nobody should be over-investing in, I forgot the phrase now, but over-investing in a situation where children are receiving the worst end of it. I think you are missing the point, Sir, with the greatest of respect, that if you do not fund the Children's Authority it does not—in fact let me say it differently, all aspects of entities that deal with the prevention of abuse of children, or the development and creation of an environment for them to grow and develop, all agencies should be funded, and it should be a priority especially given that the Office of the Prime Minister houses the Gender and Child Affairs department. And that in fact straddles all the entities you described.

So the fact for me, the fact that we are talking about in 2023 fiscal, which is the fiscal we are in now, we are going to have a situation where we need to have, according to the director, we need to have 942 required persons, but we are looking at 451 during fiscal 2023. We are starting off in a situation where we will be inadequate to task already. We are currently in a crisis. Now somebody else mentioned the fact that we had the Children's Authority's assessment as to what should have been done, plus the audit from the Judith Jones report, et cetera, that was generating 150 actioned items. All those things, the current situation of the challenges

being faced by children and the fact that the Children's Authority has not been able to rise to it, stems from the fact that they have been underfunded. And I want to join with my colleague in saluting the fact that we have had several employees, we have multiple employees—and I agree with you, we have multiple employees who have given yeoman service under the most challenging and impossibility of conditions. So I salute the staffing of the Children's Authority, but, Sir, with the greatest of respect, I believe that the Office of the Prime Minister has done a grave injustice to the Children's Authority, even though the director is very diplomatic in her statements. Even though she is very diplomatic in her statements, and maybe things have improved from 2019, 2020, 2021, and we are hoping and praying it will happen in 2023. But for all the time gone by, 45 per cent is less than half of what was required.

So from in my view, Sir, the Office of the Prime Minister has sabotaged the effective functioning of the Children's Authority, and this has happened during the period 2014—during the inspection up to today. Because it is only a hope that we will get to 90-something per cent of what is required. My concern still remains the enthusiasm and the hope that still exists in the Children's Authority, the management of the Children's Authority that given the track record of poor financial support, given the track record of not being able to hire sufficient staffing, that somehow a magic wand will be waved and suddenly they will get all the resources that they want. Ma'am I pray, I am sure my colleagues on this side also hope that you will get what you need to execute your job. And Mr. PS I also hope that the other agencies treating with children and children's affairs will similarly be funded. This is not an either/or. They must all be supported otherwise we would have jeopardized the effectiveness of the Authority.

And I started off initially by suggesting to the director that maybe the fact that we did not have the resources to tackle this 1200 meant that because no punishment was coming to these 1200, more came up. Because we were not able to treat with those. We did not have the resources to treat with those that were already in our hands. So it is very possible that the failure to financially support the Authority created the space for more difficult circumstances of children. I am really hoping that we see 2023, ma'am for your sake, for our sake, all, I am hoping for 2023 we see much greater impetus from the Office of the Prime Minister. But I would not hold my breath ma'am. I turn over to my colleague.

Ms. John: Chairman, you started your statement by saying, given the mandate, responsibility, and I want to add, given the consequences when we get it wrong—I mean these are young lives that you have under your care, and I really am very troubled, you know, by you saying that you could overfund that. No money spent on saving a child's life is too much money as far as I am concerned. I mean you have to oversee the money and the choice goes into the right place, so I am really concerned, given where you sit in the Children's Authority.

Basically, I need to remind that the children who find themselves at the Children's Authority door, based on the report you have, the strategic plan 2020, are children who are sexually abused, they suffer neglect,

physical abuse, and that is at the upper end of the spectrum. Physical abuse, 16 per cent; sexual abuse, 24.7 per cent, neglect 23.8 per cent. These are very vulnerable children. These are our youngest children, and basically I think you should be advocating more. The agency by the way is in the right place in the Office of the Prime Minister. That is the right place, and therefore there should be a laser beam on this Authority and the work it does and the attendant stakeholders who operate within that space, given who the clients or the customers are. Right, there is no amount of money that we could invest, once we are investing it properly into our children that is too much.

