

# NINTH

REPORT  
FROM

THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS  
(ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE

EXAMINATION  
OF

the Audited Financial Statements of the National Commission for Self Help Limited (NCSHL) for the Financial Year 2016 and follow up on the Implementation of the Recommendations in the Committee's Fourteenth Report from the 11th Parliament.

## Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee

The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee (P.A.(E).C) established under Section 119(5) of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is mandated to consider and report to the House of Representatives accordingly on:

*“(a) the audited accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements of all enterprises that are owned or controlled by or on behalf of the state; and*

*(b) the Auditor General’s Report on any such accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements.”*

## Current membership

Mr. Wade Mark	Chairman
Mr. Rushton Paray, MP	Vice-Chairman
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	Member
Mrs. Renuka Sagramsingh-Sooklal	Member
Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP	Member
Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing	Member
Mr. Keith Scotland, MP	Member
Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie, MP	Member

## Committee Staff

The current staff members serving the Committee are:

Ms. Keiba Jacob	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Darien Buckmire	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Anesha James	Administrative Assistant
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## Publication

An electronic copy of this report can be found on the Parliament website: [www.ttparliament.org](http://www.ttparliament.org)

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**Members of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee**



**Mr. Wade Mark  
Chairman**



**Mr. Rushton Paray  
Vice-Chairman**



**Ms. Amrita Deonarine  
Member**



**Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds  
Member**



**Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal  
Member**



**Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing  
Member**



**Mr. Keith Scotland  
Member**



**Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie  
Member**

## **Executive Summary**

The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee (PA(E)C) is the Parliamentary Financial Oversight Committee tasked with the responsibility of examining the audited accounts of all State Enterprises that are owned or controlled by the state. The Committee conducted **an examination of the Audited Financial Statements of the National Commission for Self Help Limited (NCSHL) for the Financial Year 2016 and follow up on the Implementation of the Recommendations in the Committee's Fourteenth Report from the 11th Parliament** and produced this report. This report details the issues, endorsements and recommendations made by the Committee to improve NCSHL's performance.

The Report focuses on the followed issues:

1. Status of Outstanding Financial Statements
2. Lack of Internal Audit Function and undeveloped Internal Fraud Policy
3. Reducing the duplication of requests of assistance amongst Government Agencies
4. Revision and revaluation of the criteria for grants
5. Communication Process for Unsuccessful Applicants
6. Lack of formal Strategic Plan
7. Threats identified in the Draft Strategic Plan for the period 2018-2022
8. Critical Vacant Positions
9. Annual cost of NCSHL's Services between 2017 and 2022
10. Strategies to Improve the Commissions Operations
11. Mandate of the Commission - Prioritisation of Projects on a Needs Basis

In light of the Committee's findings, the following recommendations were made:

- *The NCSHL should provide a status update on the completion and submission of the audited financial statements for the years ended September 30 2017 and September 30 2021 to Parliament by June 30 2023;*
- *The NCSHL should submit a report on the specific plans and measureable outcomes on how the Commission intends to improve its reporting publicly on the use of taxpayers monies;*

- *Based on the plans implemented NCHSL should implement stringent processes to adhere to the stipulated deadlines set in Section 3.1 of the State Enterprise Performance Monitoring Manual to Parliament by June 30 2023.*
- *The NCSHL should provide a status update to Parliament by June 30, 2023 on the recruitment of the two (2) Auditing Analysts positions listed on the Approved Organizational Chart and in areas where the Internal Audit function is absent, mechanisms should be implemented so that the existing staff can be trained to carry out the function;*
- *The NCSHL should provide a status update to Parliament by June 30, 2023 on the drafting and approval of audit schedules and plans and the Commission's Internal Audit and Fraud Policies;*
- *The NCSHL should reevaluate its internal controls to ensure operational effectiveness in identifying the gaps in the existing processes and procedures and how the Commission plans to assess and monitor the impact of the Units work and provide an update to Parliament by June 30, 2023.*
- *The NCSHL should submit a status update on the development and implementation of the Shared Inter-Ministry, Department and State Enterprise data base to Parliament by June 30, 2023;*
- *The NCSHL should submit a status update on the revisions to the criteria needed for an applicant to be successfully recommended as well as the revised criteria be submitted to Parliament by June 30, 2023;*
- *The NCSHL should ensure that the implementation of the revised criteria should only apply to new applications allowing the applications already in the system to be fairly critiqued against the criteria in place when those applications were received.*
- *The NCSHL should submit the steps taken by an applicant when applying for grant inclusive of the timeline from applying for the grant to receiving the funds / unsuccessful and how it will continue to address the communication issues plaguing the Commission to the Parliament by June 30, 2023.*
- *The NCSHL should submit a status update on the finalisation and submission of the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan to the MSCD and MoF also indicating what feedback was received to the Parliament by June 30, 2023.*

- *The NCSHL should submit to the Parliament by June 30, 2023 a status update on the measures and mechanisms the Commission will utilise to successfully:*
  - *revise the current performance management system;*
  - *implement proper change management techniques; and*
  - *adhere to proper industrial relations practices and contract management.*
- *The NCSHL should submit a report on challenges the Commission is currently facing with respect to its human resource capacity to Parliament by June 30, 2023;*
- *The NSCHL should submit a status update on recruitment of the vacant positions of Health and Safety Officer, Procurement Manager, Project Manager, Civil Engineering Officer, Payroll Officer, Accounts Payable Coordinator, Budget Coordinator, Treasury and General Accounts Coordinator to Parliament by June 30, 2023;*
- *The NCHSL should develop a workforce planning guide with specific plans to ensure that there are enough resources and skills available to deliver efficient and effective programmes and services and provide an update to Parliament on the progress in implementing this guide with measurable outcomes by June 30, 2023;*
- *The NCSHL should submit a status update on the Commission's review of its organisational structure and the recommendations for same it submitted to the MSCD and the MoF to the Parliament by June 30, 2023; and*
- *The MSCD should submit a report on its position on the NCSHL's request for the revision of terms and conditions of employees at the Commission to Parliament by June 30, 2023.*
- *The NCSHL should submit a status report on its intention to establish satellite and roving offices to decentralise its operations so that its services will be more accessible to citizens across the country to Parliament by June 30, 2023.*
- *The NSCHL should also submit a status update on the Memorandum of Understanding it wants to sign with the PTSC to provide mobile services to its clients who have a long commute to its current three (3) locations to Parliament by June 30, 2023*
- *The NCSHL should identify and report to Parliament by June 30, 2023 the reasons there were instances in the past where some communities promptly received NCSHL's*

*assistance whilst others were left wanting when each was affected by the same adverse weather and the specific plan and measurable outcomes to address this situation.*

In light of the Committee's findings, the following observations were noted:

- *The Committee notes the process used by the NCSHL to assess and award persons applying for its grants and welcomes the revision of the criterion used to select successful applicants to ensure the most deserving and neediest of clients receive the assistance that they required.*
- *The Committee notes the amounts spent each year between 2017 and 2022 on its MRRG, ERRAG and CIDP initiatives as well as the number of grants distributed during that period as well as the number beneficiaries.*
- *The Committee notes initiatives being taken by the NCSHL to improve the Commission's reachability and solve the communication challenges its clients face whilst trying to access its services.*
- *The Committee notes the NCSHL use of its social media platforms, printed media and community outreach programmes to advise and educate the public on how to secure and prepare their properties properly prior to and during periods of inclement weather.*
- *The Committee notes the NCSHL's mandate and is guided by Commission's assurance that it does not prioritise projects based on a community's geographic location.*



## Introduction

### Establishment

The PA(E)C 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.

### Mandate

The Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago mandates that the Committee shall consider and report to the House on the audited accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements of all enterprises that are owned or controlled by, or on behalf of the State.

In addition to the Committee's powers entrenched in the Constitution, the Standing Orders of the House of Representatives and Senate also empower the Committee (but not limited) to:

- a. send for persons, papers and records;
- b. have meetings whether or not the House is sitting;
- 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 Orders<sup>1</sup> 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.

### State Enterprises Performance Standards

The (PA(E)C used the State Enterprises Performance Monitoring Manual as a benchmark to examine the performance of State Enterprises. The manual outlines the framework for compliance with official policy and the monitoring mechanisms to be used in assessing such compliance. The Government of

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<sup>1</sup> Standing Order 110 (6) in the House of Representatives and 100(6) of the Senate.

Trinidad and Tobago monitors the performance of State Enterprises to ensure that these enterprises successfully execute their mandates and maximize value for money for the national stakeholders and shareholders<sup>2</sup>

### Election of the Chairman and Vice-Chairman

In accordance with section 119(6) of the Constitution, the Chairman must be a Member of the Opposition in the Senate. At the first meeting held virtually on Wednesday November 18, 2020, Mr. Wade Mark was elected Chairman and Mr. Rushton Paray was elected Vice-Chairman of the Committee.

### Establishment of Quorum

The Committee is required by the Standing Orders<sup>3</sup> to have a quorum in order to exercise the powers granted to it by the House. A quorum of three (3) Members, inclusive of the Chair or Vice-Chairman), with representatives from both Houses was agreed to by the Committee at its First Meeting held on November 17, 2020.

### Change in Membership

By resolution of the House of Representatives at a sitting held on June 13, 2022, Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie, MP was appointed a Member of the Committee in lieu of Dr. Nyan Gadsby Dolly.

### Determination of Date and Time of Regular meetings

The Committee is required by the Standing Orders<sup>4</sup> to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House. At its Second Meeting, the Committee agreed to meet on the First and Third Wednesday of each month at 9:30 a.m.

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<sup>2</sup> State Enterprise Performance Monitoring Manual – Ministry of Finance Website accessed on March 30, 2022 <https://www.finance.gov.tt/2017/05/19/state-enterprise-performance-monitoring-manual-2011/>

<sup>3</sup> Standing Order 87(2) of the Senate and 97(2) of the House of Representatives

<sup>4</sup> Standing Order 101(b) of the Senate and 111(b) of the House of Representatives

## Methodology

### Determination of the Committee's Work Programme Third Session

At the Committee's Twelfth meeting held on Wednesday February 01, 2023, the Committee identified the following entities for examination during the Third Session of the 12<sup>th</sup> Parliament:

- National Commission for Self Help Limited
- National Maintenance Training and Security Company Limited
- Community Environmental & Protection Enhancement Programme Company Limited;
- Estate Management & Business Development Company Ltd;
- Sports Company of Trinidad & Tobago Limited;
- National Infrastructure Development Company Limited;
- Tourism Trinidad Limited;
- Urban Development Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited
- National Flour Mills Limited;
- National Export Facilitation Organisation of Trinidad and Tobago;
- Trinidad and Tobago National Petroleum Marketing Company Limited; and
- Vehicle Management Corporation of Trinidad and Tobago Limited.

## The Inquiry Process

The Inquiry Process outlines steps taken by the Committee to conduct the inquiry into the operations of NCSHL. The following steps outline the Inquiry Process agreed to by the PA(E)C:

- I. The Committee conducted a review of the responses provided to the Fourteenth Report of the Eleventh Parliament on the Examination of the Audited Accounts, Balance Sheets and other Financial Statements of the National Commission for Self Help (NCSHL) Limited for the financial years 2008 to 2015. Based on the responses provided, the Committee wrote to the relevant entities to determine the status of the implementation of the recommendations.
- II. The Committee also conducted a review of NCSHL's Audited Financial Statements for the Financial Years ended September 30, 2016. Based on an analysis of the financial statements, issues were identified and questions for written response were generated.
- III. Questions for written response were forwarded to NCSHL, Ministry of Sport and Community Development (MSCD) and Ministry of Finance – Investment Division (MOF-ID) on March 10, 2022. NCSHL's responses were received on April 5, 2022, the MSCD's responses were received on March 22, 2022, and the MOF-ID's responses were received on April 26, 2022.
- IV. Preparation of an Issues Paper which identified and summarised matters of concern in the responses provided by the NCSHL. Based on the responses received and the issues identified, the Committee agreed to have a public hearing.
- V. A public hearing was held on November 2, 2022. Representatives from NSCSL, the MSCD and MOF-ID were invited.
- VI. Questions were sent for additional information to the NCSHL, MSCD and MOF-ID after the public hearing on November 9, 2022. The NCSHL's responses were received on November 24, 2022, the MSCD's responses were received on November 17, 2022, and the MOF-ID's responses were received on December 14, 2022.

- VII. Report the Committee's findings and recommendations to Parliament upon conclusion of the inquiry. The Report will be transmitted to the MSCD as the Minister with oversight of the NCSHL for written response within sixty (60) days in accordance with Standing Order 110(6) of the House of Representatives and 100(6) of the Senate.
- VIII. Carry out follow-up to monitor progress in the implementation of recommendations.

## Company Profile<sup>5</sup>

### History

The history of this organization dictates that in 1987, under the stewardship of the Prime Minister Arthur Napoleon Raymond Robinson, a decision was taken to institutionalize the self-help concept through the formation of the National Commission for Self Help Limited. Mr. Robinson said the then government wanted "to promote an entrepreneurial spirit among our citizens making them active agents in the economic life of the nation, rather than passive dependents of the State and victims of trends and forces beyond their control. The National Commission For Self Help is a vital cog in the machinery of the State to provide services necessary in order to fulfill the rich potential of our people throughout the length and breadth of Trinidad and Tobago." Today, twenty-six years later the National Commission For Self Help Limited has managed to carve a niche in the arena of several State Agencies with parallel functions.

### Vision

"The leading Agency in stimulating communities to alleviate poverty and transform lives."

### Mission

"To improve and transform lives through micro and macro infrastructural development, aiding deserving individuals and motivating communities to become self-sufficient."

### Core Values

- Integrity and Equity
- Accountability and Transparency
- Customer Care and People Focused Service
- Communication, Collaboration and Teamwork
- Reliability and Professionalism

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<sup>5</sup> The National Commission For Self Help Limited website accessed on February 22, 2023  
<https://www.ncshl.co.tt/about/about.php>

## Programmes<sup>6</sup>

### 1. Community Infrastructural Development Programme (CID)

The Community Infrastructure Development (CID) Programme allows Community Groups, NGO's, CBO's and FBO's to access funding for community-based infrastructure development projects such as:

1. Roads
2. Drains
3. Bridges
4. Retaining walls
5. Steps
6. Pan theatres
7. Turf wickets
8. Recreation Parks
9. Basketball Courts
10. Community Centers
11. Houses of Worship
12. Water

### 2. Minor Repairs And Reconstruction Grants (MRRG)

The National Commission For Self Help Limited (NCSHL) offers the Minor Repair Reconstruction Grant (MRRG), where assistance is provided to:

1. Families who are affected by Natural Disasters (wind storm, earthquake etc)
2. Fire
3. Flooding
4. Old Age Pensioners
5. Socially Displaced Persons
6. Destitute families

Assistance is provided in the form of a Purchase Order whereby the building materials can be used to replace dilapidated wooden flooring boards, galvanize sheetings, windows frames, doors, steps, partitions etc. The maximum of funding is fifteen thousand Dollars (\$15,000.00) for the repair work and the labor component is to be sourced/provided by the applicant.

### 3. The Emergency Repairs/Reconstruction Assistance Grant (E.R.R.A.G.)

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<sup>6</sup> The National Commission For Self Help Limited website accessed on February 22, 2023  
<https://www.ncshl.co.tt/programmes/programmes.php>

The Emergency Repairs/Reconstruction Assistance Grant (E.R.R.A.G.) is accessible to citizens whose homes have been impacted by natural disasters such as windstorms, earthquakes, tornadoes etc. as well as fires and structural damages due to flooding. The E.R.R.A.G. is valued up to \$25,000.00.

### Board of Directors

- Mr. Adrian Winter Chairman
- Mr. Hayden Mitchell Deputy Chairman
- Mr. Matthew Kailah Director
- Mr. Randy H. Sinanan Director
- Ms. Melissa Morris Director
- Mrs. Kerneisha Prince-King Director

### Management Team

- Mr. Akino Greene Chief Executive Officer (Ag.)
- Mr. Darryl Worrell Corporate Secretary
- Ms. Avel Hendricks Accounts Manager
- Ms. Marina Alexander Internal Auditor
- Mr. Gary Romain Senior Project Officer

### Line Ministry - Ministry of Sport and Community Development

#### **Minister of Sport and Community Development**

- Hon. Shamfa Cudjoe, MP

**Permanent Secretary** - Ms. Angela Edwards

**Deputy Permanent Secretary** - Mrs. Beverly Reid- Samuel



## Issues and Recommendations

In the Committee's examination of NCSHL's, the following issues were identified and the corresponding recommendations and observations made:

### **1. Status of Outstanding Financial Statements.**

According to parliamentary record, the last submitted audited financial statements for the NCSHL were for the year 2016. Section 3.2.5 of the State Enterprise Performance Monitoring Manual which states "State Enterprises are required to submit their Audited Financial Statements (2 originals and 120 copies) to the Minister of Finance within four (4) months of their financial year end. These reports are to be laid in Parliament and subsequently submitted to the Public Accounts and Enterprises Committee for consideration." The Committee inquired into the status of the outstanding financial statements for the years 2017 to 2021. Officials from the NCSHL stated the following:

- On March 25, 2019, the NCSHL held its Annual General Meeting where;
  - the Audited Financial Statements for the period ended September 30, 2016 were received and accepted by Corporation Sole;
- It was agreed that a new External Auditor be appointed as Bob Gopee & Associates served for six (6) years in which the, the Tenders and Procurement Committee recommended Deloitte.
- Communication was subsequently received from Corporation Sole by way of letter dated June 29 2020 and the NCSHL was instructed to "redo the exercise for the selection of an Auditor based on quality, experience and value for money and resubmit the same to the Ministry of Finance (MoF) for approval. The Board of Directors voted in favour of an open bid process where suitably qualified audit firms would be invited via an Expression of Interest to submit a technical bid.
- After the tender submissions were evaluated, the Tenders and Procurement Committee recommended that Moore Business Solutions Trinidad and Tobago is suitable. The same was communicated to Corporation Sole for consideration.
- June 28, 2021 by way of Ordinary Resolution of Shareholders, Moore Business Solutions Trinidad & Tobago Ltd. was selected as the External Auditor.

- The company was engaged on August 10, 2021 to Audit the NCSHL’s financial statements for the periods ending September 30 2017 and September 30th 2018.
- Bob Gopee and Associates was informed that they were no longer the External Auditor for the NCSHL.
- The Fiscal 2017 audit began on September 1, 2021, but experienced delays due to the Covid-19 pandemic and restrictions. The audit is expected to be completed by April 15, 2022. The Fiscal 2018 audit will commence immediately after and is expected to take one (1) month. It is anticipated that the audited financial statements for the periods ended September 30 2017 and September 30 2018 will be submitted to Parliament by June 30 2022. Audited Financial statements for the period ended September 30 2019 should be submitted by September 30 2022. The statements remains outstanding to date.

