

VERBATIM NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE HELD AT THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS ON THURSDAY, 22ND MARCH, 2018 AT 9.35 A.M.

Submittee: Ministry of Civil Service

In Attendance:

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| 1. | Ms. Bernadette Welch | - | Permanent Secretary |
| 2. | Mr. David Raj | - | Business Manager |
| 3. | Mr. Viliame | - | Senior Accountant |
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DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members and invited officers from Ministries and Departments, a very good morning to you all. I would like to welcome you all to the meeting of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), particular to the Madam Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Civil Service and her team, I welcome you.

We are here to discuss the Audit issues that were raised in the 2016 Audit Report on the General Administration Sector of Government, Volume 2. I believe there were certain issues and questions sent to your Ministry and I believe a written response has already been provided to us. Nonetheless, we would like to hear what you would say in regards to this written response.

Just very quickly, I would like to introduce my team.

(Deputy Chairperson introduced the Honourable Members of the Committee)

We also have representatives from the Ministry of Economy (MOE), as well as from the Office of the Auditor-General (OAG), and our Secretariat staff.

I would like to give the opportunity now to you, Madam PS. Perhaps, before we move on to the submission, if you can very briefly introduce your officers to us and just a point of note that whilst you will be doing the submission, there will be some supplementary questions in between, so hopefully you are all right with that. Those questions are just directed to know more in-depth about the issues that we will be discussing. I now give you the opportunity, Madam PS, to lead us from here.

MS. B. WELCH.- Thank you, Honourable Deputy Chairperson for inviting us to address the Committee today.

(Introduction of the Ministry of Civil Service Officials)

Before we proceed, I will explain our corporate services arrangements which will explain why we have a member of the Ministry of Employment, Seema Maharaj.

The Ministry of Civil Service has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Ministry of Employment to provide some of our corporate services. While we have our own Business Manager, our accounting services are provided by the Ministry of Employment, our Information Technology (IT) services are provided by them and some of our Human Resource (HR) services, but we do all of our own recruitment and we do our own contracts and postings for doctors.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Madam PS, we believe that this is a very new Ministry, it has been there before as Public Service Commission (PSC) but most of the roles and responsibilities are diverted elsewhere whereas some very important roles are still contained within the Ministry. I am just interested to know about the structure of the Ministry now.

MS. B. WELCH.- Yes, it would be good for me to start with that. I will explain what the Ministry of Civil Service does and how we are structured to deliver.

The Ministry of Civil Service has a responsibility to provide secretariat services to what is now the Public Service Commission (PSC), which is under the Constitution, between three and six commissioners appointed by the President through the Constitutional Offices Commission.

The PSC is responsible for employing and oversight of Permanent Secretaries, it issues regulations under the Civil Service Act and it issues Civil Service Guidelines. So that is one of our responsibilities, the support for the Commission.

Secondly, we have a Policy Division and the Division provides support to other Ministries in the development of their own policies. This is consistent with the responsibilities that Permanent Secretaries now have under the Constitution, for their own Ministries to operate like Chief Executives.

We have a Recruitment Division which is responsible for recruiting all of our staff which, at this point in time, also includes the doctors, so we run recruitment campaigns in phases throughout the year to bring in doctors but also our own staff in the Ministry of Civil Service. The Recruitment Division also does all contracting. We do all of this in collaboration with the Ministry of Health and Medical Services.

We also are responsible for doctors' postings and we run the Posting Committee, both myself and the PS for Health chair the Posting Committee, and we also run the committee that looks at doctors' appeals against their postings.

We have a Training Division. The responsibility of this Division is to coordinate all of the international training offers that we receive from other organisations and other countries for the whole of the Civil Service. We provide learning and development opportunities and courses for the whole of the Civil Service. Most of what we are running at the moment relates to training in the Civil Service Reforms, but we also run a number of other courses and we are developing new courses all the time.