Mr. Gangapersad: Chair, can I respond, through you, please?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead please.

Mr. Gangapersad: Thank you very much. So I just want to assure the Committee that in no way was I indicating that money being spent on the Children's Authority is too much, or over-compensated at this point in time. I attempted to contextualize my statement by indicating that at some point in time we have to emphasize the issue of prevention rather than allowing children to come into a situation—to come into a system that is not necessarily the best place—we all agree that children should not be in. I also indicated as well that through the advocacy of the hon. Minister and myself as well with the Children's Authority we would have gotten a commitment to increase the subvention to the Children's Authority as long as this situation continue to persists, and from what my colleague here has said it will be around 97 per cent of what is required in 2023. Thank you.

12.00 noon

Ms. John: Chairman one last thing. Sorry, one last—well given what you are saying I agree that once you work the children out of that system and you start from the level of prevention, but in the strategic plan before us 2018 to 2020 there is nothing in here which supports that vision quite frankly. I do not know if it is in the 2020 to 2023 strategic plan, if you kind of said, okay, fine, here is where we are taking the Children's Authority, all the stakeholders that whole system of protecting the children, that issue of prevention. I do not know, Director, is that in the new strategic plan?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes, please, member. Yes, please.

Ms. John: That is not with us as yet?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: In the new strategic plan we can submit it to the Committee but we are focusing in the new strategic plan on families, helping to support families. So the thinking is that prevention is better than cure. So if you can avoid children coming into the system by supporting the families then that is a cause that is won, because we believe that children thrive best in loving families. Hence, our initiatives also to increase our foster care footprint and also to get into a kinship foster care, which is another type of foster care, that would see a child in a home environment as opposed to an institution. So, we do believe in an all of government

approach as well. So our approach in our strategic plan, 2022/2025, calls for much more collaboration with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services and other Ministries in order to support families.

Ms. John: Just yesterday I heard the hon. Prime Minister of St. Vincent, Ralph Gonzales saying, you cannot depend on the State to create families. And he is correct. So I do not know how the whole of government, what are they doing and I will be very keen to see how you all are going to create these magnificent families, who now do not want over 10,000 children, that throughput of 500 a month. I mean, that is a startling statistic, you know, in terms of where you are going with this? How are we going to get people to love their children and not abuse them at the level they are abusing them. I mean, I am looking at your graph, the sexual abuse is out of control. How are you going to deal with that as the Children Authority?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: We believe in continuous education and advocacy for the society, because—

Ms. John: But you do not have one ad in the papers or the television you know. Do you have that in your budget? How are you—your outreach? You have that in your budget?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes, we do, we do continuously engage different stakeholders. We have a constant presence on Facebook and we do place ads in the newspaper. We are working with other agencies, spotlight agencies to highlight the issue of child abuse prevention. So we do communicate that to the public, but, of course, there is always room to ramp up that initiative.

Mr. Chairman: Member Seepersad.

Ms. Seepersad: Thank you, Chairman. One of the impediments that you identified was the absence of information on data, because they were not documented standard, operating procedures or defined policies and procedures informing operation. And that the social work practice is largely driven by legal and policy framework rather than the other way around. What are you doing to address that impediment in your new strategic plan and what measures do you have to evaluate the success of those initiatives?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Thank you for the question member. I would like Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan to respond.

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: Certainly. With respect to data gathering, one of the challenges that we experienced over time is the very CPIMS system, Child Protection Information Management System, that we used at one point in time. We have since incorporated a new system that would allow us to gather the relevant data. It is relatively new, probably about just over six months into implementation. So that should be able to give us the information we require to be able to chart the way forward.