***Recommendations:***

- ***The NCSHL should provide a status update on the completion and submission of the audited financial statements for the years ended September 30 2017 and September 30 2021 to Parliament by June 30 2023;***
- ***The NCSHL should submit a report on the specific plans and measureable outcomes on how the Commission intends to improve its reporting publicly on the use of taxpayers monies;***
- ***Based on the plans implemented NCHSL should implement stringent processes to adhere to the stipulated deadlines set in Section 3.1 of the State Enterprise Performance Monitoring Manual to Parliament by June 30 2023.***

**2. Lack of Internal Audit Function and undeveloped Internal Fraud Policy**

Improving the delivery of services by the NCSHL is a priority but there appears to be gaps in responsibilities for ensuring their realization. The role of Internal Audit is to provide independent assurance that an organisation’s risk management, governance and internal control processes were operating effectively. The State Enterprises Performance Monitoring Manual states that “Every State Enterprise is required to appoint an Audit Committee. It shall be composed of a minimum of two (2) non-executive directors and other independent Company professionals. The Minister of Finance may appoint other independent professionals to the Committee.” The Audit Committee of the Board should ensure that NCSHL’s internal audit function is most effective within the company. Persons

appointed to this committee should be properly informed of its responsibility so that its financial reports and internal control system can be accurately monitored and efficiency will be fostered.

The Commission does not consistently have an Internal Auditor and consequentially, lacks an Internal Audit policy and the Internal Fraud Policy. Developing the Commission's Internal Fraud Policy was a duty assigned to the Commission's Internal Auditor. The Internal Audit department position for an internal auditor was vacant during the period 2018 to 2022 except for a four (4) month period in 2021. Officials from NCHSL stated that additional staff could not be recruited into the Internal Audit Unit due to budgetary constraints despite the August 2014 Cabinet Approved Organizational Chart for the NCHSL indicating the Internal Audit Unit should comprise of the following positions:

- Internal Auditor – One (1) position
- Auditing Analysts – Two (2) positions

In the Committee's Fourteenth Report, the Committee recommended that "NCHSL should recruit additional qualified staff within its Internal Audit Unit, as reflected in the approved organisational structure, no later than January 30, 2019". In response to the Committee's recommendation, the NCHSL stated that the vacant position of Internal Auditor was filled effective February 9, 2021 but unfortunately, the incumbent resigned from the position effective May 28, 2021. In light of the aforementioned, the NCHSL implemented the following control measures:

- established an Audit Committee;
- developed an Audit schedule of work with deadlines set for each area of activity in the plan;  
and
- an Internal Audit Legal Department.

During the drafting of the NCHSL's Strategic Plan for the period 2022-2026, Officials of NCHSL reviewed the strength of NCHSL's financial controls and auditing practices where gaps were discovered in the existing processes and procedures. As such, the current Board of Directors recognizing the importance of the Internal Auditor to its financial controls, auditing and compliance, prioritised the recruitment of an Internal Auditor. Following the recruitment step of the process, the NCHSL recruited an Internal Auditor effective September 28 2022.

***Recommendations:***

- *The NCSHL should provide a status update to Parliament by June 30, 2023 on the recruitment of the two (2) Auditing Analysts positions listed on the Approved Organizational Chart and in areas where the Internal Audit function is absent, mechanisms should be implemented so that the existing staff can be trained to carry out the function;*
- *The NCSHL should provide a status update to Parliament by June 30, 2023 on the drafting and approval of audit schedules and plans and the Commission's Internal Audit and Fraud Policies;*
- *The NCSHL should reevaluate its internal controls to ensure operational effectiveness in identifying the gaps in the existing processes and procedures and how the Commission plans to assess and monitor the impact of the Units work and provide an update to Parliament by June 30, 2023.*

**3. Reducing the duplication of requests of assistance amongst Government Agencies**

Gaps and lags in data collection contributed to providing excessive support to some, while others in need were ineligible. Elimination of same programme and services offered by other Government Agencies has been a challenge as well as tracking the cost and the benefits. The NCSHL recognises that its services were sometimes accessed by applicants who have already approached other Government Agencies who offered similar types of services such as the Ministry of Rural Development and Local Government and the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services. In an effort to mitigate these occurrences the NCSHL plans to propose and implement the following:

I. Shared Data Space:

It was suggested that an inter-Ministry, Department and State Enterprise data base be developed and made accessible to Ministries, Departments and State Enterprises that offer similar services. Creating a data space such as this will allow for the opportunity to assign applicants specific, personal social grant application identification numbers which can be shared among state agencies. For example, when an applicant applies to NCSHL and accessed another similar type of social service this duplication of requests will be easily and accurately identified.

II. Revision of Criteria for Recommended Applicants:

Currently the criteria that an applicant needs to meet in order to be considered for recommendation consists of the following:

- Completed Minor Repair and Reconstruction or Emergency Repair and Reconstruction Assistance Grant Application Form;
- Land Tenure Documents;
- A form of Identification; and
- A Utility Bill.

These current basic requirements are most often satisfied by the majority of applicants seeking to access NCSHL's services and this wide applicant base increases the probability of these applicants accessing a NCSHL service as well as a similar service at another state agency. By revising its criteria, the Commission will tailor requirements to identify and facilitate its intended client base which include:

- Families who were affected by Natural Disasters;
- Fire;
- Flooding;
- Old Age Pensioners; and
- Socially Displaced Persons,

Ensuring more stringent criteria is in place will substantiate those persons who truly to access NCSHL's services from those who should be forwarded to another Ministry, Department or State Enterprise more suited for their needs.

***Recommendations:***

- *The NCSHL should submit a status update on the development and implementation of the Shared Inter-Ministry, Department and State Enterprise data base to Parliament by June 30, 2023;*
- *The NCSHL should submit a status update on the revisions to the criteria needed for an applicant to be successfully recommended as well as the revised criteria be submitted to Parliament by June 30, 2023;*
- *The NCSHL should ensure that the implementation of the revised criteria should only apply to new applications allowing the applications already in the system to be fairly critiqued against the criteria in place when those applications were received.*

**4. Revision and revaluation of the criteria for grants**

Government programmes and services are experiencing significant challenges such as budgetary constraints and the rising cost of construction materials. With the cost of

construction materials consistently increasing, NCSHL's CEO indicated that the Commission's budget of \$21 million for fiscal 2023, which has to be distributed across all districts in Trinidad and Tobago, assists less persons each year. As such, the Committee inquired into the criteria used to select and award Emergency Repair and Reconstruction Grant (ERRAG) recipients from the pool of successful applicants. The NCSHL stated that its Project Management Department was populated with Senior Project Officers and Project Officers who are tasked with conducting site visits and assessments of persons applying for ERRAGs. It was further stated that during these assessments, the Project Management Personnel will assess the damage to applicants' properties which may have resulted from natural disasters and make recommendations based on the extent of the damage as well as the remedial work that needs to be done. That criteria that may be used to select emergency cases to be treated with urgency include:

- i Joint income of the Household- This will determine if the applicant is in a position to initiate repair work themselves or whether the NCSHL should immediately intervene ;
- ii Household information- Household constitutes elderly or disabled occupants who may require immediate assistance ;
- iii Extent of Damage to Property – The Project Management Personnel's assessment will indicate the extent of damage done to the property due to the natural disaster, the extent of this damage is used as a criterion to determine the award of a grant ; and
- iv Recommended remedial work – The type of remedial work recommended may also be used as a criteria when awarding an ERRAG.

Officials from the NCSHL informed the Committee that the new Board of Directors initiated a review of the current criteria used to select successful applicants. With there being no salary limit in place to access the NCSHL's grants any individual from any income group could approach the NCSHL for assistance once their claims were legitimate.

***Observation:***

- ***The Committee notes the process used by the NCSHL to assess and award persons applying for its grants and welcomes the revision of the criterion used to select successful applicants to ensure the most deserving and neediest of clients receive the assistance that they required.***

## 5. Communication Process for Unsuccessful Applicants

The NCSHL informed the Committee that a communication drive was in place to inform all the unsuccessful applicants of the reasons for an application for a grant or grants offered by the NCSHL were unsuccessful since there has been a backlog of a number of requests for status of applications from applicants dating back several years. Officials from the NCSHL stated that the Commission would have previously sent to the applicant a “Not Recommended” letter without specific details on why the application was refused. It was highlighted that the new letters will now be personalized to each applicant detailing why their application was not accepted thus allowing the applicant to modify their application and resubmit, if eligible for assistance. The NCSHL stated that a “Not Recommended” letter would have been mailed to any applicant who failed to meet any of the following criterion:

- i A citizen of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago;
- ii Income eligibility (Household size concerning monthly income/poverty line);
- iii Senior citizen/fire victim/destitute/victim of natural disaster;
- iv Community-driven projects (Applicant prepared to coordinate the necessary repair/reconstruction work);
- v The dwelling house must be owner-occupied;
- vi Land Tenure/ Rent Receipts (ownership/declaration/permission letter);
- vii The scope of work was not too large or speaks to an extension of the home;
- viii The applicant has not received a grant within a five (5) year period (unless specifically approved by Board); and
- ix Works required were not for the aesthetics of the home.

### ***Recommendations:***

- ***The NCSHL should submit the steps taken by an applicant when applying for grant inclusive of the timeline from applying for the grant to receiving the funds / unsuccessful and how it will continue to address the communication issues plaguing the Commission to the Parliament by June 30, 2023.***

## **6. Lack of formal Strategic Plan**

The NCSHL has been operating without a formal Strategic Plan for many years despite several attempts to formalise one. The Committee inquired on the development of the NCSHL formal Strategic Plan. The following response was given:

- On December 28, 2017, the NCSHL entered into an agreement with Grace Talma Associates and Company Limited to provide professional service for the development of a Strategic Plan.
- On July 18, 2018, the Strategic Plan 2018 – 2022 was submitted to the Ministry of Finance (Corporation Sole).
- On November 29, 2019, the then Board of Directors reviewed the Strategic Plan in order to make the relevant changes to the Operational Plans and collect further information.
- On February 20, 2020 the revised Strategic Plan 2019 – 2023 was then submitted to the Ministry of Finance (Corporation Sole) and the Commission’s Line Ministry at the time – The Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts.
- The NCSHL resubmitted its Strategic Plan for the period 2019-2023 on June 25, 2021 to Corporation Sole and its Line Ministry. On July 27, 2022, the Board of Directors received feedback and guidance from Corporation Sole which highlighted that a review of the plan was urgent and necessary to ensure that the company’s mandate and the focus on self-help and community development was effectively captured in the Strategic Plan.
- As such, in August 2022 the Board of Directors and Management set out to conduct a further review of the Strategic Plan in the context of its original mandate to ensure adequate focus is placed on strategic plans in the area of self-help and community development initiatives.
- A Strategic Plan which will cover the period 2022-2026 will be finalized and submitted to NCSHL’s Line Ministry and Corporation Sole on November 30, 2022 and hoping to receive the relevant approvals shortly thereafter.
- The initial cost of the consultancy was one hundred and sixty-eight thousand, seven hundred and fifty dollars (\$168,750.00). The cost of the consultant’s re-engagement to review the Strategic Plan in keeping with the guidance of Corporation Sole was forty-five thousand (\$45,000.00)



***Recommendation:***

- ***The NCSHL should submit a status update on the finalisation and submission of the 2022-2026 Strategic Plan to the MSCD and MoF also indicating what feedback was received to the Parliament by June 30, 2023.***

**7. Threats identified in the Draft Strategic Plan for the period 2018-2022**

The conceptualization of the NCHSL draft strategic plan for the period 2018-2022, three (3) threats to the company's operations were identified namely inconsistent appraisal practices, barriers to change management and risk of litigation at a cost to commission. The NCSHL confirmed that it was in the process of developing a comprehensive plan to mitigate these threats as identified in the Strategic Plan's SWOT Analysis and proposed the following plans to treat with the:

**I. Inconsistent appraisal practices:**

Revising the current Performance Management System – To address the threat of inconsistent appraisal practices the NCSHL intends to revise its current performance management system and put forward recommendations to the Board for approval to implement. The NCSHL has been revising its Human Resource policies and procedures which include its performance management system. The purpose of this review was to realign the current system to one which was target based, encouraging collaborative work between managers, supervisors and staff as well as providing a form of feedback on employees' performance. When this revision process was completed and recommendations approved were implemented, all staff will be trained in the use of the revised performance management system so that it will be applied equitably across the organization for its intended purpose.

**II. Barriers to change management:**

Implementing Proper Change Management techniques – To overcome barriers to change management, proper change management practices will be adhered to. When an initiative was proposed to be implemented and will result in some form of change, the following steps will be followed:

- i. Employees will be made aware of the need for the change;
- ii. Employees will be made aware of the advantages of the change;
- iii. Employees will be equipped with the knowledge of the effects of the change, which will in turn ensure that they were able to facilitate the change; and
- iv. Systems will be put in place to reinforce the change

Additional Change Agents will be trained for specific transitions when initiatives that will effect change were to be implemented to ensure that the change was communicated throughout the organization and there is general staff buy in.

III. Risk of litigation at a cost to commission:

Adhering to Proper Industrial Relations Practices and Contract Management – To mitigate the risk of litigation, the NCSHL has already made strides in adhering to proper industrial relations practices as well as proper contract management.

This approach varies from previous situations where employees’ matters were dealt with out of the scope of proper industrial relations practices, the NCSHL ensures that matters were handled in such a way that if a grievance was registered the proper process would have been followed by the Commission.

Additionally, the NCSHL was staffed with the relevant personnel in the Human Resource Department and Legal Departments to provide appropriate advice and guidance when dealing with matters that may result in litigation. Also, external counsel was also engaged on an as needs basis to ensure proper advice is submitted when making decisions. These corrective measures have already reflected a significant decline in the number of matters brought against NCSHL before the courts. The following is a synopsis of matters registered with the court over the last five years:

Year	Number of Matters
2018	1
2019	7
2020	5
2021	1
2022	1

**Recommendation:**

- *The NCSHL should submit to the Parliament by June 30, 2023 a status update on the measures and mechanisms the Commission will utilise to successfully:*
  - *revise the current performance management system;*
  - *implement proper change management techniques; and*
  - *adhere to proper industrial relations practices and contract management.*

## 8. Critical Vacant Positions

While the issue of staff retention due to uncompetitive compensation packages has been an issue plaguing the Commission, this issue has not been formally put forward to the Line Ministry as a major area of concern. However, NCSHL continues to write to the Line Ministry requesting updates on the request for the revision of terms and conditions of employees at the Commission with its most recent correspondence being forwarded to the Ministry in June 2022. Based on the organisational chart approved by the Cabinet, several key positions of NCSHL were absent in the project management, finance and legal units. The following vacant key personnel positions included:

- Project manager;
- Civil engineering officer;
- Health and safety officer;
- Payroll officer,
- Accounts payable coordinator,
- Budget coordinator,
- Treasure and general accounts coordinator;
- Communications manager;
- Procurement manager; and
- Paralegal.

The current Board of Directors recognized that the filling of those key vacancies were critical to fulfilling the mandate of the NCSHL. As such, recruitment and selection procedures were initiated and completed for a number of these vacancies identified above. The following updates were given regarding the above mentioned vacancies:

- The job position of Health and Safety Officer was advertised internally and externally during the period August 29, 2022 to September 13, 2022. Applicants were short listed and interviews were scheduled to be conducted by December 2, 2022.
- The job position of Communications Manager was advertised internally and externally during the period August 29, 2022 to September 13, 2022. Applicants were shortlisted and interviews were conducted on October 19, 2022. The successful candidate assumed duty with NCSHL on November 7, 2022.
- The job position of Procurement Manager was advertised internally and externally during the period August 29, 2022 to September 13, 2022. Applicants were shortlisted and interviews

were conducted on October 27, 2022. The successful candidate was presented with an offer in keeping with CPO guidelines however the candidate submitted a counter-offer which is receiving the attention of the Board and Line Ministry.

- The job position of Paralegal was advertised internally and externally during the period August 4, 2022 to August 18, 2022. Applicants were short listed and interviews were conducted on November 9, 2022. The successful candidate was presented an offer of employment on November 17, 2022, s accepted the offer and scheduled to assume duty with NCSHL effective December 1, 2022.
- The job positions; Project Manager, Civil Engineering Officer, Payroll Officer, Accounts Payable Coordinator, Budget Coordinator, Treasury and General Accounts Coordinator were to be advertised and the recruitment procedure initiated in December 2022.

***Recommendations:***

- ***The NCSHL should submit a status update to Parliament by June 30, 2023 on the following:***
  - ***challenges the Commission is currently facing with respect to its human resource capacity;***
  - ***recruitment of the vacant positions of Health and Safety Officer, Procurement Manager, Project Manager, Civil Engineering Officer, Payroll Officer, Accounts Payable Coordinator, Budget Coordinator, Treasury and General Accounts Coordinator;***
  - ***the Commission’s review of its organisational structure and the recommendations for same it submitted to the MSCD and the MoF; and***
  - ***request for the revision of terms and conditions of employees at the Commission.***
- ***The NCHSL should develop a workforce planning guide with specific plans to ensure that there are enough resources and skills available to deliver efficient and effective programmes and services and provide an update to Parliament on the progress in implementing this guide with measurable outcomes by June 30, 2023;***

**9. Annual cost of NCSHL’s Services between 2017 and 2022**

NCSHL’s priority services, which have not changed since the company’s incorporation include the following:

- Disbursement of Minor Repair and Reconstruction Grants (MRRG) to low-income homeowners;
- Disbursement of Emergency Reconstruction Repair Assistance Grants (ERRAG) to those affected by natural and other disasters; and
- Community Infrastructure Development Projects (IDP).

The table below illustrates the annual costs and beneficiaries of Minor Repair and Reconstruction Grants; Emergency Reconstruction Repair Assistance Grants and Community Infrastructure Development Projects that have been disbursed/completed in each year between 2017 to 2022.