We have a Major Events Division which is responsible for coordinating major international meetings run by the Government. This Division is very new, I have just recruited the Director and we are in the process of recruiting the staff of this Division. Our main focus at this point in time is organising the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Annual Meeting which will be held here in Fiji next May.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I have noted certain points, the first in terms of recruitment, so when it comes to direct recruitment of officers from a Ministry, it is mostly the Ministry of Health. Apart from the Ministry of Health, is there any other Ministry?

MS. B. WELCH.- No, the doctors were actually moved into the Ministry of Civil Service in the 2016 – 2017 Budget, so we have had them for nearly two years. Our role is administrative, so the doctors still work within the Ministry of Health in the Ministry of Health facilities, but we provide their administrative services.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I believe, there is a bit of thin line of differentiation in terms of what the Fiji Medical and Dental Council, the institution that actually assesses the doctors who come into Fiji, and your Ministry. What is the difference between their role and your role when it comes to recruitment of medical personnel here in Fiji?

MS. B. WELCH.- I think you might be referring to the Fiji Medical Council.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Yes.

MS. B. WELCH.- The Fiji Medical Council is chaired by the Permanent Secretary for Health and it is a separate organisation which is responsible for issuing medical licences. That is their role, they licence interns and they licence doctors.

I am not involved in Fiji Medical Council. That is more of a technical responsibility and it is not my responsibility. That cuts across the administrative side that I am responsible for.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- The assessment of doctors who come from overseas into Fiji comes directly under your Ministry?

MS. B. WELCH.- Yes, we do the recruitment and we convene interview panels. While we convene the interview panels which are usually medical specialists who chairs those recruitment panels, we comply with the Open Merit-Based Recruitment Framework which requires for anyone above Band J that there is an external member to the Civil Service and an external member to the Ministry.

My Ministry provides a secretariat service to these recruitment processes, so we have someone sitting there who is scribing. We sometimes provide people on the panel outside of doctors as well, but it is always chaired by a doctor.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Your brief explanation that you have just given on the structure, so to speak, of this new Ministry, I understand one of your core functions is the Civil Service Reforms?

MS. B. WELCH.- No, the Civil Service Reforms are administered under the MOE, the Civil Service Reform Management Unit sits within the MOE.

What the Ministry of Civil Service does is, after reforms are rolled out and the initial strong focus on training as many people as possible in the reforms as part of the change management occurs through the Reform Unit, the training packages get handed over to the Ministry of Civil Service and then we start running that training on an ongoing basis, so we then embed the training into our training programme.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Interesting! So this training programme, would you be using something similar in the past with the PSC, like running a parallel programme with the new training scheme that you have?

One of the things that we have noticed is the lack of capacity discipline, trying to reinforce the duties and roles required of each civil servant in dealing with training. Maybe, I am jumping the gun a bit quickly, Deputy Chairperson, but it is something that I am kind of confused at as to your role, you are saying that you are just playing the secretariat role and then the reforms are run in a different Ministry, and that you hand out the training package as well.

MS. B. WELCH.- Yes, as far as the reforms are concerned, once the change management has occurred and the reforms have been rolled out and embedded then the training comes into the Ministry of Civil Service to roll out, as part of our ongoing learning and development offerings.

Ministries also run their own training and can send people on learning and development that they feel that they need to do. The Ministry of Civil Service runs the kind of training that is universally required across the Civil Service and our secretariat responsibilities are different from the training. That relates to the support of the PSC which is an externally appointed commission that is responsible for Permanent Secretaries' recruitment and performance.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- MOE, I think it is very important for us to know more in-depth about this. The Civil Service Reform; what is the main responsibility of your Ministry when it comes to this?

MOE REP.- Sir, the Civil Service Reform Unit function on its own and it comes under our Minister. I would appreciate if you need an audience with them, to have a certain time allocated for them to come and answer any questions that you may have.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- As far as we know, we thought that the whole initiation and implementation part came under the Ministry of Civil Service. We did not have much idea that it actually comes under the MOE and the Ministry of Civil Service in their capacity, mostly focuses on training and the secretariat work.

This special unit is with the MOE, not in the Ministry of Civil Service?

MOE REP.- Yes, Sir, it is in our building.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- And the appointment of the Permanent Secretaries are done by the PSC which is an external....