In terms of the strategic plan and its implementation, with respect to using data to guide policy and procedure, we are now on a drive to ensure that there is a policy audit across the organization. That comes from our strategic plan but it also comes as well from the Judith Jones Report and the subsequent task force recommendations. So we are in the process of onboarding the relevant support staffing to be able to look at

the existing approved policies as well as look at draft policies that guide many of the operations throughout the Authority so that we can bring it to a place of full approval, review amendment and look at efficiencies to ensure that we are doing it the best way that we can, given the evolving mandate. So that is a drive that we are looking at currently.

Ms. Seepersad: What is your target date for full implementation?

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: The policy—we are looking at having the person come on by April of this year and within one year to have a full policy audit done and review towards implementation of the policies.

Ms. Seepersad: I just want to build on what was already discussed on attitudes to children, because I am really, I am not seeing the ads and campaigns being in public domain to influence people's attitudes to children and the need to protect them and love them and any misconceptions that people have about children. So I do not know if you could just elaborate a little more on that because that is a real concern. Because if you want to stop it you need to influence people's attitudes at the beginning. And I am just a member of the public, this is not my core function, and I am not seeing those programmes, et cetera, being in the public domain.

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: With respect to the communications department at the Authority that is their role to assist with this prevention and advocacy, public education and we have been and I myself personally have been part of that drive. One of the challenges is that we rely on the internal teams who are assigned different case management, et cetera, duties, to go out into the public and that is something that we are looking at as well in terms of bringing the bodies on to be able to really infiltrate all of the areas where persons need to know about the Authority. Existing drives that we have in train is our social media presence which is fairly new over the last two years or so where we are on all of the major social media platforms and we do weekly programmes with respect to different areas regarding child protection.

We also engage different partners, for example, National Family Services, the Psychologist Association, the Child Protection Unit, the Counter-Trafficking Unit, so that together we can share our experiences and our advice to the public with respect to ensuring that children are cared for and protected. Our current campaign:

“Before you go and ramajay, make sure the children ok.”

So we have found ourselves and teams on the weekends, after hours, even in our Kiddies Carnival celebration to ensure that we are sharing that message. So we do go out there. There is always, always room for improvement. The member indicated that advertising is quite expensive and so that is part of the drive to ensure that we have the relevant funding to make that presence even more aggressive in terms of prevention.

Ms. Seepersad: Just one follow-up question. How do you measure your success, well of these programmes?

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: With respect to the social media platforms and so on, we have internal KPIs and targets in terms of the number of views, the number of responses that we have and so on. With respect to boosting, we look at the boost in terms of what kind of outcome. Because I am not directly in communications

I cannot give you direct figures, but these are the M and E strategies that the team utilizes, looking at what we put out in terms of the ad and the number of views. One of the features as well is that when we go out into the public and share in the sensitizations there is a commensurate feedback in terms of our number of reports received. Once we go out into the public and we speak about how you can report we tend to get additional reports and that is also a feature of how we can measure our efficacy in terms of reaching members of the public.

Ms. Seepersad: Thank you, Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Based on what you just said, Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan, you are one of veterans of Children's Authority. You discussed advertising just now, I want to question, we have a question coming in. Is advertising costs part of the operating cost? And if it is, how much money is spending on advertising and the marketing of the services of the Authority?

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: The advertising cost that will come out of communications would come from a recurrent budget. So I will have to pass to my colleague to be able to speak to that from a finance perspective.

Mr. Mulrain: There is an advertising and promotion line item within our budget. The allocation in this year is \$2.8 million.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Mulrain: We also benefit from a number of project funding and advertising and promotions, particularly through social media, and that may add an additional \$500,000.

Mr. Chairman: You are saying that the advertising is part of the operating cost? But it is not specifically included in the financial statements. Is there a specific reason for that?

Mr. Mulrain: I am not, well I am not sure as to the basis of the disclosure note. I can speak to the advertising and promotion cost in this years, fiscal 2022 and 2023 and what the budget allocation is.

Mr. Chairman: So what is the budget allocation for fiscal 2022 and 2023?

Mr. Mulrain: In 2023 it is \$2.8 million.

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Mr. Mulrain: In fiscal 2022 we had an amount in the region of \$800,000 available to us.