YEAR	PROJECT TYPE								
	MRRG			ERRAG			CIDP		
	\$	Grants Distributed	Beneficiaries	\$	Grants Distributed	Beneficiaries	\$	Grants Distributed	Beneficiaries
Fiscal 2017	4,212,839	304	936	6,879,775	363	1522	2,413,316	63	2758
Fiscal 2018	526,711	39	65	954,549	51	109	475,045	7	3046
Fiscal 2019	4,159,215	309	1009	3,377,628	203	854	1,012,497	28	11750
Fiscal 2020	10,127,516	716	1976	5,629,451	293	895	1,091,382	26	20318
Fiscal 2021	9,077,460	648	1837	3,778,124	191	506	506,533	15	447
Fiscal 2022	10,374,703	730	1727	5,233,580	251	556	1,027,231	20	1542

**Observation:**

- *The Committee notes the amounts spent each year between 2017 and 2022 on its MRRG, ERRAG and CIDP initiatives as well as the number of grants distributed during that period as well as the number beneficiaries.*

## **10. Strategies to Improve the Commissions Operations**

### **I. Decentralising of the NCSHL's operations**

The NCSHL intends to decentralise its operations so that its services will be more accessible to citizens across the country. Memorandums of Understanding with service providers such as the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC) were considered as an option to provide a version of mobile service to clients similar to the same undertaken by YTEPP. In addition to a mobile unit, the Commission intends to establish satellite and roving offices across communities where the commute to its current three (3) locations may be difficult for these residents.

### **II. Improving the NCSHL's community presence**

The NCHSL has recognised that it plays an important role in helping build communities nationwide as a way of improving the company's outreach initiatives, the NCSHL identified the following specific plans and measurable outcomes to be implemented to solve the communication challenges applicants encounters:

- Phone Calls – Telephone mailboxes will be cleared so that incoming calls via Communications & Complaints, Administration, and relevant units will be received.
- Education Programme – Programmes will be developed and executed via Social Media Campaigns and frequency of posts to highlight the Commission's work, Accessibility to Grants, and Tips on Securing Vulnerable Homes, especially during the Wet Hurricane Season.
- Stakeholders Engagement – Relationships will be built and strengthened with relevant stakeholders, where necessary e.g. the National Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Month Committee (hosted by ODPM) to increase awareness of the services of the Commission.
- Outreach Programmes – An increased number of outreach programs geared towards rural communities across Trinidad and Tobago will be implemented to improve the NCSHL's stakeholder relations.
- Feedback/Complaints Forms – These forms will be made accessible on the website as well as at all the NCSHL's front desks. Feedback forms will also be shared at outreach sessions.

### **III. NCSHL's response to Climate Change and Adverse Weather**

The NCSHL has acknowledged that climate change has been fueling the scale of damage and loss of property experienced during the rainy season and periods of inclement weather. The NCSHL plans to mitigate the effects of climate change and adverse weather on its work by embarking on the following initiatives:

- Public Education Campaigns: Educating the public on securing their property (roofs, windows, etc.) properly during incidents of inclement weather. This will be facilitated by our Project Management Department and Communications Unit through our social media platforms, printed media and community outreach programmes; and
- Advising on Home Preparation for inclement weather: Advising the public to affix guttering and down pipes to their roof which should be channeled to nearby drains. This will lessen instances of landslides and landslips which require NCSHL's intervention.

NCSHL further stated that it will continue to partner with the Office of Disaster Preparedness and Management, the Disaster Management Unit of Regional Corporations and the Tobago Emergency Management Agency on how to treat with the impact of climate change and the effects of adverse weather on the citizenry of Trinidad and Tobago.

***Observations:***

- *The Committee notes initiatives being taken by the NCSHL to improve the Commission's reachability and solve the communication challenges its clients face whilst trying to access its services.*
- *The Committee notes the NCSHL use of its social media platforms, printed media and community outreach programmes to advise and educate the public on how to secure and prepare their properties properly prior to and during periods of inclement weather.*

***Recommendations***

- *The NCSHL should submit a status update on its intention to establish satellite and roving offices to decentralise its operations so that its services will be more accessible to citizens across the country to Parliament by June 30, 2023.*
- *The NSCHL should also submit a status update on the Memorandum of Understanding it wants to sign with the PTSC to provide mobile services to its clients who have a long commute to its current three (3) locations to Parliament by June 30, 2023*

## **11. Mandate of the Commission - Prioritisation of Projects on a Needs Basis**

During the public hearing, questions surrounding the perception of preferential treatment with respect to households in certain districts receiving grants in quick time whilst others were still left without assistance. The high winds and losses experienced on Thursday 2 September 2021 in Trinidad was the example discussed where the NCSHL distributed \$3 million in grants to persons only along the East/West Corridor. NCSHL's CEO states that the Commission does not practice preferential treatment in the distribution of grants and cited that problems with filling out of application forms was the likely cause of persons not successfully receiving a grant from the NCSHL. In its written response to the Committee on this issue, the NCSHL stated the following:

“According to NCSHL's Memorandum of Association dated April 14, 1997, its mandate is as follows:

- to nurture and develop a culture of self-help and self-reliance within communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago;
- to facilitate the promotion, design and implementation of self-help projects throughout Trinidad and Tobago;
- to stimulate the development of individual and community industry, enterprise and cooperative efforts,
- to monitor the implementation of self-help projects, and
- to identify, develop and implement programmes that may create scope and opportunities for the further involvement of the national community in self-help activities.

As such, the NCSHL does not limit its infrastructural development projects to rural communities, nor does the Commission prioritise projects based on a community's geographic location. The Commission serves communities all across Trinidad and Tobago and development projects were selected based on criteria which include a minimum of five (5) households benefiting from the project to be considered for approval. As per NCSHL's mandate, the NCSHL facilitates varying levels of development for communities throughout Trinidad and Tobago, which include:

- Roadworks;
- Bridges;
- Cultural Projects;
- Social Projects;
- Drainage;



- Recreation;
- Retaining Walls;
- Schools; and
- Steps.”

***Observation:***

- *The Committee notes the NCSHL’s mandate and is guided by Commission’s assurance that it does not prioritise projects based on a community’s geographic location.*

***Recommendation***

- *The NCSHL should identify and report to Parliament by June 30, 2023 the reasons there were instances in the past where some communities promptly received NCSHL’s assistance whilst others were left wanting when each was affected by the same adverse weather and the specific plan and measurable outcomes to address this situation.*

## Conclusion

In light of the above, the Committee notes that NCSHL is committed to the continued transformation of lives through its micro and macro infrastructural development programmes thereby aiding deserving individuals and motivating communities to become self-sufficient across Trinidad and Tobago.

The Committee is optimistic that the company will continue to strategically position itself as the leading agency that not only stimulates community development nationwide but also alleviates poverty and improves the standard of living of the citizenry that qualify for its grants.

The Committee therefore awaits the responses of the Minister of Sport and Community Development to the recommendations proposed above, in accordance with Standing Orders 100(6) and 110(6) of the Senate and the House of Representatives respectively which states inter alia that –

*“The Minister responsible for the Ministry or Body under review shall, not later than sixty (60) days after a report from a Standing Committee relating to the Ministry or Body, has been laid upon the Table, present a paper to the House responding to any recommendations or comments contained in the report which are addressed to it....”*

The Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee respectfully submits this Report for the consideration of the Parliament.

Sg.  
Mr. Wade Mark  
Chairman

Sgd.  
Mr. Rushton Paray, MP  
Vice-Chairman

Sgd.  
Ms. Amrita Deonarine  
Member

Sgd.  
Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal  
Member

Sgd.  
Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds, MP  
Member

Sgd.  
Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing  
Member

Sgd.  
Mr. Keith Scotland, MP  
Member

Sgd.  
Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie, MP  
Member

Appendix 1: Meeting Minutes **THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE**  
-  
**SECOND SESSION, TWELFTH PARLIAMENT**  
**MINUTES OF THE ELEVENTH MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY ON**  
**WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 02, 2022 AT 9:39 A.M.**

Present were:

Mr. Wade Mark	-	Chairman
Mr. Rushton Paray	-	Vice-Chairman
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	-	Member
Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing	-	Member
Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal	-	Member
Mr. Keith Scotland	-	Member
Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie	-	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacob	-	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	-	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Darien Buckmire	-	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Rachel Nunes	-	Graduate Research Assistant

Absent was:

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds	-	Member
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### **CALL TO ORDER**

- 1.1 At 9:39 a.m., the Chairman called the meeting to order and welcomed those present.

### **INTRODUCTION OF THE NEW COMMITTEE MEMBER**

- 2.1 The Chairman announced that Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie replaced Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly with effect from June 13, 2022.
- 2.2 The Chairman welcomed the new Member to the Committee and thanked the former Member for her service.

### **THE EXAMINATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE TENTH MEETING**

- 3.1 The Committee examined the Minutes of the Tenth (10th) Meeting held on Wednesday June 1, 2022.
- 3.2 There being no omissions or corrections, the Minutes were confirmed on a motion moved by Mr. Rushton Paray and seconded by Ms. Amrita Deonarine.

### **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES OF THE TENTH MEETING**

- 4.1 With reference to item 8.2, page 4: the Chairman informed Members that the responses to the request for additional information sent to the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited were received by the Secretariat on August 25, 2022 and used to draft the Committee's Report. The responses were uploaded to the Rotunda (e-repository) for Members consideration.

### **CONSIDERATION OF WORK SCHEDULE AND COMMITTEE CALENDAR FOR THE THIRD SESSION, TWELFTH PARLIAMENT**

- 5.1 The Chairman invited Members to review the proposed work schedule and calendar for the Third Session, Twelfth Parliament prepared by the Secretariat and circulated for Members consideration.
- 5.2 The Chairman invited Members to make any comments and or suggestion. After some discussion, it was agreed that Members review the work schedule and provide feedback to the Secretariat by 4:00 p.m. on Monday November 7, 2022.

### **CONSIDERATION OF COMMITTEE'S DRAFT REPORTS**

- 6.1 The Chairman invited Members to review the draft Seventh and Eighth Reports of the Committee which were circulated to Members via email and uploaded to Rotunda for comments and suggestions.
- 6.2 The Chairman informed Members that comments were received from Member Deonarine and incorporated into the Draft Reports.
- 6.3 The Chairman invited Members to make any comments and or suggestion. After some discussion, it was agreed that Members review the draft seventh and eighth reports and provide comments to the Secretariat by Friday November 4, 2022.

### **Other Business**

- 7.1 The Chairman informed Members that the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) extended an invitation to Members to participate in new online courses which focus on Climate Change, Accessibility and the Public Accounts Committee. An email was sent to Members to register for these online courses. Members were informed to contact the Secretariat via email at [housesec@tpparliament.org](mailto:housesec@tpparliament.org) for clarification.

### **PRE-HEARING DISCUSSION RE: NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SELF HELP LIMITED (NCSHL)**

- 8.1 The Chairman reminded Members that the purpose of the virtual public hearing was to examine the Audited Financial Statements of the National Commission for Self Help Limited (NCSHL) for the financial year 2016 and follow-up on the Implementation of the Recommendations in the Committees' Fourteenth Report, 11th Parliament.

8.2 Members discussed the issues of concern and the general approach for the public hearing.

### **SUSPENSION**

9.1 There being no further business for discussion in camera, the Chairman suspended the meeting at 10:05 a.m. to reconvene in public.

### **RESUMPTION: IN PUBLIC - AN EXAMINATION INTO THE AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SELF HELP LIMITED (NCSHL) FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2016 AND FOLLOW-UP ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE COMMITTEE'S FOURTEENTH REPORT, FROM THE 11TH PARLIAMENT.**

10.1 The Chairman called the public meeting to order at 10:14 a.m.

10.2 The following officials joined the meeting:

#### **National Commission for Self Help Limited (NCSHL)**

- Mr. Adrian Winter - Chairman
- Mr. Hayden Mitchell - Deputy Chairman
- Mr. Matthew Kailah - Director
- Mr. Randy H. Sinanan - Director
- Ms. Melissa Morris - Director
- Mrs. Kerneisha Prince-King - Director
- Mr. Akino Greene - Chief Executive Officer (Ag.)
- Mr. Darryl Worrell - Corporate Secretary
- Ms. Avel Hendricks - Accounts Manager
- Ms. Marina Alexander - Internal Auditor
- Mr. Gary Romain - Senior Project Officer

#### **Ministry of Sport and Community Development**

- Mrs. Beverly Reid-Samuel - Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
- Ms. Ann Bemontes - Research Officer II
- Mrs. Jacqueline Weekes-Penco - Planning Co-ordinator

#### **Ministry of Finance – Investments Division (MoF-ID)**

- Mr. Ryan Maharaj - Acting Director, Agro-based,

- Ms. Krystal Seepersad - Research Officer II (Ag.)

10.3 Key Issues Discussed:

1. The rationale for the non-submission of the NCSHL's 2017 to 2021 audited financial statements to Parliament;
2. The current status of the NCSHL's outstanding audited financial statements, the expected audit completion dates and subsequent transmission to Parliament;
3. The NCSHL's current auditors and the date their services were retained;
4. The NCSHL's previous auditors and the date their services were terminated;
5. The NCSHL's re-tendering for its new external auditor after the Ministry of Finance raised concerns over its selective tendering process
6. The status of the two-year gap between appointing a new auditor;
7. The rationale for the appointment of the Interim Chief Executive Officer's (CEO);
8. The reasons for the appointment of a permanent CEO;
9. The measures taken to address the increasing high costs of construction materials;
10. The sum of funds an applicant can access under the Minor Repair and Reconstruction Grant (MRRG) and the Emergency Reconstruction Repair Assistance Grant (ERRAG);
11. The challenges the NCSHL's faces in processing applications for grants;
12. The requirements for the processing of applications for the MRRG and ERRAG;
13. The NCSHL's fiscal 2023 allocations for the MRRG, ERRAG and the Community Infrastructure Development Projects (IDP);
14. The current number of applications to be processed for the MRRG and ERRAG and the standard processing period;
15. The demographic data used to analyse application for grants received by the NCSHL;
16. The procedure used to notify an applicant that their application was unsuccessful and the reasons for the unsuccessful application;
17. The criteria and processing of applications when a nationwide disaster occurs;
18. The NCSHL's progress of digitizing its internal processes;
19. The status of the implementation of a formal Internal Fraud Policy;
20. The status of the NCSHL's Strategic Plan;
21. The status of the execution of the NCSHL's operational obligations;
22. The NCSHL's communication strategy and proposed outreach programme;
23. The misuse of construction materials;
24. The timeframe to approve the NCSHL's organisational structure and to address the Commission's staffing limitations;
25. The creation of three short term positions by NCSHL's Board of Directors to meet the urgent and critical needs of the Commission;
26. The key performance indicators used to gauge the NCSHL's grant processing capabilities;
27. The number of motor vehicles with and without NCHSL logo utilised by the NCSHL's;
28. The terms and conditions including the travelling allowance of the Interim CEO; and
29. The complaints made by Tobago clients about services received and the subsequent resignation of the Tobago Office's staff.

**Please see the Verbatim Notes for the detailed oral submission by the witnesses.**

11.1 The Chairman thanked the officials for attending the virtual meeting and they were excused.

11.2 The Committee agreed that additional questions would be sent to NCSHL.

**[Please see Appendix 1]**

### **SUSPENSION**

12.1 At 12:43 p.m., the Chairman suspended the public meeting to resume in-camera for a post-mortem discussion with Members only.

### **RESUMPTION: IN CAMERA**

13.1 The Committee resumed in camera at 12:44 p.m.

13.1 The Chairman informed Members of the need to return to physical meetings starting in January 2023 and proposed that both physical and virtual meetings be conducted on a rotational basis. A discussion ensued. The Committee agreed to resume physical meetings.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

14.1 There being no other business, the Chairman thanked Members for their attendance. The Committee agreed that the next meeting of the Committee will be held on November 16, 2022 at 9:30 a.m. At this meeting, the committee will examine the Audited Financial Statements of the Community Environmental & Protection Enhancement Programme Company Limited (CEPEP) for the years 2013 and 2014 and follow up into the Committee's Fourth Report, 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament.

14.2 The adjournment was taken at 12:50 p.m.

**We certify that these Minutes are true and correct.**

CHAIRMAN

SECRETARY

*November 2, 2022*



**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

*ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS ARISING FROM MEETING OF THE PUBLIC  
ACCOUNTS [ENTERPRISES] COMMITTEE*

**Request for Additional Information – Questions to the NCSHL**

1. What are the terms and conditions offered to Trinidad residents required to work in the Tobago office?
2. What are the terms and conditions of the three short-term positions created by the Board of Directors to meet the urgent and critical needs of the Commission?
3. Provide the Chief Personnel Officer's guidelines which stipulate the NCSHL's Corporate Secretary's remuneration package.
4. What plans are in place to reduce the duplication of services offered by the NCSHL and other Ministries and Departments?
5. In light of the NCSHL's budgetary constraints and rising cost of construction materials, what criteria is used to select and award ERRAG recipients from the pool of successful applicants?
6. What communication processes were utilised for applicants whose applications was rejected, not properly completed, or not approved because of budgetary constraints?
7. Based on the balance scorecard methodology that was used in the strategic plan to arrive at the strategic goals, objectives, initiatives and respective KPIs (pg. 40-49), state the progress on achieving each of the targets listed?
8. In terms of achieving key performance indicators (KPIs), what 10 KPIs were prioritised by the NCSHL?
  - a. Provide an explanation for why each listed KPI was prioritised
9. For those KPI targets that were less than 50% was completed:
  - a. Provide the reasons for them not being completed; and
  - b. How does the NCSHL plan to ensure its commitment to fulfilling the target?
10. Does the NCSHL intend to develop a comprehensive plan to overcome the threats identified on pg. 28 of the strategic plan? If so, how does the NCHSL plan to comprehensively deal with:
  - Inconsistent appraisal practices;
  - Barriers to change management; and
  - Risk of litigation at a cost to commission.
11. What plans are in place to deal with the high turnover of staff?
12. Based on the organizational chart approved by the cabinet, several key positions of NCSHL were absent in the project management, finance and legal units. The following key personnel are:
  - Project manager;
  - Civil engineering officer;
  - Health and safety officer;
  - Payroll officer, accounts payable coordinator, budget coordinator, treasure and general accounts coordinator;
  - Communications manager;

- Procurement manager; and
  - Paralegal.
    - a. How is NCSHL able to fulfill its mandate effectively without these positions?
    - b. Provide a status when these key personnel will be recruited.
13. Based on submissions (appendixes 19 and 20), there were many cases of litigation against NCSHL, what procurement process was adopted to select the legal firms recruited by NCSHL in these cases?
14. How does the NCSHL assess the effects of climate change on the demand for the MRRG and ERRAG?
- a. How does the NCHSL plan to mitigate the effect of climate change and adverse weather on its work?
  - b. Which ministries, departments, agencies do NCHSL plan to partner with to deal with the impact of climate change and the effects of adverse weather?