MS. B. WELCH.- The Public Service Commissioners are appointed by the President under the Constitutional Officers Commission and they operate as an independent Commission.

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Deputy Chairperson, this is a new Ministry, if you can just provide us with something like an organisation chart so that we will be able to know the three main Divisions that you had mentioned and we will be able to know the functions?

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- So you are specifically requesting the Ministry because I am sure that you can find it on their website on both, the MOE and the Ministry of Civil Service.

MS. B. WELCH.- Sir, I am happy to take that on notice and provide an organisation chart.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Deputy Chairperson, through you, Madam PS and to the MOE as well, the core function is there with the Ministry now but has to be developed from the past PSC. With Government purse, the PS Economy is tasked with that responsibility, yet respective PSs are also now fully charged to look after that as well. So, when it comes to accountability within the reform that you are now proposing, how does that function from the full responsibility of PS Economy, that is now required of the PSs in their respective Ministries?

MS. B. WELCH.- Sir, the best person to talk about the responsibilities of the PS for Economy would be the PS herself. I can only talk about responsibilities I have under the Constitution which would be the same as other Permanent Secretaries. So, under the Constitutions, PSs are basically the Head of the Accounting for their own Ministry, so the budget that I receive, I am fully responsible for and I need to account for that budget and make sure that there are policies and procedures in control in place to ensure efficient, effective and economically use of public money.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Probably, just a question to clarify the earlier question; the appointment of PSs, who does the appointment?

MS. B. WELCH.- The Public Service Commission is charged with appointing PSs under the Constitution and it does that with the agreement of the Prime Minister.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- It is like an independent body now. So, that means the Civil Service Reform Unit falls under the PS of the MOE?

MR. D. RAJ.- I am not sure whether it comes under the PS of the MOE but it does come under the Honourable Minister for Economy.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I think that is the thin line of differentiation we are interested to know about. Honourable Members, any more questions?

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- The previously known PSC now Ministry of Civil Service, the work that used to be done in the PSC in terms of employees, used to be managed by PSC, what about now?

MS. B. WELCH.- Once the Constitution changed, the responsibility for civil servants changed, it is my understanding, but that happened before I came to Fiji. What happens now is that each Ministry is responsible for its own employees, just like each Ministry is responsible for its own budget. So, I am responsible for the employees in the Ministry of Civil Service and because doctors are administered by my Ministry, that includes doctors as well.

As far as the responsibilities that were with the PSC, the Ministry of Civil Service is very different to what the PSC was as a ministry. So, there was a PSC Ministry and there was a Public Service Commission which was the Commission as well. Now, that Ministry does not exist. Its responsibilities, some changed under the Constitution and others were moved into other Ministries.

The only things that moved into the Ministry of Civil Service were training and secretariat support for the PSC. Those were the only two things that have come to the Ministry of Civil Service. Its other responsibilities moved to a number of different agencies across the Civil Service.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Just like the scholarship section moved to TELS, previously it used to be under PSC.

MS. B. WELCH.- Yes.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Madam PS, another question out of interest; this so-called Disciplinary Tribunal, is it under your Ministry now?

MS. B. WELCH.- No, the Tribunal does not sit under a Ministry, it is separate.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- All right.

MS. B. WELCH.- The Discipline Guideline itself is issued by the PSC and that Guideline can be found on the PSC's website.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- So, that Guideline was not set by your Ministry?

MS. B. WELCH.- No, it was set by the PSC.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- I think we have had quite extensive discussions on the roles and responsibilities, perhaps, we can move on to the Audit issues itself, so requesting you or your designate or whoever will be giving response to lead us from here.

MS. B. WELCH.- Sir, I am happy to go through the questions that were sent by the Committee and the answers that we have given, if you would like me to address the Committee in that way.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- I apologise, PS, before we go into the Audit issues, there is a qualification in the Audit Opinion regarding the revenue of \$1 million which could not be verified. Can you just enlighten the Committee what this revenue of \$1 million is relating to?