Mr. Chairman: And this advertising comes from, this is done, how? Where? Is it—do we have a media advertising or is it events, is it outreach programmes?

Mr. Mulrain: It is a combination of activities undertaken by our communications department over the course of the year. So it would include activities such as the current Carnival campaign, a number of outreach activities over the course of the year undertaken with regional health authorities and other agencies.

Mr. Chairman: All right, I am a Member of Parliament and just for reference, and we have another member here, my colleague, I would welcome the intervention and involvement of the Children's Authority directly in

my area as well, because I know that you may have national perspectives. But in our areas as Members of Parliament, even as Senators we would have engaged individuals who are in desperate need of the services of the Children's Authority. So I would welcome any initiative on your part to provide the offices of the Members of Parliament and to the Senators with some level of information that we could also distribute, but I also suggest that since we already have 41 Members of Parliament engaging with members of the community, you already have 41 in effect sub-offices that you can make maximum use of. So that is just a suggestion going forward.

I noticed in our questions, in response to some of the questions by the Secretariat you indicated that, and you mentioned it again today, that there was some level of staff burnout. Now that is understandable given that you are already short staffed. Sorry to belabour the point but that is a major consideration for us, for the delivery of service. But you are already short staffed and therefore you will have staff burnout. I noticed that some of the measures taken to address staff burnout includes: celebrating World Mental Health Day, EAP, retreat, games night, celebration of world happiness day, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. But when the question was asked of how successful these measures were at addressing the problem of staff burnout the response was, staff participated in varying degrees in these activities and this assisted in team building.

Now I am very sure that—I understand what staff burnout is, I understand what burnout is and team building may help with burnout, but I am not too sure that we have been able as an entity to treat with staff burnout sufficiently to ensure that we retain the vibrant hardworking staff that we have, who are willing to work under the challenging circumstances. But I am not too sure, even the activities listed here were really the type of activities that would be required to treat with staff burnout and as a result the agency itself. The Authority may be doing a bit of disservice to its staff who are experiencing the staff burnout. Let me ask it in a form of a question then.

Has the Authority undertaken any other sort of investigation as to qualitative measures that can be taken to treat with staff burnout? May be in the sense of some sort of medical support, counselling, those sort of things or engagement at all with the staff itself, because when you have some of these activities it is the same staff who are having to work on these activities, not so?

So we have staff complaining of burnout and they have been expected to work on world happiness day and everybody is already tired. So is it that we have in addition to these things an additional limb where we have some access where staff can go in and seek counselling to treat with them. Because in addition to the challenges they have as staff working with children in difficult circumstances they have their own challenges in personal life and so on. And as somebody involved in the Authority now I am sure that you are familiar with the emotional trauma that you take home with you as a staff member. So I know, I ask the question and I know that probably it got lost in the conversation, but the question is, whether or not any additional support has been put in place to offer staff who are suffering from burnout and others who are hopefully not, well

more likely or not, going to be headed that way because of the short staffing. Is there any additional facility being offered to them?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes, thank you for that question, Chair. I will commence the response and rely on my colleagues to support because in terms of the history of how this had been treated, we do have an existing EAP provider, so that is in place. But in addition to that, I am aware that surveys were done to sort of test the temperature, the pulse of staff. What would you like to do? How will we in terms of wellness, what would you like to see happen? And I know that some of the initiatives came out post that survey, but there are other issues, such as the compensation level and the major issue from where I sit is the numbers in terms of the staffing.

So you have case workers who may have more than 100 cases to address and which one, which one will receive your priority. And you go to this one, but it is really this one that the risk is manifested. So to me that remains the most critical issue, the numbers, increasing the numbers of staffing and that will afford a better work/life balance. I do not know if my colleagues have anything to add to it based on the history in the organization.

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: I just want to concur as well, the initiatives, there was a whole wellness programme that we would have developed coming out of the respective staff surveys. Staff indicated what they wanted to do. One of the major successes came from having dealt directly with teams is from the World Mental Health Day, where persons can have a day to be able to regroup, to be able to debrief and so on, separate and apart from the EAP, the Employee Assistance Programme, which is heavily utilized.

