

**Response of the
Ministry of Local Government
to the**

**Fourteenth Report
(2013/2014)**

**of the Joint Select Committee appointed to inquire into and
report to Parliament on Municipal Corporations and
Service Commissions**

on a

**Review of the Administration
of the
San Fernando City Corporation**

Fourteenth Report of the Joint Select Committee appointed to inquire into and report to Parliament on Municipal Corporation and Services Commissions on a review of the administration of the San Fernando City Corporation

3.2 The San Fernando City Corporation (SFCC) is continuing its efforts in developing and maintaining new and innovative means of raising finance and increasing its income generation to assist in the operation of the corporation from year to year. However despite the Corporation's best efforts, it is critical that urgent attention be paid to addressing the human and financial constraints that retards its efforts to meet the increasing demands placed by the citizenry of San Fernando. SFCC appreciates the comments of the Committee and will continue to work to ensure its goals are achieved.

3.3 The committee's comments are noted and all subsequent submissions will contain statistical data/evidence to support its claims.

Human Resources

3.5 The concern of the committee is the lengthy period of time which has elapsed since recommendations for the creation of Human Resource positions (police and engineering) were made.

The exercise is being handled with the Public Management Consulting Division (PMCD) of the Ministry of Public Administration. Several meetings were held during the period January 2014 to date and information has been forwarded as requested. The last meeting was held on May 2014.

The following areas are being pursued urgently:

Municipal Police Department Staffing needs

- 1 - Superintendent of Police
- 1 - Police Inspector
- 2 - Police Sergeants
- 4 - Police Corporals
- 24 - Police Constables

Staffing needs at Engineering Department

- 2 -Engineering Assistants II
- 2 -Engineering Assistants I
- 2 -Works Supervisors I

Health Department

- 3- Sanitation Foreman II

As the exercise to create new positions continues, with urgency the short fall of the required personnel are improved in a limited way. Technical requirements are provided through short term employment and trainees from other agencies. These personnel works alongside the Corporation's technical officers but in most cases are retained for the duration of projects. Within the last month, two (2) Municipal Police officers whom would normally occupy front desks were replaced by armed private security officers thereby now having these officers available for other duties.

Municipal Police

3.6 On Wednesday 19th February 2014, Multi Stakeholders Consultation was held at the City Hall Auditorium with the Minister of Local Government, the Honourable Marlene Coudray and all heads of the Municipal Police. Agreements were made that the recommendations made by the Committee are the way to positively move the Municipal Police forward. Our recommendations are as follows:

Proposed strength

One (1) Superintendent of Police,

One (1) Assistant Superintendent of Police,

Two (2) Police Inspectors,

Eight (8) Police Sergeants,

Twelve (12) Police Corporals, and

Seventy-Six (76) Police Constables

Municipal Police Officers are already receiving the One Thousand Dollars (\$1000) as a Special Duty Allowance.

3.7 SFCC has considered the Committee's concern with respect to reporting and jurisdictional consideration that may arise with the arrangement of the Municipal Corporation Police (MCP) being complemented by private Security officers. The practice of joint exercise with private security officers has been discontinued. As a consequence of the depleted Police force requests were made for SRPs since May 2014.

Vacant Lots

3.8 Within the City of San Fernando over fourteen hundred vacant lots have been identified. Documentation on these properties is not updated on a timely basis and more acute in the extended areas of the City; formerly under the purview of the Princes Town Regional Corporation. The records of ownership since 2009 when property taxes were removed, continues to be a challenge since owners/agents have no vested interest in visiting the Rates Department to pay rates and taxes and update information regularly.

The SFCC continues to employ innovative measures to deal with the dilemma, in instances where owners are unknown and/or cannot be contacted; a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is being pursued with the CEPEP Company Ltd and is in its final stages of negotiations.

The recommendations of the committee are noted and endorsed. However, recommendation (i) is pursued, and will definitely go a long way to address the critical need of making owners more responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of their property. Recommendation (ii) only addresses instances where buildings are removed. This will have limited success because this activity does not by and large address the issue of vacant overgrown lots.

The reintroduction of property taxes though, will allow for the recovery of monies expended in instances where the Corporation incur costs in cutting, clearing and maintaining overgrown properties.