MS. B. WELCH.- Yes, I can, that revenue of \$1 million is related to PSC scholarships, so it is related to something that was not the responsibility of the Ministry of Civil Service. It was a legacy issue and we could not provide the documentation that related to it because we never had that responsibility but unfortunately, because it was still set in Head 17 and Head 17 was the Head for the PSC. So that is why we have ended up with this legacy issues in the Ministry of Civil Service because we inherited Head 17 and all the legacy issues from the PSC came with it, even though the Ministry did not inherit those responsibilities.

When it came to providing information for the auditors in relation to matters that the Ministry of Civil Service was not responsible for, we were unable to do so. The OAG, without having the documentation, they have qualified the account. But what we have done is, we have been in discussion with the MOE to regularise this issue and now my understanding is, that the balance has been cleared and it no longer appears in our account for Head 17.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- MOE, can you confirm that?

MOE REP.- Thank you, Deputy Chairperson. The MOE took into consideration the comments from the Ministry for Civil Service, likewise there was no proper handing over done during the transfer of PSC to the Ministry of Civil Service and that includes the Scholarship Unit.

What the MOE did, we collected all the files from the old office and the team did verifications of all the scholarships that were given according to only the files that were available to them. So we have verified all the documents and the accounts have already been transferred now to Fiji Revenue and Customs Services (FRCS) for their collection of revenue.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- This particular Division that we are talking about, this is the one opposite Dolphins Plaza, just beside the Fiji Broadcasting Commission (FBC).

MOE REP.- Yes, Deputy Chairperson.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- So, they used to handle the PSC Scholarships or other scholarships as well? During those times we had the Multi-Ethnic and Fijian Affairs Board Scholarships.

MOE REP.- They used to handle the PSC scholarships.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Deputy Chairperson, I seek some clarification from the MOE. Now that you have cleared the outstanding amount under the Ministry of Civil Service and you had pushed it to FRCS, it is the same quantum, when you do not have any paper trail and all that?

MOE REP.- We have collected some of the folders from the PSC's old office, so whatever scholarship folders that we managed to collect we had verified and the balance, with the folders, had been given to FRCS for their collection of revenue from respective scholarship recipients.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- The collection of scholarship dues are now under the responsibility of FRCS. So these amounts are from the ones who might have not paid their bond or pay back what the scholarship arrangement was or might have gone away or migrated somewhere. Are these the type of cases we are talking about?

MOE REP.- Yes, Deputy Chairperson. We have also verified for those who have collected according to the amount that was given to them, so the balance is the one that was given across to FRCS.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- We can move onto the next issue.

MS. B. WELCH.- Sir, I will start back from the beginning.

17.4.1 - Management of Fixed Assets; we have just talked about the second issue 17.4.2 - Lack of Documentary Records for Inherited Account Balances, so I will skip that one as we going through.

One of the issues that was raised was management of fixed assets. It was noted that there was not a handover of the Fixed Assets Register from the PSC, which is correct, we did not received the Fixed Assets Register and, in fact, we did not receive all of the fixed assets either.

The PSC used to be in Berkeley Crescent. The Ministry of Civil Service from day one, was set up in Civic House. So we were given some furniture from PSC, we also got the CTD training area and the furniture and fittings came with that. But some of the furniture stayed at Berkeley Crescent and it was taken over by the Ministry of Lands.

There was no Fixed Assets Register that we were given or that we could identify and so we did our own count and that has been recognised in the Audit Report because that count could not be verified back to the Fixed Assets Register.

What we have done now is that, my Business Manager - David Raj, has done the MOE training in Assets Management and Fixed Assets Registers. We have a Fixed Assets Register for the Ministry of Civil Service which all our fixed assets that we have purchased is recorded in. So at this point in time, we are confident that we are effectively managing our fixed assets.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- A very interesting comment that I have noted from the Ministry says in the first paragraph of the Ministry's comments, and I quote:

“...many of its responsibilities moved to other Ministries, yet the Ministry of Civil Service continues to be held responsible for the accounts of the former PSC.”

OAG, what is your stance on that statement, are they still held accountable for all these issues?