With respect to ongoing support and ongoing initiatives we are now rolling out, again, post-COVID, we did have a very extensive programme. However, due to COVID and the restrictions in terms of grouping and interaction that had to be scaled back quite significantly. But we are now, based on the feedback and from the bowels of the organization, the staff has spoken in terms of what are some of the initiatives and we are rolling those out. As recently as Friday, we should be having some very interesting wellness activities on board.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. I have a question from the viewing audience. I actually have an answer that we could provide and then the other question. So based on the note of the financial statements for 2018, one of the questions was the number of employees for 2018. I could provide that. It was 166. In 2017, it was 141; in 2022, it was 225 plus 17 independent. I think the question—so that was the answer to a question that was posted at *ParlView*. The question that still is there, is how many members of staff are contract officers, civil servants/public servants and how many approved positions are administrative, technical, supervisory or managerial?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: All the positions, Mr. Chair, are contract positions.

Mr. Chairman: Is it a five-year, a two-year, three-year?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Three-year contract positions, those are the usual positions, usual duration.

Mr. Chairman: Would you be able to advise how many admins, technical, supervisory or managerial?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: I do not have the exact breakdown right now in terms of that but we can supply that response subsequently.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. I have one major question that I will want to ask and then I will turn it over the floor. Of the 150 action items reference that came out of the Judith Jones Report on the collaboration of the Children's Authority, can you advise how many have been implemented and what is the status of the rest that have not yet been implemented?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: We have commenced some of the action items. I will ask Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan if she would just give a capsule of the items we have started and Mrs. Lewis also has an item she can report on.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: With respect to implementation, what we have done is look at over 150 of the recommendations and condense them into areas of focus. The foster care, kinship policy and foster care for migrants are among those that we are currently working on. The CRE integration project which would also treat with a key feature of auditing the children in CRs, community residences, to understand where they are placed and what we can do to ensure that they have a good permanency plan. We are also looking at certain community residences which my colleague will elaborate on in terms of ensuring licensure and support. And those are the ones that come to mind, but there are quite a number of initiatives. Additionally, the Authority is part of the standing committee on child protection where we report these particular initiatives and our successes and that is the M and E framework that allows for monitoring the implementation of these strategies. I will pass to my colleague to add additional initiatives.

Mrs. Lewis: Good morning, Chair, and good morning everyone. Just allow me to—I am very happy to say that one of our key recommendations that came out was that of training for caregivers and other staff member, whether in our child support centres and in our children's home. And we are well on stream to execute that recommendation. We have engage the University of the West Indies and they have provided for us a programme that we are looking forward to enrolling in March, as early as March 2023 with respect to training and upskilling our current caregivers and supervisors within the children's homes and our child support centres. So we are very much on stream with respect to that and that certainly is a critical recommendation that came out of the report that we are happy to say at this point is well on stream to being executed.

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: I also wish to point out, Mr. Chair, that the OPM—would you confirm PS, the funding, that initiative?

Mr. Chairman: We are hoping that it is funded in time. Mr. PS can you—

Mr. Gangapersad: Thank you very much. Yes, based on the nature of the initiative I am certain that we will

find the resources to fund that. And from my reading of the proposal it is not really much money for the type of investment that we are doing.

Chair, through you again I just want to bring to your attention, one, there are a number of things that have been done through the Committee and I am committed to sending you a status report on the implementation of the various action items and where we are. In fact what we have done since the Committee has started was to put out two monthly status reports on the various media houses to indicate where we are and we have given a commitment to continue to update the public through those mechanism, monthly status report update on where we are as it relates to those recommendations.

One in particular that we are doing now is to assist these homes, these children homes that were spoken to earlier on. I think there are 12—to assist them with funding, to ensure that they meet the necessary infrastructure work, to meet the public health and fire services standard so that they could at least meet those requirement for licensure. That one is advanced and a number of the homes have made request for these services already, they were approved and efforts are being made to ensure that they receive the funding on time.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you PS. I turn over now to member Seepersad.