## Questions Arising from Written Submissions

### General Questions

#### *Based on response to Question 2 Page 1*

1. What does an ‘effective internal and external communications strategy’ entail?
  - a. How was the strategy’s effectiveness assessed?
  - b. What have been the results of these assessments thus far?
2. What is the status of the comprehensive and detailed business process review used to examine and map key departmental processes to close gaps, streamline operations, and increase efficiency?
3. What is the NCSHL’s definition of “a strong Human resource function”?
  - a. Where is the status of the “Human resource function”?
  - b. How many employees were offered training?
4. What is the status of the review of the organizational structure?
5. Which policies and procedures have been updated and documented?
6. Which policies and procedures have not to be updated and documented?

#### *Based on response to Question 3 Page 1*

1. Provide the number of Minor Repair and Reconstruction Grants; Emergency Reconstruction Repair Assistance Grants and Community Infrastructure Development Projects that have been disbursed/completed in each year between 2017 to 2022?
  - a. What was the annual cost of each and the number of beneficiaries served?

#### *Based on response to Question 4 Page 2*

1. What is the staffing complement of the Monitoring & Evaluation Unit’s?
  - a. Is the unit appropriately staffed?

2. Since the Monitoring & Evaluation Unit's establishment in March 2021, state the challenges encountered in executing the Units roles and responsibilities?
  - a. How were these challenges addressed?

### Follow-up Questions based on Fourteenth Report of the PAEC

#### Based on Response to Question 1 on Recommendation 1.2 Pages 4-5

1. Who was the consultant retained to develop a four (4) year Strategic Plan (2019 to 2023)?
2. When did the engagement commence?
3. What was the total cost of the consultancy?
4. When was the Board approved Strategic Plan sent to Ministry of Finance- Investments Division and Line Ministry for review?
5. With regard to the four (4) year Strategic Plan (2019 to 2023) ending next year, has the NSCHL begun the process of developing a new Strategic Plan post 2023?
  - a. Provide a status on the development of a new strategic plan.

#### Based on Response to Question 1 on Recommendation 3.1 Pages 6-11

1. What was the outcome of the review of the strength of the financial controls and auditing practices?
2. Why was the updating of the desk manuals not completed?
3. What were the reasons for the Supplier Relationship Strategy & Document Policy not being formally designed and implemented?
4. Has the NCSHL informed the Investment's Division and its Line Ministry of the funding challenges which have disrupted the Commission's objective of increasing the efficiency of its financial processes by 70% over the next four years?
5. Was the consultant retained to complete the Commission's Business Process Review?
  - a. What was the cost of the consultancy fee and duration?
6. What is the status of the Online Application Solution?
  - a. Which consultant was selected?
  - b. What was the cost of the consultancy fee and duration?
7. What is the status of the external customer training?
  - a. How many members were trained?
  - b. What would be the cost of the external training?
8. What is the status of the implementation of the mobile service?
9. What specific plans and measurable outcomes will be implemented to solve the lack of communication challenges applicants encounter?
10. What is the status of the Compensation Review submitted to the Line Ministry for approval in March 2021?
11. When was the Board approved Human Resource Strategic Plan submitted to the Line Ministry for review and feedback?
  - a. What was the reason for the delayed response from the line Ministry?

**Based on Response to Question 1 Recommendation 9.3: Page 20**

1. How long has the Commission's Debt Management Policy been in draft?
2. Why has this policy not been brought before the current Board of Directors for consideration?
3. Why has an unapproved policy been used to guide the NCSHL's creation and management of debt?

**Strategic Plan**

***Based on Response to Question 3: Page 23***

1. State the financial requirement needed to execute each of the following unachieved Strategic goals and objectives:
  - Improve Technology Management;
  - Implement a mobile roving Unit; and
  - Increase the number of MRRG recipients on a monthly basis.

***Based on Response to Question 8: Pages 25-29***

2. How does the Commission address each of the weaknesses identified in the SWOT analysis presented as it pertains to the Commission's:
  - a. Financial and Risk perspective,
  - b. Customer Service, Communities & Stakeholder Perspective;
  - c. Internal Process; and
  - d. HRM, Team, Learning & Growth.
3. What is the risk associated with each threat identified in the SWOT analysis as it pertains to the Commission's:
  - a. Financial and Risk perspective,
  - b. Customer Service, Communities & Stakeholder Perspective
  - c. Internal Process; and
  - d. HRM, Team, Learning & Growth.
4. NCSHL's Balanced Scorecard highlighted the strategic goals and objectives the Commission wanted to achieve between 2019 and 2023 and the specific initiatives and measurements to gauge success. From each of the four perspectives identified (Financial and Risk Customer Service, Communities & Stakeholder, Internal Processes; and HRM, Team, Learning & Growth.),
  - a. Were the targets met?
  - b. If no, what challenges were experienced at each of the four perspective?
  - c. How much of a setback did these challenges cause?
  - d. What were the lessons learnt in executing the initiatives under each of the four perspective?
  - e. How will these lessons be applied in next strategic planning process?
5. NCSHL's PESTLE Environmental Analysis identified a number of trends that could both positively and negatively impact the Commission.

- a. State the trends that are most worrisome to the Commission either under each umbrella term or the trends that could negatively impact the Commission both internally or externally?

## **Project Management**

### ***Based on Response to Question 5: Page 31***

1. With regard to infrastructural development projects for rural communities, state the following for fiscal 2023:
  - a) The rural communities that were prioritise;
  - b) The level of development scheduled for each community;
  - c) The total expected and actual expenditure to date on each infrastructural development project (completed, on-going, not started, on hold); and
  - d) The number of beneficiaries in terms of contractors and communities.
2. NCSHL stated that in order to improve value its project management services, the Commission would engage in secondary road construction and repairs, the construction of retaining walls, construction of drainage, secondary bridges and assisting nonprofit organisations (e.g. houses of worship) contributes to community growth.
  - a. What is the envisaged role of the NCSHL in each of the aforementioned activities?

## **Procurement Practises**

### ***Based on Response to Question 3: Page 34***

1. What is the Procurement Unit's establishment?
2. What other resources will be sought for the unit this fiscal?
3. Has the issue of staff retention due to uncompetitive compensation packages been put forward to the Line Ministry as a major area of concern?

### ***Based on Response to Question 9: Page 35***

1. What issues were experienced with the disposal of property policy and state the reasons for the lengthy approval process?

## **Request for Additional Information – Questions to the Ministry of Sport and Community Development**

1. In the NCSHL's initial written submission to the Committee, it was stated that the Commission had sent a copy of its four (4) year Strategic Plan 2019 to 2023 to the Investment's Division and its Line Ministry.
  - a. Could the Ministry of Sport and Community Development state when it received the NCSHL's Strategic Plan?
  - b. Provide a status update on the Ministry of Sport and Community Development assessment of the Strategic Plan and any feedback returned.

## Request for Additional Information – Questions to the Ministry of Finance

1. Given statement made on Wednesday November 4 2022 by Officials from the NCSHL that “in many instances even though grants were approved in terms of applicants fulfilling the criteria established, sometimes grants couldn’t be ‘approved’ until releases were made to cover the total value of grants approved as per criteria.”
  - a. Will the Ministry state what assistance will be offered to NCSHL to address this issue given the rising cost of construction materials, increasing levels of vulnerability of households, and effects of climate change that may cause increased demand for grants offered by NCSHL?
2. Has the Ministry of Finance been appraised of the funding challenges which have disrupted the NCSHL’s objective of increasing the efficiency of its financial processes by 70% over the next four years?
  - a. If yes, what support does the Ministry of Finance intend to give the NCSHL?
3. In the NCSHL’s initial written submission to the Committee, it was stated that the Commission had sent a copy of its four (4) year Strategic Plan 2019 to 2023 to the Investment’s Division and its Line Ministry.
  - a. Could the Investment’s Division state when it received the NCSHL’s Strategic Plan?
  - b. Provide a status update on the Investment Division’s assessment of the Strategic Plan and any feedback returned.

**VERBATIM NOTES OF THE ELEVENTH VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS (ENTERPRISES) COMMITTEE HELD (IN PUBLIC) ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 02, 2022, AT 10.14 A.M.**

**PRESENT**

Mr. Wade Mark	Chairman
Mr. Rushton Paray	Vice Chairman
Mrs. Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklal	Member
Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing	Member
Ms. Amrita Deonarine	Member
Mr. Keith Scotland	Member
Mr. Stephen Mc Clashie	Member
Ms. Keiba Jacobs	Secretary
Ms. Hema Bhagaloo	Assistant Secretary
Mr. Darien Buckmire	Graduate Research Assistant
Ms. Rachel Nunes	Graduate Research Assistant

**ABSENT**

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds	Member
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**NATIONAL COMMISSION FOR SELF HELP LIMITED (NCSHL)**

Mr. Akino Greene	Chief Executive Officer (Ag.)
Mr. Adrian Winter	Chairman
Mr. Hayden Mitchell	Deputy Chairman
Mr. Matthew Kailah	Director
Mr. Randy H. Sinanan	Director
Ms. Melissa Morris	Director
Mrs. Kerneisha Prince-King	Director
Mr. Darryl Worrell	Corporate Secretary
Ms. Avanel Hendricks	Accounts Manager
Ms. Marina Alexander	Internal Auditor
Mr. Gary Romain	Senior Project Officer

## MINISTRY OF SPORT AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Mrs. Beverly Reid-Samuel	Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
Ms. Ann Bemontes	Research Officer II
Mrs. Jacqueline Weekes-Penco	Planning Co-ordinator

## MINISTRY OF FINANCE – INVESTMENTS DIVISION

Mr. Ryan Maharaj Acting	Director, Agro-based, Manufacturing and Services Sector
Ms. Krystal Seepersad	Research Officer II (Ag.)

**Mr. Chairman:** Good morning to all and welcome, particularly, to the officials from the Ministry of Finance, Investments Division, the Ministry of Sport and Community Development and the National Commission for Self Help Limited. My name is Sen. Wade Mark and I am the Chairman of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. Let me say from the outset that the Committee on Public Accounts has a mandate to consider and report to the House on the audited accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements of all enterprises that are owned or controlled by or on behalf of the State. We also have the responsibility to look at the Auditor General's report on any such accounts, balance sheets and other financial statements, as well as to determine whether policy is carried out efficiently, effectively and economically, and whether expenditure conforms to the authority which governs it.

The purpose of this meeting of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee is to examine the audited financial statements of the National Commission for Self Help Limited for the financial year 2016, and to follow up on the implementation of the recommendations in the Committee's Fourteenth Report from the Eleventh Parliament. The Committee is desirous of hearing the challenges being faced by the key stakeholders at the National Commission for Self Help Limited in an attempt to determine some of the possible solutions to these challenges. The role of the Committee is to help the National Commission for Self Help Limited to improve its delivery of services in an efficient, effective and economic manner.

This meeting is being broadcast live on the Parliament's Channel 11, as well as on Radio 105.5 FM, and the Parliament's YouTube channel, *ParlView*. Viewers and listeners can send their comments related to today's enquiry via email, [parl101@ttparliament.org](mailto:parl101@ttparliament.org), [facebook.com/ttparliament](https://www.facebook.com/ttparliament), [twitter@ttparliament](https://twitter.com/ttparliament). Participants are advised that their microphones



should remain muted until recognized by the Chair.

At this time, I will invite members of our Committee present to introduce themselves. Members.

*[Introductions made]*

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. Thank you very much, members.

**Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing:** Good morning, everyone. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing, member.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much, Laurel, and other members. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome Mr. Mc Clashie, and I told you earlier on that he has replaced the Minister of Education. Welcome, Mr. Mc Clashie.

**Mr. Mc Clashie:** Thank you, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. Thank you, Mr. Mc Clashie. I would like at this time to ask—to invite representatives to introduce themselves in the following order, representatives of the Ministry of Finance, Investments Division, representatives from the Ministry of Sport and Community Development, and, finally, representatives of the National Commission for Self Help Limited in that order. Can I invite representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Investments Division? *[Pause]* Do we have representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Investments Division? *[Pause]* Can I invite representatives from the Ministry of Sport and Community Development?

*[Introductions made]*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Anyone else from the Ministry of Sport? Can I invite members or representatives of the National Commission for Self Help to introduce themselves?

*[Introductions made]*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Well, may I welcome all of these officials to this enquiry of the public organized by our Parliament and conducted by the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. At this time, I would like to invite the acting Permanent—well, we do not have anyone from the Ministry of Finance at this time until a little later on; maybe they will join us, so I will take this opportunity to invite the acting Permanent Secretary for this week, as she indicated, of the Ministry of Sport and Community Development to make a brief opening statement. Acting Permanent Secretary.

**Mrs. Reid-Samuel:** Thank you, Chairman. The Ministry of Sport and Community Development was formed in August 2020, following the realignment of ministerial portfolios of the former Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts and the Ministry of Sport and Youth

Affairs. The Ministry is a dynamic customer-oriented and policy-driven organization that brings all stakeholders together to promote sport and community development. The National Commission for Self Help Limited is one of three state enterprises under the portfolio of the Ministry. We take seriously our responsibilities as detailed in the *State Enterprises Performance Monitoring Manual* and have worked with the various boards of management and executives of the company to ensure compliance and assist the company in achieving its mandate.

The current board of directors was installed in June of this year, 2022, and so far they have worked quickly with the Ministry to address issues relating to the company's operations. We at the Ministry of Sport and Community Development look forward to supporting the company in achieving its goals. We thank the Committee for this opportunity to address any concerns you may have on the operations of the National Commission for Self Help Limited. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much. I will now invite the interim Chief Executive Officer of the National Commission to just make a brief opening statement.

**Mr. Greene:** Thank you, Chair, and good morning again, Chair, and Committee members. So we at the National Commission for Self Help Limited are ready, willing and able to take part in this meaningful discussion and follow-up on recommendations that were previously submitted. So we are here waiting and willing, ready to answer questions.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Well, thank you. And again, on behalf of the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee of our Parliament, we would like to once again welcome all of you to this enquiry. I would like to begin by asking for clarification on a few areas of concern to our Committee and I would like to ask, possibly the interim CEO, if he can provide this Committee with a status report on the financial statements that are outstanding for the periods 2017, 2018 and 2019. Now, we understand that those reports will be submitted, or ought to have been submitted to the Parliament, of course via the Minister in question, corporation sole, by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June this year. Those statements, financial statements, are yet to arrive, so I would like the interim CEO to inform this Committee as to the rationale for the non-submission of these statements and explain to us when those financial statements will be submitted to the Parliament. Mister interim CEO.

**Mr. Greene:** Yes Chair. So we have a synopsis of our status update concerning that and—*[Inaudible]*—Accounts Manager, Ms. Hendricks, to give us an update on those financial statements.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Ms. Hendricks:** Good morning, once again. Chairman, through you, the current auditors are completing the 2017 this week. We had some challenges in terms of the audit was conducted virtually, so all documentation was submitted to the auditors virtually in soft copy. There were some questions during that period for the—related to the 2017 financials and some delays there in terms of the staffing here and COVID, et cetera. So we expect the 2017 to be completed by Friday and the 2018 will be conducted soon after, and that is not expected to take more than three weeks. So after which, once we submit to the Ministry of Finance and we have the AGM, it would be submitted to the Committee.

**Mr. Chairman:** What about your financial statements for 2020 and 2021? When would you be able to complete those statements and have them submitted to the Parliament?

**Ms. Hendricks:** We have all intentions to have those financial statements audited and completed by the close of fiscal 2023.

**Mr. Chairman:** We will be holding you to that because I can tell you, as a Committee that is responsible for auditing—not auditing but examining the audited statements of state enterprises, and you fall under that rubric, we are very disappointed that this National Commission for Self Help has been spending taxpayers' moneys for the last five years without any accountability via submissions of your financial audited statements to this Parliament. So we want to put the National Commission for Self Help on notice that we are holding—you have already disappointed us because we were told by the National Commission for Self Help that their 2017, '18 and 2019 reports would have been submitted by the 30<sup>th</sup> of June and we are now in November, at the beginning of November, and almost a few months after and we are now being told by your good self, on behalf of the Commission, that we will have the '17 report, audited financial report by next week.

I want to put you on notice and the Commission that this Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee will be holding this Commission seriously to this deadline and we hope that you will fulfill that commitment to our Committee and to the people of our country. Can you tell us who are your auditors?

**Ms. Hendricks:** Currently, Moore Business Solutions Trinidad and Tobago Limited.

**Mr. Chairman:** And how long they have been with the National Commission for Self Help?

**Ms. Hendricks:** Chair, this is their first appointment and they started on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 2021.

**Mr. Chairman:** Who was your auditors before?

**Ms. Hendricks:** Bob Gopee and Associates Limited.

**Mr. Chairman:** So their services were terminated some time in 2021, Bob Gopee?

**Ms. Hendricks:** Correct. At the AGM in 2019, when the financials for 2016 were accepted, the decision was made to change the auditors because Bob Gopee was the sitting auditor for the past four years—three years, four years prior.

**Mr. Chairman:** And what happened between 2019 to 2021 before this new team, as you explained, came on board?—Moore, the auditors, the new auditors, Moore. What happened between the period when Bob Gopee left in '19 and when these people arrived, that interim period? What would have happened in terms of having an auditor? What was responsible for not having an auditor to audit those books?

**Ms. Hendricks:** Thank you, Chair. In 2019 after the AGM, the National Commission for Self Help went out for tender for the new external auditors. The process for that tendering was a selective process and at the time four service providers were chosen. It was reviewed and a recommendation was made to the Ministry of Finance. On June 29, 2020, the Ministry of Finance communicated—sorry—corporation sole communicated by way of letter dated June 29, 2020, that they were asking that we redo the whole tender process so that we can—sorry—invite, based on the recommendations, at least 10 persons.

At that time the Commission decided to do an open tender process and this was then submitted after evaluation of the proposals. It was submitted to the Ministry of Finance again in 2021, February of 2021, and in April of 2021, the Ministry—sorry—May, 2021, the Ministry communicated that they were in agreement and by way of resolution we were able to remove the past auditors and appoint Moore Business.

**Mr. Chairman:** Any reasons for the removal of the last auditors? Is it because of the time frame of four years—

**Ms. Hendricks:** Correct.

**Mr. Chairman:**—and you wanted change?

**Ms. Hendricks:** Correct, the period.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. So as I said, we, at our level, will be writing to the National Commission for Self Help, holding you to this deadline of December 31<sup>st</sup> for the submission of all your outstanding financial audited statements for the period 2017 to 2021, and we hope we will

not have to have you come before us in December if you fail to submit those accounts so that you can further explain to the country why you have reneged on your pledge to complete those reports.