AUDIT REP.- Thank you, Deputy Chairperson. When there was a transition between PSC to Ministry of Civil Service. There were certain issues which we have highlighted, the first being the scholarship. The charges were appearing on to Head 17 which was inherited by Ministry of Civil Service, together with those are the transfer of fixed assets which were not properly recorded.

However, going forward and the comments from the MOE and we also agree with that, that charges have been cleared as explained by MOE. Also, we have noted that subsequent to the transition, they have now enable to agree and maintain proper records of assets. So I guess, there were certain issues at the point of transition but going forward, whatever was inherited the Ministry has been able to account those. I think they are working closely with MOE to identify if there is any other charges appearing. It will not be the similar issues that we had noted at transition but going forward, I think those issues are being taken care off.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, any questions?

HON. S.B. VUNIVALU.- Deputy Chairperson, can I ask another question in regards as there was no proper handing over to clarify why it was put down?

MOE REP.- The staff of the Ministry were composed, like they were moved around to other Ministries. When we decided to verify the scholarship documents, there was no one there to assist us or to handover all the documentation. So the staff from the MOE just went across and gathered all the files from the old office and we started off with our verification.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- We can move on to the next issue.

MS. B. WELCH.- I will skip the next issue because it was the first one that we had discussed.

17.4.3 - Anomalies in the Operating Trust Account; it is the same issue again. These anomalies are related to former PSC responsibilities that had moved to other agencies, they had not moved into the Ministry of Civil Service. Of course, as I have said, we did inherit Head 17 which had these legacy issues in them.

We had gone through and listed all of the old accounts that have had no transactions in them and are dormant, we have written to the MOE to ask that they be transferred, closed or blocked so that this Ministry does not have to continue to deal with legacy issues from the PSC and the Operating Trust Account.

In relation to reconciliations which had not been occurring regularly, we do now have regular reconciliations. It did take us a bit of time to get those better done but they are now.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- If I can make reference to Table 17.4, there are a number of account numbers, descriptions and amounts that had been mentioned. It says, "Deduction for Rent of Government Quarters"; the third row says, "Payroll Deduction PSC Bond Quarters; then, "Payroll Deduction Agriculture", et cetera. There is even a transaction on Government water rates charges. All these were were the responsibility of PSC?

MS. B. WELCH.- None of these were Ministry of Civil Service's matters, they were legacy matters from the PSC.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Legacy matters. So, now most of it is under MOE?

AUDIT REP.- Sir, those accounts are still under Head 17. They had written to MOE asking for our assistance for the clearance of those accounts. We are reviewing it because they are payroll deductions. We need to liaise with respective organisations to check if the employees' deductions had been paid before we make any recommendations.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- So, that means this matter is still under review.

AUDIT REP.- Yes, Sir.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Deputy Chairperson, through you, just a point of interest, Madam. Do not you think it is prudent that you get your house cleaned first before you go into this Reforms or whatever, because it will be in a continuous rhetoric here, that you come to inherit this Head 17 because the books of the OAG will just...

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- The onus lies on you, Madam PS, if you want to answer that question or not.

MS. B. WELCH.- Sir, I acknowledge that there were issues that we inherited, but I am also giving you details about how we are dealing with them. There is not a single issue that we inherited, that we have not taken steps to deal with. So I do not think that it is necessarily a correct observation to think that this Ministry is not dealing with the legacy issues, we are, but we are stating the facts in terms of the fact being that these were issues that came from the PSC.

We had written to the MOE on the issues raised on this matter, we have had the MOE clear that revenue balance, so all of those legacy issues are being dealt with. I most definitely take that responsibility seriously and want my accounts to be cleared so that it is easier for me to be able to manage my responsibilities going forward, and I want a clear set of financial statements in this current audit financial statement.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- We can move on to the next one, and I believe that is the last issue.

MS. B. WELCH.- 17.4.4 - Anomalies in the Maintenance of Payroll Accounts; there were problems with payroll reconciliations back when this Audit was done. We have put some extra processes in place in terms of payroll reconciliations. We now have a further step where we have the HR staff going through the reconciliations after the Accounts staff have done them, so that we can make sure that anomalies are being picked up by the staff who actually know who should be on the Person to Post list.