Ms. Seepersad: My apologies. Non-national children who are in an abusive situation, does the Authority have any jurisdiction to intervene in these circumstances? Because we have a substantial migrant population and they too have issues.

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Thank you for that question. I will pass it to my colleagues.

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: The Authority is responsible for treating with all children in Trinidad and Tobago regardless of their nationality. We actually have on board with the support of funding from UNICEF and this is one of our projects that work towards the task force recommendation filling as well. It is a case management officer who specifically works with migrants. This is a bilingual individual who is able to bring cultural sensitivity and linguistic competence to the service that we would have otherwise offered through an interpreter. We also have on board an interpreter with the support of UNHCR so that we can be able to offer that service as part of the delivery to our non-national clients who are Spanish speakers.

Ms. Seepersad: How adequate are those resources? You are talking about two people.

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: Those persons have a case load of approximately 50 children at this point in time. And so they are working through, though a little above best practice internationally, they are working as effectively as they can with the current client load that they have.

Ms. John: Thank you, Chairman. To the Director, through you Chairman, you know you get the sense sometimes that the service providers can operate in a bit of silos and that will impact on the ability to maximize your resources as it were. So, can you kindly tell the Committee who are the stakeholders amongst which closer collaboration is needed?—and just let me finish. What are the barriers to the implementation of a more

collaborative inter-agency approach to child protection encompassing all of the stakeholders?—and, of course we maximize the resources and results. And will it be the Children’s Authority or the Office of the Prime Minister who will be responsible for establishing this kind of approach and, of course, the resource demands. Maybe you might not be able to say what resource demands are if you have not worked out the variables to establish such a system that is interrelated and collaborative and integrated.

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: Yes, thank you for that question member. I would start and I will ask one of my colleagues to jump on in terms of the details. PS and I we always speak about a collaborative approach and the fact that we, for instance, social workers, some here, some there. If we get together, our thinking is that we can be much more of a force for the good that we all trying to do if we come together. So there are always discussions and in our attempt to collaborate and deepen our collaborative footprint between and among the different stakeholders. We have signed a number of MOUs with different agencies. But apart from that, recently through UNICEF we had someone visit from Romania and that child protection specialist from Romania, we discussed ideas and preventative measures, how do you support families. So I am speaking about this in the context of our collaborating in order to have a greater impact on the work that we do.

Part of the discussions entailed us exploring pilot projects going out into the areas that we see as most vulnerable and addressing the needs of families. And this is the idea that came from Romania. I know it is probably not unique to Romania alone that we will establish a committee of persons based, multi-disciplinary, social work, education, health, et cetera. And you go out and you identify the most vulnerable families in the different communities and as a group you service the needs of those families. So that is some of the thinking that we are engaged in right now based on some of the international doors that are being opened through the effort of PS.

12.30 p.m.

In terms of what is happening on the ground, Mrs. Lewis or Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan, if you can just jump in.

Mrs. Lewis: I do not want to speak on the development of the memorandums of understanding with the various entities. Thus far, the Authority has memorandums of understanding that carve out the collaborative role with the counter-trafficking unit, with SWRHA, with THA, Tobago House of Assembly and NCRHA. We have on-going collaborative discussions with a number of entities including the Child Protection Unit, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Community Development, NWRHA, ERHA and TRHA. So those are among the drive to ensure that we are collaborating effectively.

But just to reiterate as well, the National Child Abuse Protocol, our next stage after having drafted the documents, consulting with our partners to see where their role starts, where our roles ends, where our roles overlap and how we can work together to ensure that we navigated any silos that may exist in the system. Separate and apart from having that discussion at that level, we are also engaging on a very on-the-ground type

of consultation within the upcoming months to ensure that we got it right, to ensure that what we discussed in the room upstairs, we have also discussed with our entire operations team. And so hopefully that will ensure that decisions made or recommendations being implemented are practical for those on the ground who actually interface with our clients. So those are among the collaborative steps that we are taking.