The other area I would like to enquire into, and this is to the interim CEO; Mr. CEO, how long have you been interim?

**Mr. Greene:** Chair, good morning again. So I have been in the post effective from the 19<sup>th</sup> of September to present of this year.

**Mr. Chairman:** 19<sup>th</sup> of September this year?

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Chairman:** And who was there before you?

**Mr. Greene:** That would be Mr. Romain, our Senior Project Officer who is in the meeting with us as well.

**Mr. Chairman:** And he was also interim as well?

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, he was.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Chairman—I think it is Mr. Winter is the Chairman.

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Winter, is the board of directors of the National Commission for Self Help responsible for ensuring that we have a permanent CEO on board? Mr. Winter.

**Mr. Winter:** Good morning again, Chair. Yes, that would be correct, Chair. What I can say about the Chief Executive Officer position is that the board that was there previous to us, they started the process of the recruitment of a Chief Executive Officer upon the term of Mr. Julien ending. That term would have ended around the 25<sup>th</sup> of March and we embarked on that process between the months of February and March of 2022. They left without being able to complete the process and when we took over in June of 2022, we immediately began that—to continue the process of recruitment of a CEO.

So I can confirm to you and to the Committee this morning that our first round of interviews for that of the recruitment of a Chief Executive Officer is on the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 2022. And if all things being equal, I would say, we would have a confirmed Chief Executive Officer by January 2023.

**10.40 a.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay, excellent. I just want to ask the interim CEO here, given the budgeted figures that you would have for running the operations of Self Help, and given the rising cost of

construction material and your function in providing grants to citizens who come before you—given the rising cost of construction material, how is Self Help coping with this development? Can I ask the interim CEO?

**Mr. Greene:** Yes. So in response to your question, what the Commission is doing is actually relooking at the criteria used to disburse grants, and also proposing a revision in the amounts of the grants that are distributed, because we know that with rising costs less items could be purchased with what we currently offer. So that is the stance or the way forward for the Commission, relooking at our processes, at our criteria and at the upward limit of our grant allocation or distribution.

I am not sure if Chairman Winter you want to add anything further concerning this?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, Chair, if I may—oh, sorry, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** I was going to ask what is the current sum a citizen can access in terms of a grant, is it \$10,000?

**Mr. Greene:** So Chairman, we have the Emergency Repair and Reconstruction Assistance Grant with an upward limit of \$25,000, and we have the Minor Repair and Reconstruction Assistance Grant with an upward limit of \$15,000.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. So you said you were going to consider, is it looking at or changing the criteria? Can you elaborate?

**Mr. Greene:** Yes Chair. So, our current criteria, there is no upward cap or salary cap for citizens accessing the grants, number one, and also not only relooking at the criteria, but as I was saying looking at the amount that we are allowed to distribute, to allow citizens to access to more material than what we currently offer. Through you Chair, I wanted to give our Chairman Winter the opportunity to add some further context to this.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, Mr. Winter.

**Mr. Winter:** Thank you very much, Chair. So Chair, I would want to just elaborate that our grants—since this board came into office in June of 2022, we have been really looking at the criteria to access our grants, because as it stands now our two major grants, which is the Minor Repair Reconstruction Grant and the Emergency Repair Grant, the criteria to access those grants are basically that of land tenure, land tax receipts, and our main target group is that of old age pensioners, single parents and destitutes. Now, in the case of emergencies, if it is a fire, of course, we look for the correspondence from the fire service. If it is a natural disaster, we look for that

disaster management letter.

So one of the things we have done and we have recognized is that shortcoming in terms of strong criteria, strong policy that guides our grants. So one of the things we did is that we formulated that of a Legal Policy and Research Committee of the board, which has been actively looking at that criteria, because I will tell you, Chair, there are a number of agencies across the State sector that offer similar grants. The thing with those other state agencies is that they have strong criteria to access those grants. The thing with Self Help, because we have those shortcomings in terms of a strong criteria, strong policy to guide the grants, it is very easy for persons to come to our organization and access. So we have come in for some hits over the years, because of that, and it is something that we are actively looking at in terms of policy, as I said, solid policy, solid criteria in terms of the access of our grants.

**Mr. Chairman:** In terms of allocation, Mr. Winter, for the Emergency and the Minor Repair Grants at this time, what is the allocation that you have gotten for 2022/2023?

**Mr. Winter:** So for this fiscal, Chair, we got an allocation for our Development Programme of \$21 million, and that covers grants as well as our Development Programme. When I say Development Programme I mean those programmes that we do in communities as it relates to bridges, roads, any kind of development works to churches, mandirs, mosques, from a Self Help point of view.

**Mr. Chairman:** In terms of your process, as it relates to—well, before I deal with process, can you share with us at this time what is the outstanding amount of applications pending before you, at this time, for both emergency and minor repairs that have been outstanding? Do you have a backlog, and if you have a backlog what is the total, and if you can break it down in terms of emergency as well as the minor repairs?

**Mr. Winter:** So Chair, when we talk backlog in terms of the grants we—when we talk approvals to issue a grant or to issue a purchase order, we issue that on the basis of an approval of a grant, and we do not want—what we have been trying not to get too tied up with is that of saying that a grant has been approved, and there is no money to implement the grant.

One of the things that we have been plagued with over the years is that even though there are grants that may have been recommended in the system, they may not properly be called actually approved grants, so we cannot really say there is much of a backlog in the system. What I can say as well is that there are a number of emergencies that come up from time to time, and sometimes

those emergencies take priority over those of minor repairs.

As it relates to a backlog, I can tell you—if you would so allow, we can provide to you in writing those applications that may have been recommended, but I would not want to use the term too much of “approval”, because we would want to look at approval against that of the release of funds and the ability to actually issue a purchase order to a client.

**Mr. Chairman:** So you care to explain to the public the criteria that is used as it relates to recommendation versus, for instance, approval? Because you seem to be making a distinction Mr. Winter, between recommendations or something being recommended to be given, and some application being approved? What is the fundamental difference, and do you have criteria that you utilize in order to distinguish between those two concepts?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, certainly, Chair. So, as it relates to our Minor Repair Reconstruction Grant, we use that of land tenure, tax receipts and, as I indicated, the main target group we look at, old age pensioners, whether somebody might be a single parent, somebody may have found themselves in a situation, or that of being a destitute person. As it relates to the emergency, we add one more tier to that which is that of a disaster management letter.

Now, even though an application may be recommended based on our criteria, we can only so disburse those funds when we actually have funding, and that is where we begin to use the terminology that the application has been officially approved, once we have the funding to cover the recommended application.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. I think I have a couple of questions on internal fraud policy. I see that we have brought on board an internal auditor. I am very happy about that, because we were of the view, based on the information that we had on the submission made by your good self, that an auditor was still outstanding. So I will come back to both the fraud policy, the arrival of the internal auditor, and there are some other issues I would like to deal with.

But seeing that we are on this question about emergency grants, we are on repairs, we are on recommendation and approval, I would like to invite Mr. Paray, who can come in at this time to ask some further clarification, and then I will move on to others, and I will come back. So Mr. Paray you can come in at this time.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and again welcome to members who have joined us today at this Committee meeting. Before I run into a couple of the questions that I have, I just want to ask one or two quick follow-ups. In order not to delay in the timing that we have,



you know, very short responses will suffice.

I am looking at the time that it has taken to get a fixed CEO for an organization that is as important, especially now in these tough economic conditions, to get a CEO placed in your organization. Is there any special skill that is required for someone to be appointed as the CEO of your organization, that you are having some difficulty in finding and, perhaps, not even finding it in the last two gentlemen who, one Mr. Romain who has acted before, and your new Acting CEO Mr. Green? What specialist skill that you are missing that is going to take us till January next year before we hope to find a CEO for your organization, Mr. Chairman?

**Mr. Winter:** Thank you very much, Vice-Chair, and through you Chair. Let me just indicate that both Mr. Greene and Mr. Romain were shortlisted for the position of Chief Executive Officer. So we have to take into consideration that the previous CEO would have left because his tenure came to an end in February of this year. The board started the process and the board would have left before they would have been able to complete the process. Now, we came in, in June of this year, and we immediately started the process, Mr. Vice-Chairman. So I would not say that we have delayed in terms of the process. We want to ensure the process is seamless as possible, and we really choose the best candidate. We did receive about 40 applications in the first advertisement of February to March of this year. I think January 2023 is a safe start date, if I may.

**Mr. Paray:** Okay. Thank you for that, and I look forward to that being sorted in January, because I think the Self Help Commission is an absolutely necessary unit, especially for rural communities like Mayaro, which I am the MP for, since that is going to spin off a couple of things here.

Mr. Greene spoke about one of the challenges with regard to the processing of applications, and the fact that there was no salary limit in terms of when someone makes an application. So you may not have to be only in the area of single mother or some destitute person. You could have been a middle-income teacher, lawyer, doctor, engineer and you can apply for a Self Help grant. Is that what I am hearing in terms of a bit of the challenge with regard to the application process and having to filter some of those out?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, you are very, very correct Mr. Vice-Chair. The thing is that one of the things we try to do with our grants is that we try to target a particular group, because as you would—I mean, I looked at one of the previous recommendations of this Committee, and one of the strong recommendations coming out of this Committee was that of us partnering and having a relationship with other agencies that offer the similar grants. So one of the things is that those other agencies

may be able to facilitate a grant for one of our clients that is in a similar circumstance, and they may meet that criteria. The thing with our criteria, because it is so open-ended, we receive them, we try as much as possible.

I mean, one of the things we met when we came is a real dedicated project management team, Mr. Vice-Chair. Those people are really in touch with the ground, really in touch with the communities in terms of these grants. So you are very correct when you say that there is that bit of—*[Inaudible]*

**Mr. Paray:** Mr. Winter, in your experience, and I know you have been there—I am not sure you have been there as Chairman in the organization before, or in other another role, but in your experience, or in the experience of your other members, the vast majority or the bulk of the applications comes from what strata of our society? Is it lower income, middle income, upper income? Where do you get the bulk of your applications?

**Mr. Winter:** Vice-Chair, so I only came into the Commission in June of this year when the other board members would have started as well. It is varied, it is varied. It comes from various groupings in society. It is not that of only lower income, middle income or high income. We receive applications from all income groups. Sometimes it basically depends on the circumstance that the person may have found themselves in, especially when it is comes to emergency grants. So someone may be living in that of an urban community, however, they may have experienced some sort of natural disaster, and they approach the National Commission for Self Help for assistance in those instances. So our clients are not really low income or middle income, as we say. They come from all various groupings.

**Mr. Paray:** Mr. Winter, would you not agree that it is reasonable to think, the wider community out there, it is reasonable to think that the vast majority of these applications are going to come from those at the lower income, lower strata of our society, taking into consideration that their recovery from anything, be it a disaster, a fire, a landslip at the back of their home, the vast majority of these people in rural communities may not have a lot of paperwork and so on. Is it not reasonable to think that the vast majority would come from this group, and special arrangements be made to expedite when these types, or that strata of folks, come into the system? I just want to give a simple example.

In the Mayaro constituency—and I had my staff pull a lot of data for me for this meeting this morning. I have 13 requests or applications for fire victims from 2016 to 2022. I wanted to

get a feeling from the Self Help Commission if, one, a fire victim in the lower income bracket is considered an emergency, and if it is an emergency do you have a set key performance indices that you can say within 14 days, 21 days or 30 days, of all the necessary paperwork coming to your organization, we can grant a cheque to assist this person, either get back some basic amenities whenever they move under a friend's house into a rental apartment or something? Would this be considered as an emergency, and how can you explain that we have applications inside that are 12, 24, 36 and 48 months outstanding? How would you give an explanation for something like that?

**Mr. Winter:** Mr. Vice-Chair, I would say with regard to the emergency grants we try as much as possible within seven days to issue those purchase orders. But if I may, through you and through the Chairman, if I could just ask Mr. Romain to just give us a—Mr. Romain has been functioning in the organization as a senior projects officer, mainly in the south area, which would fall under one of your districts. Can I just ask him to shed some light on this please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, Mr. Romain.

**Mr. Romain:** Good morning all again. Through you, Chair, and also to Vice-Chairman. As we speak about disasters, especially as it relates to fires—now, someone's house could be burnt, someone's dwelling could be burnt, someone's property could be burnt, and they would approach the National Commission for Self Help. As Chairman Winter would have espoused before, we really try within a seven-day period to bring these people's positions back to indemnity. Sometimes, a lot of the times, folks would approach the Commission for assistance. They would fill out the necessary application forms and things like that, but at the end of the day it comes back, straight back, to the criteria.

So they would fill the form, they would say they applied to the Commission, but what happens is that sometimes they do not have the requisite land tenure. So that is one of the main things that would hold back an application. It is one of the main things that would hold us back from even giving the assistance, because once they do not fall or they do not have the requirements where the criteria is concerned, especially with land tenure, that would hold it back.

**Mr. Paray:** But Mr. Romain, is there a process where these victims, these fire victims, are notified? Because many of them come back to our offices, time and time again, asking for updates, asking us to get updates for them. Is there a current procedure where feedback is given to these clients on a regular basis, and even if they do not have the proper documentation, is that told to them, that you do not have it and your application has been denied and it is closed off? Is there a

process for that?

**Mr. Romain:** As it is, we would have recently embarked on a drive where we are reaching out to those applicants, telling them whether their applications are recommended or not recommended and even why. So that is a recent development which we are going through as we speak.

**Mr. Paray:** I have one question before I allow my colleagues to go in again, and this is for Mr. Winter. Mr. Winter—

**Mr. Chairman:** Before you continue, Mr. Paray, I just wanted to ask Mr. Romain, Mr. Romain, are you saying that the Self Help Commission has now embarked on an approach or a policy that would address the issues raised by Mr. Paray, as it relates to the citizens who would apply, but they would not qualify because the criteria that they are required to meet have not been met? Are you telling us that you have now embarked upon a policy to inform these people, either in writing or via communication, oral communication or both? So that, for instance, you would not have people coming back to the individuals who may have applied for that particular grant, and they keep asking you, what is going on? But if you communicate with them directly or through writing, as I said, or via communication, it would help, and is that now in effect?

**Mr. Romain:** Yes, Chairman, that is now in effect.

**Mr. Chairman:** Can you give us some examples in writing where people would have—how many instances, you would say since that policy took effect, you have executed that policy? You would say like, for instance, you have had a few written correspondences, or direct communication, or both to those persons who have applied?

**Mr. Romain:** Yes. So direct communication normally takes place if the person comes back to the organization to find out the status of their application. That really was the unofficial part of it. The official part of it is where we actually write to that applicant. To answer your question based on figures, over the past couple of years we would have done a few hundred of these letters out to people via the mail, and what we would tell them is that we would have seen they would have applied for a grant and that it was not recommended, because these are not recommended letters. We have also added some reason why they would not have met the criteria.

So in the first instance, when we just started, we would have just told them well, it was not recommended, but we have since spruced up that letter to the applicants, telling them, well, you did not meet the criteria based on some instance.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you. Mr. Paray you can continue please, Sir.

**Mr. Paray:** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I would be very, very quick as well. Mr. Romain and Mr. Chairman of the Self Help, I am hearing of the process and procedures that you are putting in place, right, and I have 404—as far as my office records go—404 applications for self-help, that we have attempted to follow up over the last year, year and a half, and we have had no responses and, I mean, they come back to our office to ask what is happening. These are mixed, from persons who are applying for the routine things like an extension to their homes, bathrooms, toilet, roof repairs and so on, but then there are many with emergency cases like fires, and there are cases like landslips close to homes and so on. Many of them are all over a year, a year and a half, which I feel there is something here. I mean, I would be happy to provide this file, this data, to Mr. Romain, or even to the Chairman of the Committee at some point in time, where some response to my office could come back on another channel.

But what I want to ask in terms of this question, in 2021, Mr. Chairman, we had somewhat of some very, very high winds that knocked off quite a bit of our constituents' roofs in Mayaro, and my records have 25 of them that have been approved, or 43 went through the Disaster Management Unit, and my understanding is that 25 fit the criteria for some support. Now, that is September 2021, and up to this day, as far as our records indicate and communications with those 25 persons, no grants have been forthcoming.

I want to be very careful what I am going to say, without putting myself in any trouble. There is the perception out there that there is preferential treatment. I want to use that word very, very nicely in terms of which areas get serviced. And to the people of Mayaro, when they read on the newspaper, and I want to quote this newspaper, the *Newsday*. Trinidad *Newsday*, 8<sup>th</sup> of September, which is about four days—four days after that heavy wind:

“Self Help Commission distributes over \$3m...”—in grants.

“...\$330,000...to 22 families in Arima.”

Fifty-two recipients in Mount Hope. Fifty-two families along the East-West Corridor.

This is CNC-3 news, and this is the 8<sup>th</sup> of September.

“...National Commission for Self Help...distributed \$255,000 in grants to 17 families in the Arouca/Maloney constituency today.”

21<sup>st</sup> of September, aAbout a week or two after the roofs were blown off. So my question is: What can you tell those 25 families in Mayaro, why clearly in some areas these grant are processed within five and six days and we are over one year? How can you rationally tell the people of

Mayaro to wait a bit longer? How can you explain that? Anybody could answer that question.

**Mr. Winter:** So, Vice-Chair, that matter in Mayaro is very familiar to us, because I would recall that you were there with your constituents on the ground in 2022. I believe it was July 2022, when a similar disaster struck in the St. Ann's Village in Mayaro. Your office sought an update on those outstanding applications, and at the time, which was in July of this year, what we had recognized was that shortly after the disaster in 2021, we at the Commission conducted site visits in September of 2021, just days after. What our records reflect is that we conducted about 54 site visits. As of July of this year, 35 of those that were on the list submitted to us for an update were not even registered on our database. That goes back to what Mr. Romain would have indicated, where we may have given the application forms to the clients, but they would not have fulfilled their end of the bargain in terms of bringing in those applications.

I am just saying to you, Vice-Chair, respectfully, that that is what our records would have reflected on those applications. However—

**11.10 am**

**Mr. Paray:** Mr. Winter. Mr. Winter, I want to respectfully tell you that our office is very meticulous with those forms. Right? And even so, if I give you the benefit of the doubt that the applications were not done, it was done incorrectly, why? It is still over one year when you have evidence that—and, I mean, I doubt the people of other constituencies are more efficient than we are in Mayaro, that in four days an application can go in and you can get the grant. So all I am asking going forward, Mr. Winter—as I said, your organization is absolutely important, especially for rural communities where you have indigent, you have poor people and, I mean, many of these homes that are damaged, these people are—if they may not be squatting, they may have been given a “bligh” by a neighbour, a friend, a neighbour, somebody to build something and in times of the destruction, the roof blows away, they need help.