Funding

3.9 The following are existing strategies which provide sources of revenue for the Corporation. In most cases these funds are utilized in the maintenance and upgrade of the facility. Presently, SFCC is expanding some facilities with the intention to increase its revenue:

1. Expansion of Areas for vending at Cross Crossing and Harris Promenade to provide for an increase of twenty (20) vendors.
2. Administrative Fees have been collected for applicants registered for new food premises and applications for Liquor Licences.
3. Rental of facilities
 - (i) Auditorium- this facility will be upgraded and charges adjusted appropriately.
 - (ii) San City Cuisine- closed for approximately one (1) year, however refurbishment works have been completed and a new agreement signed with a new service provider.
 - (iii) Skinner Park- Hard surface areas have been rented to T&TEC and Neal & Massy Ltd for staff parking. This facility will be expanded by converting vacant lots (owned by SFCC) into car parks.
4. An increase in the number of service providers for the wrecking of unauthorized parked vehicles within the city from one (1) to two (2). Quotations have been received.
5. Construction of two (2) public car parks at the Waterfront, Lady Hailes Avenue. These projects are approximately fifty percent (50%) completed and is expected to provide services for both the Hospital and the Water Taxi users.

The SFCC also endorses the recommendations set out in the Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform with respect to some degree of financial disclosure. Further, we eagerly await the resumption of the collection and administration of House Rate and Land and Building Taxes as set out in Government Policy on Local Government Transformation and Modernisation (2012).

3.10 The level of infrastructural development was only achieved as a consequence of abandon and vacant land owned by the Public Transport Corporation becoming available for use by SFCC as a consequence of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed in 2012.

The shortage of technical officers does not permit the setting up of a project monitoring and evaluation unit at this present time. However, the SFCC do support the committee's recommendation this will be considered when additional personnel (Technical Officers) are provided to us. The department continues to be assisted by On-the-Job Trainees as these projects are developed and executed.

We endorse the recommendation set out in the Draft White Paper on Local Government Reform (2013) that suggests that a Spatial Planning Unit be established in each Municipal Corporation including San Fernando. Previously a Planning Officer was assigned to San Fernando City Corporation in preparation of a Spatial Plan. However, with the passing of the Bill "**An Act relating to the planning and development of land and to repeal and replace the Town and Country Planning Act, Chap. 35:01**", provision will be made for San Fernando City Corporation to be assigned a full time Land Use Planner.

Public Health Issues

3.11 The decision of Council to compensate Public Health Inspector's for performing extra duties re food surveillance has proven to be quite effective in that the level of sanitation and vending etiquette have improved tremendously. It has also created a level of consciousness amongst patron in that they are now more discerning with respect to the requirements that vendors must now satisfy.

The Cross Crossing Designated Vending zone has proven to be quite popular especially on weekends and nights. The Council has approved funding for a pre-fabricated public toilet facility

to be erected at the site. The Unit is currently being prepared and should be completed by the end of July 2014.

The Designated Fruit Vending area at Harris Promenade is due for upgrade and expansion since a new public toilet facility is to be constructed in close proximity to this vending area.

Recommendation (i) is duly noted and allows for greater synergies with respect to sanitation and support services.

3.12 The “Dine Safe” programme has been an initiative of the Department which was endorsed by the previous Council. It should however not be confused with the legal requirement for the registration of food premises under the Public Health Ordinance. “Dine Safe” is intended to serve as a guide to the public, indicating that food service establishments have satisfied the requirements of the Public Health Department upon inspection. The Certification can be withdrawn similar to Registration which can be withdrawn once good Public Health standards are not maintained.

Street Dwellers

3.13 The Corporation acknowledges the comments from the Committee, with respect to its efforts to collaborate with the NGO at Court Shamrock. Temporary employment was provided by street dwellers in the form of general labour work; in cleaning and repainting the fixtures on Harris Promenade.

The Council is presently organising a public consultation on “Street Dwellers” to be held in August 2014; as a way forward.

Relationship with Statutory Authorities’ Service Commission

3.14 The one-way relationship between the Commission and the Corporation continues, despite efforts made through timely communication and follow-up, as recommended by the Committee. To date, the Corporation operates without Chief Officers, such as City Treasurer/Accountant and City Medical Officer of Health.