And of course our case management team allows for a geographic allocation of persons so that our staff is actually closer within the regions that they hope to operate to build better relationships with the stakeholders in that community for more effective service for clients. We are not fully there yet, it is a work-in-progress but we continue to thrive and strive towards getting 100 per cent efficacy.

Ms. John: Thank you. Director, given that your agency is still fairly young and you are kinda of feeling your way through, I was very interested in your reference to Romania and the conversations—no, no, we will take everything as it comes. Is it that they are seen as a model of best practice and why?

Mrs. Morris-Cummings: We specifically engaged Romania for the issue of deinstitutionalization because as indicated before, we believe that children thrive best in loving family environments. In engaging Ms. Völker-Thomas from Romania, we were allowed the benefit of hearing of her experience in Romania and how they went about reducing deinstitutionalization in Romania. Part of her sharing also had to do with the development of the kinship foster care system. So we started the conversation here. We have an invitation to go to Romania, yes PS. So we are deepening that sort of collaboration and technical trading, the trading of information on the best approaches. So we had spoken to her. We were speaking to UNICEF Barbados and through that Agency, the head there, Mr. Pieter Bult, we were speaking about reducing the number of children and in institutions generally and basically taking a preventive approach to not allow children to come into institutions unless it is a last resort. We understand that sometimes children cannot remain in their home environment.

So based on that conversation, based on that collaboration, the Romanian Child Protection Specialist came and she spent two weeks with us and she left recommendations with us and we are going to engage in some of those recommendations relative to our kinship foster care, the draft policy which was already done and we are also looking at that model relative to deinstitutionalization.

Mr. Gangapersad: Chair, if I may add, please. It is support that is being provided through UNICEF as well as the benefit of that model is what was espoused earlier, it is an integrated child protection model that brings together all of the agencies with an emphasis on deinstitutionalization of children. But it is the model that would probably give the best hope for Trinidad and Tobago given our current situation and given the enormity of the task in terms of providing for children and all of the services that are required. So I think it is a model that is worth looking at, worth pursuing and it would certainly, if we continue in that direction would be able to transform the child protection system adapting some of the approaches that were used in Romania.

Mrs. Gregoire-Roopchan: Chair, if I may? Engaging Romania is really a wider scope for us. We have

recognized the youthfulness of the Children's Authority having been just seven years and there are many other more mature child protection systems as we all know. And as part of that, we understood the need for us to do that reaching out to those various even more mature societies and systems. Romania is just one of them. We would have also engaged Jamaica so we would have spoken with the Jamaican children's authority, that is not the exact name, to hear from them and to share experiences and to see how we can learn from what they are going through and what they are doing as well. So certainly Romania is one of those countries, a more recent one. We would have also had—PS had engagement with Canada recently as well. Again, looking to strengthen the whole Children's Authority system here in Trinidad and Tobago and trying to learn from the other mature and long-standing agencies out there. That is certainly the goal of our engagement with other countries and agencies.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very, very much for that. Colleagues, do we have any more questions for this team? Member John?

Ms. John: No.

Mr. Chairman: Anything else? All right, then it falls on me to thank you all very much for coming today, members of the Children's Authority, the Auditor General's Department and the Office of the Prime Minister, Gender and Child Affairs Unit. I thank you all very much for your presence here today and for being so forthcoming to providing answers to the questions being asked by the Committee in the national interest.

It is my hope, I think it is our hope as a unit and when I say as a unit, I mean all of us as participants in this enterprise that we can find the relevant resources, personnel, financial and otherwise to ensure that we maximize the reach for the children who are in need of support in any form or fashion. It has been a pleasure, it has been a learning experience at least for me and I want to thank you all very much for coming. Again, thank you.

Official: Thank you Chair, thank you, Members.

Meeting adjourned at 12.37 p.m.