But, you know, how can we as MPs, representatives of the people, help this process along. Because we would we walk through—I mean, we would be calling the DMU, we will make sure that the DMU turns up on the site, gets the report. If the person comes to our office and says they are getting a run-around from the DMU, I will call the chairman of the corporation and say, “Look, expedite this because I know Self Help needs some time to process these applications.”

But from July 2021, we in November 2022, and I cannot believe and I will not accept that not one out of those 35 or 25—sorry, 25 applications could be processed. And I doubt very much

that one out of those 25 applications has not been correctly done to get a grant. And I am going to leave it there because I wanted to raise this matter coming back to, you know—tie it back to the performance of the organization, how important it is, especially in a time now where our economy is struggling, there is a high amount of joblessness, you know, the cost of food is so high, every cent counts. And when these grants are given to those people, it puts their children into schools, which is already under serious, tremendous trouble with a failing education sector. So, I will leave it there and I would like the opportunity to send this data that I have from Mayaro to Mr. Romain, who I have interacted with in the past, very noble understanding gentleman and I will continue to work with him. But just for the record I just want to make sure that this is how the people of Mayaro, and I am sure of many other areas, see the challenges. And at the end of the day, they are hurting. And no matter what problems you are having, they are still hurting and we need to fix that, and it is our job as this Committee to understand why this is happening and make the relevant recommendations to the relevant Minister and Ministry. So, thank you very, Mr. Chairman. I will pass on to one of my other colleagues.

**Mr. Chairman:** Before I ask Mrs. Sagramsingh-Sooklall to come in, I just want to ask Mr. Winter and the interim CEO, based on what Mr. Paray has said, what would you recommend to address this matter with some degree of urgency? Because the public is listening to what is going on. This is going live and he has put forward his position. He has evidence of it. How can you as the Chairman and the interim CEO look into this matter, or what would you recommend, I should say, could be done by Self Help to address this matter?

**Mr. Winter:** So, Chair, thank you. Thank you. You know, I just want to reassure this Committee and the members of the public that there is no preferential treatment when it comes to the distribution of our services. We try as much as possible to ensure that our services, our grants, our development programme is spread across all districts throughout Trinidad and Tobago.

If I look at the 404 that the Vice-Chairman would have identified, that 404, if we talk about a mix of minor repair, Chair, as well as—that will be emergency—we are talking about in excess of \$6 million if the persons qualify for highest tier. The thing is that with a budget of \$21 million, let us say for this fiscal, we have to ensure that that \$21 million is distributed across all districts in Trinidad and Tobago.

What I can also tell you, Mr. Chairman, is that we would have—I would have looked as details as far back as 2010 to 2022, and I have not seen any data to suggest that there is any

preferential treatment in the distribution of grants. So I just want to reassure you and the members of the public that that is not a criteria, in terms of where you live and that kind of thing as part of our process.

In terms of going forward, what we want to do is to ensure that there is a strong, a strict criteria in terms of accessing our grants. As I said, Chairman, our grants are very easily accessible as it relates to the criteria. We are not able to approve a grant or distribute a purchase order unless we have the required funding. So I just want to put it in that context so that we could just be on the same page as it relates to that of where the funding and the recommendation is concerned once again.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal, the floor is yours.

**Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal:** Thank you, Chair. Well, you know, just to—I know the Chairman of Self Help would have mentioned that this particular board would have come into existence, I believe, June 2022. So, of course, we are looking at what?—almost a five-month or a four-month-old board and I could well imagine, you know, you all would have just had to hit the ground running being pretty new in a constituted board. But notwithstanding that, of course, you know, I could hear from member Paray’s submission, of course, his deep concern, him being a representative—

**Mr. Scotland:** Good morning, Martin.

**Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal:** Him being a representative—

**Mr. Scotland:** Talk to “meh”.

**Mr. Chairman:** Just a section, Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal. Mr. Scotland—

**Mr. Scotland:** [*Inaudible*]—have money to pay?

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Scotland. Mr. Scotland, could you mute? We are hearing your conversation.

**Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal:** Thanks, Chair, for that intervention. So I just want—so I do recognize, I mean, and that is why I started off by mentioning and reiterating that I understand that the board has come into—this is probably a five-month-old board. But at the same time, we have a member, such as member Paray, who represents persons that have concerns. And, of course, it seems as if you would just have to hit the ground running, which is clear and evident that you have already started to put systems and processes in place within the organization so that you can be able to treat with the applications as they come forward. And, of course, I do also understand that you would be limited to the resources that are available at the time when applications do come to



you all. So I just wanted to make that simple point.

Now, I—a lot of the discussion this morning has been on Self Help reviewing its criteria policy. And that I also want to place on the record, that I agree that it is critical, especially because you are involved in the expenditure of state finances, it is critical for you to review that particular policy. And I am pleased that at least this new board, based on the submissions of—based on your submissions, I am pleased to recognize that the board would have recognized and acknowledged it was necessary to review its criteria policy, of course, land tenure being a critical part of that policy.

What I can respectfully suggest, of course through, Chairman, we have other state entities that offer similar and like programmes, for example, the new HVIP programme, the Home and Village Improvement Programme. I understand that it is a programme that has strict criteria and policy. So perhaps in, again, because you all are a five-month-old board and you are embarking upon this process of reviewing your systems, you may probably want to look at precedents that already exist in other entities that can serve as a guideline and guidance to your team in creating and establishing a criteria. And I believe that by looking at precedents and relying on precedents from other organizations, you would appreciate it would help you to really be able to bolster your processes as soon as possible so that you could treat with applications that come before you, the applications that are currently in the system and, of course, new applications that will come before you.

What you would also—I would respectfully submit that you will have to consider if you are looking at revamping a criteria process is how are you going to deal with applications that would have—the older applications that would have been specific to the older criteria and then establish a new criteria for applications and how are those older applications going to be treated with. So in my mind that are just the legal concerns that I am having that you will have to—of course, I just want to alert you all to it.

In developing your process map and working out your criteria, remember you have old applications in your system that would have, no doubt, satisfied old criteria. You bring a new policy, you create new criteria, how are you going to treat with those older applications? So those are just things that I want to respectfully alert Self Help to because they are concerns that I have and that came to my mind when all the discussion we had this morning was relative to this new criteria that you are looking at.

I believe, respectfully, that communication is critical and I could hear it when Chairman would have raised the concern about, and also member Paray, about whether or not persons are informed as to, you know, where their applications are at. And, you know, that often is one of the cries and the concern of members of the public as it relates to many and multiple organizations of the State, where you submit an application and not just having that information, sometimes especially when you are talking about vulnerable groups. Of course, we can respect and understand that that will no doubt affect persons not hearing and not knowing where their applications are at, whether you are going to qualify for this grant or not. And perhaps, respectfully, especially because it is a new board, you may want to consider that customer service or public outreach. I know one of the members would have spoken about letters that were sent out recently and that has to be applauded. Right? But it should never be a situation where you wait just to have to send 100 letters at one time. It must be a process where people are continuously being informed.

And again, respectfully submitting to you all, that is perhaps something that the organization wants to look at because you are in the business of serving the people of Trinidad and Tobago, and our people just simply want to know what—and, you know, to be informed of their applications and where they stand. So, again, that is just a respectful recommendation that I personally—of course, it is not the Committee’s recommendation, but based on the discussions that we have had this morning, that I would want to make to the commission.

You know, this also brought to my mind the issue of digitization because if it is that the commission embarks upon—and perhaps that is where we can start the conversation now because I know I have said a lot, that is probably where we can start the conversation. It is no secret that at least the current Government is embarking upon the whole digitization of the public sector. Is there or what is, if at all, or how far is the Self Help from trying to totally digitize its internal processes? And I am thinking digitization from the point of, imagine if, and this may sound utopic but it has happened, imagine if someone can track their applications online. It saves member Paray’s office from being inundated by his constituents asking his office to follow up constantly on these applications. And member Paray is not in a unique situation because there will be other MPs and other members, other persons whose offices will no doubt will be inundated by these requests. So let us talk a little bit about digitization and if any member of the organization may want to speak to the Committee about, you know, your digitization plan and where you all are at

relative to, you know, digitizing your work and the process flow within the organization.

**Mr. Winter:** Thank you, member. Through you, Chairman, can I ask your permission to ask the vice-chairman of board, Mr. Hayden Mitchell, to respond to this question?

**Mr. Chairman:** Of course. Yes.

**Mr. Mitchell:** Okay. Thank you, Chairman, and of course, Vice-Chairman, and of course, the Chairman of Self Help. So to your point, this is something that our board has recognized very early. Right? The processes inside Self Help, they are manual. Right? Everything is paper-based and I will just give one example.

The first approvals meeting we had to go to, we had two dining room tables full of files, and you are looking at about 800 and something files for us to go through. You are talking about paper files. Right? After this first meeting, we immediately reached out to the digitalization group for the Government. Right? We already spoke to the chief digital officer who has agreed to come in and talk to our—look at our internal processes and guide us through because what we have found is that while the previous incarnations of the boards, they were doing—there is a difference between digitalization and digitization. Right? What they were doing is, of course, just putting everything, photocopying everything and putting it on the hard drive. But based on how Self Help operates, we have to do a whole digital transformation that is in line with what the Government's policy is and as such we have already reached out the chief digital officer, and I will be heading that committee to make sure that Self Help is on that path.

And exactly what you envisioned there is what we want to deliver to the people of Trinidad and Tobago, that regardless of where you are, you should be able to log in to an app, you should be able to see where your application is and you should be able to get your status. But that also deals with internal processes that we have to do inside Self Help which we are working on now.

**Mrs. Sagramsingh-Sooklal:** Okay. Well, that allays some of my concerns. At least the organization—and that has to be applauded, that you would have recognized the need to go that route because I really believe that—I mean, of course it the way the world has gone. Right? And, of course, it is just about having leaders like yourself and the board, of course, having that vision to be aligned with the Government, the central government's position of taking your organization in that direction. So that has to be applauded. And, of course, I wish you all the very best as you move towards digitizing and digitalizing the organization, because I think it would considerably assist the persons that you serve.

Chair, through you, I have a few questions on the internal fraud policy of the organization. Now, based on the fourth report of—well, it is actually is based on page 4, sorry, of the submission that we received. It is submission dated February 2019. It stated that:

An internal draft fraud policy was developed and it is expected to go before the audit committee for approval and then to the board of directors for ratification and subsequent implementation.

So this was actually on page 4 of the submissions we would have received. And, as I have said before, it is submission dated February 2019, dealing with the fraud policy.

Coming out of that submission my question is, from February 05, 2019, to now, if I can have a little information on what progress has been made with respect to approving and implementing the said fraud policy? And again, the question is opened to any member of the commission to answer.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. Either Mr. Chairman or the interim CEO, or both.

**Mr. Winter:** Chairman, could I, through you, can I ask the chair of our audit subcommittee to respond to this one.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Mrs. Prince-King:** Good morning, again. And through you, Chair, I would like to first identify that in 2019, we had the resignation of the then internal auditor. But with the new board, one of the first actions that we took was to go out and to have that position filled, which was filled on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September this year. The committee would have met and we have reviewed several policies that are now in draft and submitted via board note for board review and approval. However, we looked at the internal fraud policy and there are some items that we would want to review, update and include before that document is actually submitted to the board for approval.

**Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal:** But it is something that has certainly engaged your attention.

**Mrs. Prince-King:** Very actively at this point in time. So we have submitted four documents, four policies for review thus far, but the audit policy—and it is just not the audit policy, it is also a procedural manual for how we implement our internal audits and that is in front of the committee and actively being reviewed.

**Mrs. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal:** Do you all have—have you all timestamped this? Are there are deadlines that you have set internally as to how soon you may want to—because, of course, I mean, you would imagine with procurement legislation and all of those—and different things are

operating, you would realize—I am sure you recognize how critical having a solid fraud policy and more so it being implemented is to the organization. So against that backdrop, have you all set internal timelines for yourselves as to how soon you would want to convene on this matter?

**Mrs. Prince-King:** Indeed. So we had our first sitting of the audit committee and this was one of the first documents that came before us. The only issue with not moving it forward is that we feel it needs a little more work. We have also engaged the attention of our corporate secretary and the head of the legal committee to look at some items on this for us before it is submitted. We could commit to within a two to three-week period to have the draft ready and submitted to board again for approval.

**Mrs. Sagramsingh-Sooklal:** Excellent. Now, piggybacking off of fraud, let us look at whistle-blowing and whistle-blowing policies. Have there been any reported cases of whistleblowing that were investigated so far within the commission?

**Mrs. Prince-King:** That is a very specific request so I will engage the internal auditor at this time, keeping in mind that she is only with us for 30 days so far, if anything came before her attention. Ms. Alexander.

**Ms. Alexander:** Good morning everyone. Thank you, audit chair, Chairman of the PA(E)C and everyone. I have not seen anything with regard to whistle-blowing specifically but I am certain that there probably would have had opportunities for persons to do so. I do not know. But I have not seen anything evidence-wise that was done.

**Mrs. Sagramsingh-Sooklal:** Okay. Well, I guess once—I am thinking once you have your internal fraud policy—so it is clear that the new board and it is understandable that the new board, of course, would want to review its fraud policy before it is ratified by the organization. And perhaps that may be one area that the committee may want to flag in even incorporating whistle-blowing provisions in its review of its fraud policy. Because at least based on what is—now, I recognize that you are also very new to the organization but at least based on the submissions that you have made, it does not seem that the organization, at this stage, has a clear structure as it relates to dealing with issues of whistle-blowing and it is just my respectful submission, since the fraud policy—because that will marry with the fraud policy as well. So perhaps it is an area that, you know, you may want to wrap your minds around, especially because that fraud policy is currently before the board for its—well, for its consideration. Chair, other than that, for now, I have no further questions.

Just one quick submission, through you, Chair, I mean, and it comes back again to the discussions that we have had about the commission revisiting its strong criteria for persons, you know, the criteria upon which persons can apply for the grants that are available. I just want to, you know, respectfully put on the record as well, even though, yes, it is critical to have a strong criteria, you know, when grants and state money is involved, you know, let us also be reminded that the commission's mandate, to a great extent, is to serve vulnerable persons, and vulnerable persons, whether it is senior citizens, victims of natural disasters, victims of, let us say, fire, low-income, single parents. And I just wanted for the record just to remind the board that while a strong criteria is critical, because, again, it is state funds and you have to—there must be built criteria in place—also, do not—try your endeavour best not to depart from the fact that these are the groups of persons that you are servicing.

So while you want to put strict measures in place, which I recognize and from a legal perspective understand, it is critical at the same time we “doh” want to have policies that now the very said people that you are supposed to be serving and assisting, they cannot satisfy that said criteria. Because to my mind, what is the point of the grants if the persons it is meant to serve cannot have access to those said grants? And that is just my respectful, you know, two pence. Because, of course, again, this is for the benefit of all citizens of Trinidad and Tobago.

Chair, with those few words, I have no further submissions.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Thank you very much. I will now ask Mrs. Laurel Lezama-Lee Sing to come in at this time because I know she did indicate to us earlier on that she has a commitment. Laurel.

**Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing:** Thank you very kindly, Chairman. Good morning, members, and welcome once again. And thank you so much for spending your morning with us here at the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee. I want to thank you first of all, I want to congratulate the new board because you have been in office for just over four months maybe and you literally jumped straight into the fire in the middle of the aftermath of a pandemic where people certainly were tremendously challenged and beyond that knowing that we are also in the middle of the hurricane season and there are lots of challenges coming with the weather, acknowledging the effects of climate change, et cetera. So I want to thank the Self Help Commission. I want to thank the board for the work that it has been doing and I want to thank the previous members as well.

Like the rest of the Committee, I too would appreciate the reports as committed by the 31<sup>st</sup>

of December. Chairman, is that date that we had committed to? Receiving them at 30<sup>th</sup> of December this year, if I am not mistaken.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes. You are correct.

**Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing:** So I really look forward to receiving them. It would help the PA(E)C in its work. It will help us tremendously so that we could continue our work in monitoring this particular enterprise.

I am—I would just like to ask a question about your strategic plan because you are—we are speaking about the State’s money. We are speaking about what your—and it follows what Minister Sagrarsingh-Sooklal just spoke about. It follows the accountability for state resources. And most importantly, it seeks to help the vulnerable people in society as per the mandate when it was first established, from my reading, under former Prime Minister ANR Robinson in 1987. And so, I want to ask you a little about the strategic plan.

So I know the last information we have of your financial report would have been in 2016. And so, I would like to know about your strategic plan. Where are you with that old plan and where are you perhaps with a new plan? So if you can please just tell me so that we can discuss how your strategic plan is giving us value for money and fulfilling your mandate. That is my first question, Chair. Thanks very much. And I put that to either the Acting CEO or the Chairman of the board. Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you.

**11.40 a.m.**

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, thank you very much, Chairman and member Lezama-Lee Sing. Chair, let me just give a “lil” historical perspective as to where we are with the strategic plan, and it is just to say that in 2020 we submitted a revised strategic plan for 2019 to 2023. It was submitted to corporation sole at the line Ministry at the time. The line Ministry at the time would have been the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and the Arts. The strategic plan was then resubmitted in June of 2025, sorry, June 25, 2021, and very, very quickly upon my assumption as chairman of the board I received correspondence from the Investments Division which highlighted that a review of the plan needed to be done again, to ensure that the plan was in alignment with the company’s mandate and their significant focus on Self-Help and community development. So, immediately again in August of 2022 we started the process of reviewing that strategic plan. We did receive a deadline of November the 7<sup>th</sup> 2022 to submit that strategic plan to the line Ministry

and corporation sole, and I am happy to report today that we are well on the way to completing that strategic plan, and that strategic plan will cover the period 2022 to 2026.

**Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing:** Thank you very kindly Mr. Chairman, Chairman of the Board of Directors, Mr. Winter. Thanks very kindly for that. So if it is taking us from 2022 to 2026, in the interim what is your guiding philosophy insofar as accountability and transparency? Because I want to go next to the risk that you have to take as the Self-Help board.

**Mr. Winter:** Sorry member I was talking with my mike muted. Just as you pointed out very rightfully member, the commission was established in 1987 and we were later registered as a state enterprise in 1997. So, our original mandate was that:

To nurture and develop a culture of self-help and self-reliance within the communities in Trinidad and Tobago;

To facilitate the promotion designed and implementation of self-help projects;

To stimulate the development of individual community industry enterprise and corporate efforts;

To monitor the implementation of self-help projects, and more so to identify and development and implement programmes that may create scope for further opportunities within that of the national community in general.

So what we have not done, we have not strayed from that mandate as it relates to how we operate on a daily basis. So that has been our guiding principle, the original mandate. There are some elements which we need to add within that strategic plan that are in alignment with the mandate that we have been following, but of course we do not want to operate outside of an approved strategic plan, and the process, of course, has to be that of the approval of Cabinet. So once we get those approvals we would start implementing those measures that are identified in the strategic plan.

**Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing:** All right, thanks very kindly. I just have two more questions please. Do you think that there is sufficient communication coming out from the self-help commission insofar as what is available from you and what the process is? Do you think you are sufficiently resourced to assist with having those forms filled properly, and data input? And do you think you are sufficiently resourced to assist people who have put in these applications, legitimate applications?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, Mr. Chairman.

**Mr. Winter:** Sorry about that Chair, I am just having a “lil” technical difficulty. Can I just ask,



through you, Chair, for Mr. Romain to respond and then I will supplement that with what I believe would be an effective internal and external communications strategy?

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Mr. Romain.

**Mr. Romain:** Through you, Chair, could I just ask member Lezama-Lee Sing to repeat the question for me, I lost part of it, so just repeat for me please?

**Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing:** Certainly Mr. Romain. I am asking about the resources and I am asking about the communications. Communications first and then resources. Do you think that the National Commission for Self-Help has a sufficiently strong communication machinery whereby persons know about the availability of the grants that are available through the commission? Also, to get back the information, do you think that you are sufficiently resourced to receive the information, to input the information, to act upon the information? And do you think that there is a need for more resources for your effective functionality?

**Mr. Romain:** Okay, so through you, Chair, I answer. As it is right now, in terms of the communication part, we are a bit under-resourced, but we are also working on it. So, it is in progress where we are working on the communication aspect of it. The second part where if we are equipped to take for incoming, we also fell short a little bit on that in terms of the resources, but we are also working on it. And through this board, which is only four months old, they are in fact working hard at all the internal processes to bring everything up to standard. In terms of the other part concerning the resources as it relates, no, we are a little under-equipped also in that aspect, but I say again that the board, all the internal processes as it relates to the commission and the public at large, the board is working very assiduously to bring everything up to standard.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mrs. Lee Singh, Laurel.

**Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing:** Yes. Thanks very kindly, Chairman. I know that the chairman of the board said that he would come in after Mr. Romain so I was waiting to see if he wanted to come in or if I should just proceed with my final question.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yeah, well you can go with your final question, the chairman will come in there.

**Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing:** Thanks so very kindly. And my final question is insofar as the risk. Have you found instances, and I know member Sagrarsingh-Sooklall spoke to the issue of fraud, but have you found instances where, or are there several instances, or any, where persons have taken the grants and not done what they were supposed to do? And if that is the case then what is the penalty or consequence, if any?

**Mr. Winter:** Thank you member for that question, and definitely in any scenario where grants are being distributed you will find persons who come into your system to, you know, deceive. We have found such instances. I have looked back at the records over the years and all those matters have been referred to the police where necessary. Some of those matters are receiving the attention of the police up to today actually. So, in all instances where those matters of fraud have been detected, we have referred those matters to the police accordingly.

**Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing:** Thank you very kindly. Chairman, that ends my round of questioning, and I thank the members. I wish to seek my leave within the next five minutes, and I want to congratulate the board and the team, the members of staff at the National Commission for Self-Help for the wonderful work that you are doing. I want to encourage you to continue to develop and strengthen the institution that is of such great service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. Thanks kindly.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much Mrs. Lezama-Lee Sing. Mr. Scotland. Keith Scotland. Is Mr. Scotland there? [*Pause*] All right, if not I will—

**Mr. Scotland:** I am here, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Would you like to raise any questions Mr. Scotland?

**Mr. Scotland:** Yes please, Chairman. Yes, Chairman. To the Self-Help board, and I know this board is just six months in its new incarnation, Chairman. Chairman, through you, may I ask, how does this new board intend to reach the most needy as it relates to self-help? What is the plan that they can touch the most needy, the people who need self-help the most?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes. Thank you very much member. Through you, Chair. You know, one of the things we have recognized as a board very very early is that of, you know, where communications is concerned, we need to have an effective internal as well as an external communication strategy, and a strong one at that. And whether it be a public sector organization, a private sector organization, a Ministry, a state enterprise or a statutory authority, it is an important element to any business growth and performance.

And the thing is that even though both the internal and external communication strategies may have some differences and distinct goals, you know there are a lot of similarities as it allows for that strategic alignment, things like understanding our audience and helping our employees to be that of brand ambassadors and to build that community around our brand. When I look at the National Commission for Self-Help and I look at the response and I look at the interest in our

portfolio of grants, I can say safely, through you Chair, and member, that our—I think in terms of persons understanding that suite of grants and knowing how to access it, I think that is out there.

What we have been trying to do thus far is that of managing expectations. And, you know, one of the things we implemented is that of a public relations marketing and branding subcommittee of the board, and their terms of reference is that of keeping with an internal and external strategy. So, that committee would be providing us with some recommendations towards that MP Scotland. And through you, Chair, I would be happy to report to the Committee with our December 30<sup>th</sup> deadline in terms of what our planned strategy is to target those vulnerable groups.

**Mr. Scotland:** Right. Chair, through you, may I look at one aspect of fraud and ask, through you, Chair, if persons take grants and do not use it for the purpose for which it was granted, and abuse it, it means then that there were needy persons who would have required that grant, who were deprived of that grant, and it went elsewhere and was misused or abused. What action does the Self-Help, what action does the board have in plan, in place, to deal with such errant persons?

**Mr. Winter:** Through you, Chair, could I just respectfully ask that— So we have Director Randy Sinanan who is the Chair of that Legal Policy and Research Committee, can I just ask him to respond to this one please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Sure.

**Mr. Sinanan:** Good morning again, and through you, Chair. That aspect is currently being looked at, because there was a situation where the materials—the grants would have been approved and they would have secured the materials, and then it just vanished from the site. The applicant who was the beneficiary of that grant went missing. So that issue is currently before the policy in draft form, and we are at the state of settling that policy in terms of retrieving— in situations like that, how do we retrieve materials and/or compensation in that regard? So is it something that we are currently looking at.

**Mr. Scotland:** Chairman, I have one more area that I would want to interrogate with your leave? You would agree with me—through you, Chair, may I proceed?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, of course.

**Mr. Scotland:**—that staffing and adequate staffing must be critical for the optimal and efficient operation of your entity. What is being done in the short-term to address the staffing issue?

**Mr. Winter:** So, member, and through you, Chair, we are currently reviewing the organisational structure of the entity member Scotland. We have recognized those deficiencies in terms of

staffing, and when we look at the 2014 organizational structure it may have been developed for that time. So, we are actively looking at that in terms of—to see what matches this current time frame in terms of staffing.

**Mr. Scotland:** But what is the timeframe for addressing this?

**Mr. Winter:** Oh sorry. Certainly yes, the timeframe for addressing that issue is by December of 2022. We are hoping to have a recommendation made so line Ministry and corporation sole in terms of what this new structure should look like, and very shortly after that we will do that of getting the Cabinet approval. But yes, our deadline for that based on our programme of works as a board is that of December 2022.

**Mr. Scotland:** Tell me, as it relates to that synergy, and I will respectfully piggyback from member Lezama-Lee Sing and member Renuka Sagrarsingh-Sooklall, and also in a way member Paray. What outreach programmes—so do you have any plans to come out from your offices, set up some regional sub-offices with these staff and meet the needy people, some people who need self-help? I have one constituent she is 78 years of age, I had to go to her for her to sign up the form. What do you plan to do as an outreach programme so that you can really touch the people who are most needy?

**Mr. Winter:** Thank you very much for the question member. And through you, Chair, the decentralization is one that is a major aspect we have been looking at as it relates to our services. In as much as possible, like someone you just described there, is 78 years old and cannot really come to our offices, we allow—you know, if you all reach out to us, we send a project officer to them to evaluate their situation so that they do not have to come into our offices to drop off an application. We do that constant back and forth. We meet the client on that half. The other thing we have been looking at, and it has been a conversation happening since that of 2018 or before that, is that of like a mobile bus, similar to what the licensing division has, in terms of going into rural communities, going into those communities where persons cannot really come to Port of Spain.

**Mr. Scotland:** Not just rural, urban. Urban communities also.

**Mr. Winter:** Correct. Correct member. I mean, yes, definitely. Our clients are across all communities, whether it be urban or rural. But, of course, we are actively looking at that. But that requires a conversation with the PTSC. It requires a conversation in terms of acquiring that bus, but we are going to be using the same model as the licensing division. The thing is, I work in the

licensing division so it is easy to get the information in terms of getting the process in which we must follow.

**Mr. Scotland:** Chairman, through you, may I ask that we put them—we put this entity on a—could you give us—just in one month a time frame? Give us in one sentence, a time frame. One sentence, when do you think you can bring that outreach programme to fruition?

**Mr. Winter:** Member, I think based on the workings of the public relations branding and marketing committee thus far, I think we can have those approvals and that solidified by the ending of this year, so we could look at a January 2023 launch of that service.

**Mr. Scotland:** And finally, Chair, sometimes, and again I piggyback on fellow members. Fit for the purpose and fit for the persons that are most in need, one of your criteria sometimes for self-help is that the persons must own the property. Sometimes you have persons who live, let us say in certain areas, who would be living in a property for over 30, 40 years, so it is really theirs but they do not have a deed for it. I think the time has come, and I will offer assistance that we change the criteria, and the criteria, the *raison d'être*, must be *bona fides*. There must be a real need and a real need for persons who, in other words you do not want to fix somebody's roof who when you fix it the next day a landlord comes and claims it, because the person who was the most needy you want that person to benefit from it. But do you not think it is time that we adjust the criteria that it becomes more relevant to the persons who would be accessing it?

**Mr. Winter:** I agree with you fully member. So yes, that is why we have been looking at that criteria very actively in terms of bringing it in alignment with what you have just suggested. We have had instances in the past where persons would have been afforded grants, and landlords came afterward and put them out off the property and, of course, we look at that as taxpayer dollars just down the drain, and this is not what we want to encourage. It is not what we want to do. It is not what the grant is about. The grants are about helping those vulnerable persons in society.

**Mr. Scotland:** Chairman, I thank you profusely for your indulgence and those are my respectful questions to this entity. May I be relieved please, Chairman?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, thank you. Yes.

**Mr. Scotland:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you very much Mr. Scotland. May I follow up on what Mr. Scotland has asked on staffing, and I am dealing with Mr. Winter here, where you raised the issue of a review or reviewing the organizational chart of Self-Help, National Commission for Self-Help, and you

are looking forward to having a new organizational chart by December of this year. Because I have noted that there is a lot—we have a lot of vacancies at national self-help. Based on the information we have before us you have about 53 workers right now, but you have a complement of—a staff complement of 83. So you have a few people, a few posts or offices vacant at this time.

So, nevertheless, as you rightly said, you want to revisit—given the thrust of self-help you may need new personnel on board. In this particular regard I saw on your webpage or website a post being advertised, and maybe you will want to share with us what is the position of that post and when interviews are going to be conducted for this position? Something called Facilities Support Technician, which is advertised on your website or webpage, as you call it. You want to share with this Committee the functions of this new office holder and when you intend to bring that person on board?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, thank you, Chair. Through you, can I ask Mr. Greene who is also the HR Manager of the entity to respond to that one?

**Mr. Greene:** Thank you, Chair. Chairman, so I begin with the realignment of the commission's operations to strategic intent. It created an emergency need for some short-term temporary solutions that would satisfy these needs while the commission goes forward for approval for a long-term solution. So this position of the Facilities Support Technician is really to address issues at our three different locations. We have a head office location in south and one in Tobago, and we are still in the recruitment process where the vacancy—the short-term temporary vacancy has not been filled. To reiterate that it is a short-term temporary position being proposed for a three-month period to address this need that the board found it necessary that we use this just to facilitate this need while we go through our organization relook process. So that is the status with that position. We have advertised it, solicited applicants, and are still in the recruitment process for that position.

**Mr. Chairman:** And how many applicants have applied thus far?

**Mr. Greene:** Chair, it is approximately, I want to say about 30. I could furnish you with a confirmed number.

**Mr. Chairman:** And how many positions you are trying to establish, as you said a temporary interim for three months as the case may be, how many positions? Is it two, three, four, five, six?

**Mr. Greene:** One position, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** Just one position?

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, for that Facilities Support Technician, one position.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Now even though it is temporary and interim, have you sought to get the approval of the Ministry, the Permanent Secretary to ensure that you are at least addressing whatever needs you have as a commission in the proper way? Can you tell me if this particular position, that interim temporary three-month one person, have you sought any approval for such an appointment, or the establishment of such an office, even though it might be interim?

**Mr. Greene:** Chairman, at this point the temporary nature of this appointment has been approved by the board. The appointment again it has not yet been done, and so again the arrangement, the temporary arrangement has been approved by the board, however no appointment has been done to seek the approval yet from line Ministry to engage the person.

**Mr. Chairman:** Mr. Winters in terms of the approval of the board, have you discussed this matter with the line Minister or Ministry and corporation sole to ensure that you are on course, proper course, in deciding on this temporary interim engagement?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, Chair, we have discussed it to the extent of not establishing a position in terms of like a three-year contract. But we have discussed it in terms of an urgent need and that of really getting—ensuring that our facilities are properly maintained, meaning our north office, our south office and our Tobago office. What we are not doing is that we are not creating a position of sort within the organization, we are just filling a temporary need as it relates to that of Facilities Support of facilities management.

**Mr. Chairman:** And what you anticipate the cost to be?

**Mr. Winter:** So we are looking at it in alignment with that of the CPO guidelines. So, there is a recommendation from CPO as it relates to the qualifications for such a—not the qualifications, for the designation such an office. Mr. Greene could probably give us the final figure on that, but we are looking at it in alignment with what the CPO has recommended for such a position.

**Mr. Chairman:** Now I will come back to that because I am not too clear myself on that matter, so I will have to get some clarification. But whilst I am clear in my mind on that one, on the issue of—you had some challenges both with securing an internal auditor, which you have now secured, which I am happy about, and you also had a challenge with your corporate secretary. Now, I know that when you had submitted your—when we got the statement from national self-help in the month of April, I believe, 2022, you did not have an auditor, internal auditor nor a corporate secretary, you now have both. Can you tell us when the corporate secretary was engaged?

**Mr. Winter:** Certainly, Chair. Is it possible that I could just provide you with a bit of perspective on it, or you just want the date?

**Mr. Chairman:** Well you could give me a perspective on it and as well as the date.

**Mr. Winter:** So just based on our organization's records, you know, we had a corporate secretary that was appointed to the position in November 1<sup>st</sup> of 2016, and however that individual was terminated in 2019. Subsequent to that we had a corporate secretary in December 10<sup>th</sup> of 2019, and who later resigned. Our last corporate secretary she was recruited on March the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, and her period of employment was sporadically interrupted by unplanned periods of absences, which included periods of quarantine and extended periods of leave. So she would have abruptly left office on the 26<sup>th</sup> of September 2022, with no notice to the organization. And the board realizing this urgent need we set out to fill the vacancy of corporate secretary, and our corporate secretary assumed duty on October 25<sup>th</sup> 2022.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. I noticed—now I know that when we saw the statements submitted by your good self, or maybe not by you at the time, but whoever was in charge of the self-help, because you only came in June, the office of corporate secretary. You have terms and conditions, Mr. Winter, for the corporate secretary of National Commission for Self-Help? Is it consistent?

**Mr. Winter:** Certainly, Chair. Yes those terms and conditions are in alignment with the CPO guidelines. Because if I take you back to the organizational structure of 2014, the Cabinet approval of 2014 indicated that the terms and conditions for the office of corporate secretary manager legal is in alignment with the guidelines of the CPO, so we have been following those guidelines of the CPO as it relates to the salary of the corporate secretary.

**12.10 p.m.**

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. I know from what Self Help submitted, the Corporate Secretary at that time, basic was \$12,800, travelling allowance, \$2,200 and a cellular allowance of \$309.38. Can you confirm this is what is currently obtained, because this is the CPO guideline here?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, Chair. Now, what I can say for what happened previously is that based on the recommended qualifications and experience to the Office of Corporate Secretary, that would have been somehow downgraded to allow that person to come into the organization back then. So that \$12,800 you would have been seeing in terms of the salary for the Corporate Secretary would have been in alignment with what CPO recommended for that of a Legal Officer I. But our Corporate Secretary based on the terms and conditions, based on the approval of Cabinet is that of a manager



legal which is in keeping with the CPO guidelines. I can confirm the—Mr. Greene can confirm the salary, if he is unable to confirm now, through you, we can submit same in writing.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right, but are you saying that the current salary was approved by the Cabinet, is that what you are saying?

**Mr. Winter:** Yeah. The current salary for Corporate Secretary is that in alignment with what the CPO recommended for that of a Manager, Legal Services. And we did use that salary in terms of making the office of the corporate, the current Corporate Secretary.

**Mr. Chairman:** Do you have those guidelines by the CPO?

**Mr. Winter:** I do not have it—

**Mr. Chairman:** Can you submit that for us?

**Mr. Winter:** Definitely. Definitely, Chairman. Yes, certainly.

**Mr. Chairman:** Right. But you are saying in terms of those guidelines, you are saying that those guidelines have been approved by the CPO Office as well as the Cabinet?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes. So the CPO has approved, yes, salaries for the legal framework—

**Mr. Chairman:** And those salaries are what?

**Mr. Winter:** And those salaries are being used to pay our staff.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. Before I ask Mr. Paray to come in, I just wanted to ask you, Tobago, I know that you have south, you have your Port of Spain and you have, you have your Tobago office. I see you have three persons in Tobago, right? What is happening—I want to make a suggestion for your consideration, both in terms of south and Tobago. Mr. Paray did in fact raise a number of issues earlier on and one of the things that we have to probably examine is whether there are some challenges with staffing that may have resulted in the limitations that Mr. Paray is experiencing. So, I am wondering, in terms of your south office, Mr. Winter, do you think there is a need to strengthen the south offices? So that, for instance, what we were told earlier on by Mr. Paray in terms of these applications that have been outstanding, maybe that could have been one of the factors and maybe you want to consider strengthening the south office to that extent. And what is the situation with the Tobago office? Can you bring us up to speed with Tobago?

**Mr. Winter:** Certainly, Chairman. So I take that recommendation on board strongly and I take it in the context of north, south and Tobago, because when we talk about the north office we are talking everything from Matelot to Chaguaramas, we are talking Blanchisseuse, past Blanchisseuse, we are talking anything in the Caroni area, all those things go to the north office.

And anything, Chaguanas and that direction goes to the south office. And of course Tobago office services the entire island of Tobago. So, I am in full agreement with you that we do need some review of staffing in those areas, north, south and Tobago. As it relates to the Tobago office, we are currently serviced by a project officer and an administrative assistant. We have advertised the positions of senior project officers for Tobago to get that really going in terms of servicing the needs of Tobago. So all those advertisements have gone out and it is just for us now to conduct those interviews, actually shortlisting then interviews.

**Mr. Chairman:** So how many persons you have right now on the ground in Tobago servicing the needs of the people of Tobago?

**Mr. Winter:** So we have a project officer and an administrative assistant, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** I know that in the past we had, based on the information that we had before us, one project officer, one administrative assistant, one clerical assistant. Are these people based in Tobago, are they from Tobago, are they from Trinidad? How is this office staffed, because it does not matter if you come from Trinidad or if they are from Tobago, but as we speak now, what has been the experience and what is the current reality?

**Mr. Winter:** So our recruitment, when we recruit a staff to work with the National Commission for Self Help, you can work north, south or Tobago. Currently, the two staff in Tobago they are from Trinidad but when we are looking at the recruitment in Tobago we tend to really look for somebody from the island of Tobago to service the needs of Tobago. So, while this is not a fixed criteria in terms of the recruitment and selection for staff in Tobago office, we tend to look at that with a closer view.

**Mr. Chairman:** Now, I would imagine that because of the inconvenience for the citizens from Trinidad serving in Tobago, you would have to bump up your terms and conditions or would you have to address certain other stipends to make sure that they are well taken care of. Are they permanently based in Tobago? Is it temporary until you fill those things?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** In the interim, can you provide us with their terms and conditions of engagement in writing?

**Mr. Winter:** Certainly, Chair, certainly I can give you that in writing, yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay. I think Mr. Paray wanted to raise a few matters. Mr. Paray.

**Mr. Paray:** Yes, thank you, Chair, and I will be very, very, quickly. I know we are running close

to the end of the day. I want to anchor the next couple of questions on your strategic plan going forward and I want to commend Sen. Sagrarsingh-Sooklal for making a very valid point, that as you strengthen your requirement process that you do not eliminate or alienate the most vulnerable people who are depending on your service.

Now, that being said, in my experience from the data coming into our offices, they normally have an easy time getting the paperwork from the Disaster Management Unit with a nudge, you get the applications, you get the estimates and so on. But the issue of title and tenancy is where I think the bulk of the challenges are. And if I were just to revert to Mr. Sinanan, who is your legal person there, my recollection prior to 2015, Self Help as many other agencies would have accepted an affidavit, a sworn declaration that I have been residing on this premises for 20 years, 25 years, with whatever is the formal—someone who would have known them for that period of time would swear to that as well. And obviously that is a legal document. You can be charged for perjury by law and so on, if you lie on one of those documents as well.

Is this something that you can look at, in reverting to going forward in terms of proof of this tenancy and occupation by using the affidavit, the sworn declarations as was done prior to 2015, and I am not sure why it was stopped. There may have been issues which I am not aware of. Perhaps if Mr. Sinanan could just chime in on that for this particular area.

**Mr. Sinanan:** Thank you for that question. That is something I would have to look into because that was previous to my tenure. In addition to that and going a step beyond the statutory declaration and affidavits, we are even considering in the revision of the policy liaising or establishing memorandums of understanding with certain entities that would provide documentation to that effect in a very timely manner. So once an application comes before us with regard to a similar issue we are intending to establish methods to secure that information in a very timely manner.

**Mr. Paray:** And thanks for that, because one of the things that you find and in my experience again, and I mean, forgive me for speaking of Mayaro, as the MP, because that is where the data comes to me, a lot of properties in Mayaro would have been handed down via generation through deeds of gift rather than from crown colony documents. So, I may have a deed of gift but I allow Mr. John to reside on one lot of land from that deed of gift that I have had from my great grandfather. I do not have any paperwork but I know it is mine because my great grandfather passed it down. And these deeds of gift, this is where some of the problems come. So when the little house burns down or there is some structural damage, it is even difficult, although I am

charging a rent to Mr. John, \$100 a month to stay there, I do not have that paperwork but I can swear via declaration that I am the legal owner through this deed of gift from my great grandfather. I have been here 30 years, I have given Mr. John this—he has been here for 20 years and then we are all covered under this legal document which is punishable by jail time if you lie. And really find a way to move this particular—this would be the biggest hurdle especially for those vulnerable in the community where those issues of tenancy and occupancy really are the greatest hindrance taking into account our experience here in Mayaro with land passing down through deed of gifts rather than through normal title documents, okay?

One more question, Mr. Chair, and then I will wrap up for the day. I just wanted to find out from Mr. Winter if currently your organization has certain service level agreements or key performance indices for your organization that you form this agreement with your customers, you know, the people who are making these application. Does that sort of environment exist now? And if not, is it something that you can look at so at least the company can measure itself in terms of its own performance and it would help committees like ours when your data is presented in terms of these service level agreements to help better understand your needs and to better negotiate with your line Minister or line Ministry that look, this is the data presented, this is the format, they are not meeting the service level agreement that they have been mandated to. For instance I know, I think there is just one man, one of your investigators who services from San Fernando to Guayaguayare. I do not know if there is more than one but one gentleman I see all the time and I suspect that load is too much for him. So he may not even be meeting his service level agreements, his performance, because of the sheer load. So all I am saying, if it does not exist Mr. Winter, if it is something that can be looked at in implementing going forward in your strategic plans to better measure your own performance at the end of the day. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, that was my comment today.

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, Mr. Winter.

**Mr. Winter:** Thank you very much for that question and comment Vice Chair. Definitely that will form part of our KPI in going forward. We have been looking at that. I am sure Director Sinanan, their committee has been looking at those—that same recommendation that you just made. So thank you very much for it as well.

**Mr. Chairman:** I just have one or two question before we tie up our meeting. Mr. Winter or the interim CEO, can you tell this Committee whether your fleet of vehicles has increased since we

were last advised in April of 2022? I see on page 44 you have a list of vehicles that are owned by the National Commission for Self Help. I see about seven of them. I just wanted to ask whether we have, the Self Help Commission has more than seven vehicles under its ownership and control or are there many more that have not been listed that we need to be aware of? Mr. Winter or interim CEO.

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, Chair, we still remain with those seven vehicles to date.

**Mr. Chairman:** So you have no additional vehicles, right?

**Mr. Winter:** No, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Tell me something, are all your vehicles marked? I know that the Prime Minister, well, I would not say the Prime Minister, the Government is very strong on this issue of having all state vehicles marked and so on, so that we will ensure that state property is protected. Can you advise this Committee whether these seven vehicles that we have on page 44, are they all owned by the National Commission for Self Help and are they all marked? And is there any vehicle being used by Self Help at this time that is not marked that you are aware of?

**Mr. Winter:** Chair, can I ask the interim CEO to respond to this one, please?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, thank you.

**Mr. Greene:** Chair, through you to my knowledge one of the vehicles, one of the more recent acquisitions is unmarked, but we are going to rectify that very soon.

**Mr. Chairman:** So you have—so we have increased the fleet of ownership of vehicles by the Commission from seven to eight. Am I right?

**Mr. Greene:** No, Chairman. And that vehicle is included in that listing that we forwarded. So it is just one of those vehicles.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. What is the number of that vehicle?

**Mr. Greene:** I could confirm that with you, Chair?

**Mr. Chairman:** When you say confirm—yeah, confirm.

**Mr. Greene:** The number.

**Mr. Chairman:** No, no. The reason why I am asking this question is because what I have before me are seven vehicles, all of their numbers are listed. I would not want to bore you, you sent it so you would know the numbers of your vehicles. The one that is unmarked, is it included in the seven that have been identified on page 44 of your submission? That is the point I am asking. If it has been included, can you identify the number of that vehicle that is unmarked, that has to be

marked and I want to get a deadline for stamping that vehicle that is currently unmarked.

**Mr. Greene:** Okay, Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I can commit, yes, Chairman, in terms of the—I am just trying to get the listing of the vehicles—

**Mr. Chairman:** I did not hear what you said, Mr. Greene.

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, Chairman, what I am saying, I can confirm that the—or give you a deadline date on marking that vehicle as soon as—

**Mr. Chairman:** What is the number of the vehicle, Mr. Greene.

**Mr. Greene:** That is—

**Mr. Chairman:** That is the question I have been asking. And apart from the number, when was it acquired and what is it being used for?

**Mr. Greene:** All right, Chairman. In terms of the acquired date that I will have to get back to the Committee with.

**Mr. Chairman:** So you do not know when it was acquired. How long have you been working Self Help?

**Mr. Greene:** I have been here since March of 2021 as the Human Resource Manager.

**Mr. Chairman:** And is this vehicle a new vehicle, an old vehicle, a second hand vehicle?

**Mr. Greene:** It was—

**Mr. Chairman:** Is there anybody, let me ask Mr. Winter. Mr. Winter, as the chairman of this Self Help, do you know of this unmarked vehicle? And can you tell this Committee the number of this unmarked vehicle? When was it acquired and what is it being used for?

**Mr. Winter:** Chair, I am not aware of any unmarked vehicles of the National Commission for Self Help. If there are, as I said it is not something I am aware of. I can ask Mr. Romain who served as the interim CEO up until the 12<sup>th</sup> of September, 2022, to kindly respond if he does have that information, please.

**Mr. Chairman:** Who? Who you want to ask, Mr. Romain?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, please, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** All right. Mr. Romain can you help this Committee, please.

**Mr. Romain:** Through you, Chair, so I could safely answer with regard to the number of the vehicle. The acquisition which is our most recent acquisition I do not have in front of me when it was acquired but I know the vehicle, is PCL 1738, Toyota Prado.

**Mr. Chairman:** PCL right?

**Mr. Romain:** Yes, 1738.

**Mr. Chairman:** But no. So is that part of the seven that you submitted?

**Mr. Romain:** Yes. It forms part of the seven vehicles, yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Okay.

**Mr. Romain:** It is an acquisition that we would have gotten from the Ministry, our line Ministry. It came unmarked.

**Mr. Chairman:** Oh, it came unmarked.

**Mr. Romain:** Yes, it came unmarked. So we are yet to put the stamp on it. That is why—

**Mr. Chairman:** Can I get from the—how long has it been unmarked? How long did you acquire it?

**Mr. Romain:** I do not have the timeline in front of me, but I know—

**Mr. Chairman:** Can you provide the time? Mr. CEO, interim CEO, can you provide us with the following. One. When was this vehicle passed on to National Self Help by the line Ministry? Two. Why has it not been stamped as all vehicles owned by Self Help have been stamped so far? That seems to be the only vehicle not stamped. What is this vehicle being used for? We would like to have that clear. And do you as interim CEO receive a travelling allowance, may I ask?

**Mr. Greene:** So, Chair—

**Mr. Chairman:** No, I am asking a question to the interim CEO.

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Can you tell this Committee whether you are in receipt of an allowance and can you clear the air for us as to whether you have use of this same vehicle that Mr. Romain just outlined to us, PCL 1738? Can you clear the air for this Committee so we can be guided accordingly?

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, Chairman. So there is a travelling allowance attached to the compensation package of the Chief Executive Officer with respect to that. And, yes, the vehicle is accessible to persons in the office of the CEO.

**Mr. Chairman:** Are there others apart from the CEO?

**Mr. Greene:** In terms of access to the vehicle, Chairman?

**Mr. Chairman:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, Chairman. So the vehicles are used on site visits, in difficult terrain as well. And again—yes.

**Mr. Chairman:** Do you have any position on your establishment right now that is inconsistent with your current organizational chart? And is there a salary—do you have for instance, can you provide us with the salaries of your—well, first of all let me just ask the question. Do you have any position or office currently on your establishment that is not part of the current organizational chart approved by the Cabinet of 2014, interim or temporary, outside of the one that is being advertised? Can you advise this Committee? Interim CEO or Chairman or both.

**Mr. Winter:** I will allow the interim CEO to respond to this one, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** Interim CEO, can you guide this Committee?

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, Chairman. So the only positions that exist outside the approved structure are again in the temporary short term nature which include an administrative support officer assigned to the legal department and a community liaison officer assigned to the Tobago Divisional Office. Again, both of these would have been approved by the board to satisfy an emergency need and they are both in, again a short-term arrangement and similar to the facility support technician for a period of three months.

**Mr. Chairman:** But does the board have that authority to just be employing persons on an interim basis. You talk about a liaison officer being temporarily employed and approved by the board. You talked about an administrative position, I do not know what is the full designation of this administrative position and you now earlier on told us about a facility support technician all being approved by the board, all being interim temporary, all are being paid by salaries approved I would believe by guidelines set by the CPO. My concern is, does the board have the authority to employ persons whether they are interim temporary as well—and when you talk about interim temporary, how long is this administrative officer that you mentioned being employed with the National Self Help Commission? If it is interim, is it for a three-month period, a six-month period, a 12-month period, what is the time frame?

**Mr. Greene:** A three-month period, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** And what is the salaries or salary, rather, and terms and conditions of those office holders or the liaison person in Tobago as well as the administrative officer?

**Mr. Greene:** So, Chairman while I cannot give you the exact figures now, I can submit that to the Committee in writing if permitted to do so.

**Mr. Chairman:** And does the board, let me just ask, Mr. Winter, Mr. Winter—

**Mr. Winter:** Yes, Chair, yes, Chair, I am here.



**Mr. Chairman:** Can you tell this Committee whether your board has the authority to employ persons on a temporary interim basis in administrative offices, liaison offices or the one that we mentioned earlier on, without the express approval of the Cabinet of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago having had that position submitted by the board through the Permanent Secretary and ultimately approved by the Cabinet. Can you tell us whether you can do so without Cabinet approval?

**Mr. Winter:** But, Chair, the thing is that we have not created any long term positions. What we have done is that we have identified an urgent need. What we have looked at in terms of identifying the gaps in the organization are some urgent needs that need to be filled and we sought to fill those by the creation of these, just these temporary arrangements. These arrangements are not expected to last in excess of the three months. They have all been created within a period of time of filling particular key vacancies.

**Mr. Chairman:** So in the case of the administrative officer, when was that person engaged?

**Mr. Winter:** I do not have the exact date, Chair, but that three-month engagement comes to an end very, very, soon.

**Mr. Chairman:** So was that in 2022?

**Mr. Winter:** 2022, yes, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** But you cannot say if you—as the chairman, well, may I ask the interim CEO to tell us when the administrative officer was engaged? Was it in the month of April—well, you came in June, we are now in November. Can the interim CEO advise us when this person was engaged, the administrative officer?

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, Chairman, that would have been in August of this year.

**Mr. Chairman:** And when is that person's term supposed to end, the interim term?

**Mr. Greene:** Actually—

**Mr. Chairman:** August, September, October, we are now in November. If it is a three-month period, it was supposed to end at the end of October, we are now in November. Is the person still employed?

**Mr. Greene:** So, Chairman, through you the—

**Mr. Chairman:** I am asking the question. Is the person still employed?

**Mr. Greene:** Yes, Chairman.

**Mr. Chairman:** And how long do you think Mr. CEO interim, would that person be engaged for?

Until the end of December or next year?

**Mr. Greene:** So, Chairman, the engagement spans to the 8<sup>th</sup> of August to the 7<sup>th</sup> of November.

**Mr. Chairman:** 8<sup>th</sup> of August. And you will provide this Committee with the terms and conditions of that person's engagement as well as the liaison officer. I think those are the two and then you have another one that is coming up.

Now, the final, final point I want to raise, Tobago again. Did the former workers resign, did they leave? How, why did we have this crisis emerging in Tobago? Can you provide us with some answers?

**Mr. Winter:** Yes. I would not describe it as a crisis, Chair, because what happened in Tobago is that we received a number of complaints, both written and verbal complaints from our clients in Tobago.

**12.40 p.m.**

What we set out to do in September of this year, effective September 5<sup>th</sup> of this year, was to really get a training programme going for our projects team. So what we sought to do was to bring those two persons from Tobago to Trinidad for a three-month period, you know, to understudy and to work along with the projects team in Trinidad which—and most of the persons in Trinidad have been part of the organization for a number of years. So on the day that these persons were supposed to come across to Trinidad, we received resignation letters from them but it did not place the organization, I would say, within a crisis. Chair, we were able to service the needs of Tobago by the reassignment of those two persons in those vacancies in Tobago.

**Mr. Chairman:** You said that you received what, a series of complaints? From who?

**Mr. Winter:** Complaints, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:** From who?

**Mr. Winter:** From our clients. From our clients in—

**Mr. Chairman:** Like what? Can you identify what these complaints were all about?

**Mr. Winter:** So, Chair, I do not want to—now, while I—

**Mr. Chairman:** Can you put in writing—

**Mr. Winter:** Certainly, Chair.

**Mr. Chairman:**—and provide us with copies of those complaints that you mentioned so that we, at our level, can understand why you took the position that you took, or why those persons, as you said, were supposed to come to Trinidad for some training programme and on the day they were

supposed to come they all resigned? And you were saying that the reason why you wanted them here is to deal with those complaints so that they could provide better service. Put everything in writing, attach all those complaints that you received from the clients of national self-help so that this Committee could be aware of what is taking place in Tobago.

Now I think I would like to, at this time, pause. If we need to have you back we will alert you. If we do not, we will write to you any further questions we want to get from your good self on this very important matter of national self-help.

I would like, on behalf of our Committee, the Public Accounts (Enterprises) Committee, to thank everyone for being here with us. We would like to first of all recognize all the officials from the Ministry of Sport and Community Development for being here with us today, this morning into this afternoon. We would also like to thank all the members and officials, including Directors of the National Commission for Self Help, for being with us today. We would also like to thank all our Committee members for being here with us today, as well as the viewing and listening audience for tuning in to this enquiry.

I would like to excuse all of the officials at this time. I would like to ask our members to remain for a closing session of our meeting. And with those few words, I would like to thank all of you for being here today. And, as I as said, if we need to communicate with your further, either to come directly or through responses in writing we shall do so. This meeting is now suspended.

**12.44 p.m.:** *Meeting adjourned.*