We have also made amendments to the purchase reconciliations and we have told staff who are responsible for filling out purchase requisitions, they have to identify which part of the accounts the debit should come from. Rather than accounting staff being held responsible for which SEGs this debits are coming from, the staff who are actually requesting the procurement are also being held accountable and the records are retained by the Accounts Team in the Ministry of Employment. The records that could not be identified during the audit, a lot of them were from PSC records and they were hard to find because we have not had a full handover of those records.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- There are a lots of transactions in Table 17.6 so perhaps, the MOE would be the best Ministry to answer this. These transactions are very questionable in nature, a few of those which I have noted are: "Refund to JS and 1 day per diem allowance", "School fees", "PS's cocktail", et cetera. Are these types of transactions or allocations still in place in the Ministries?

MOE REP.- Thank you, Deputy Chairperson. I think for some of the transactions here they are not supposed to be charged to SEGs 1 and SEG 2, like hotel accommodation they are supposed to go to SEG 3. I think it is the Account Head who is signing the payment voucher and he/she should also be verifying the allocations that are used for those payments.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- But the gist of my question is, are these allocations still happening in Ministries? An example is this, school fees, so that means deduction from the payroll as well.

MS. B. WELCH.- Sir, I can answer that question, can I?

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Yes.

MS. B. WELCH.- These actually relate to Permanent Secretary terms and conditions in their contracts. Some relate to terms and conditions for expatriate Permanent Secretaries and they should have come out of the PSC accounts and they were incorrectly put in the Ministry of Civil Service accounts and incorrectly put in the wrong SEGs. This stated back to that first year that the Ministry of Civil Service was operating during the period before I started, I started in May of that year. I think that there was a lot of confusion at that point in time.

What I have said about how we are now making sure that people are clearly identifying where funds should be accounting to, that should mitigate the problem with these sorts of things happening.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- So, these allocations were the allocations of the PS, especially the expatriates?

MS. B. WELCH.- Not all expatriates but these are all PSC expenses. Remember, the PSC employs the Permanent Secretaries, so all Permanent Secretaries salaries and allowance, PSC meetings, et cetera, with Permanent Secretary Retreats, all come out of the PSC budget, and that point in time they were incorrectly put against the Ministry of Civil Service in the wrong SEG.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Thank you, PS, for the explanations given. Just a question in terms of the Divisions in the Ministry of Civil Service, you mentioned that the Ministry of Civil Service has its own set of employees, its own roles to play but all the other Ministries come under their respective PSs.

In terms of your Divisions, you have a Policy Division which according to this, it is responsible for the assessment of overarching Government policies. Can you just highlight to the Committee what is this Policy Division is responsible for since you mentioned you only look after your Ministry?

Then you have the Central Training Division which coordinates central training. Is that only for the Ministry or is it for the whole of Government? If you could just clarify, maybe that is a little blurred in terms of what the Committee understands about the Ministry of Civil Service?

MS. B. WELCH.- Thank you for those questions.

Firstly, I will talk about the role of the Policy Division. The Division was set up in recognition that with the other Ministries developing their own HR policies, there needed to be somewhere that they could go to get advice to make sure they were not heading in the wrong direction.

Developing policies that were inconsistent and creating issues civil service-wide so what the Policy Division does, it gives Ministries advice and assistance when they are developing their policies.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Just interrupting that, there are existing General Orders, what sort of policies again, are you talking about?

MS. B. WELCH.- The General Orders are currently under review. Ministries do have the capacity to develop their own equivalent to General Orders, because the General Orders are quite outdated. They have not been reviewed for a while and were reviewed under the former PSC and things have changed since then.

The Permanent Secretaries decided that it would be better if the General Orders are reviewed as one rather than every Ministry doing the same piece of work. The Civil Service Reform Unit is supervising that but the Policy Division of the Ministry of Civil Service is providing resources to assist in that review. That review will be done in consultation with all the other Ministries.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- This review.

MS. B. WELCH.- I am not sure of the timing. The Civil Service Reform Management Unit will be better to answer that. They know what their timelines are.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- These policies that you are talking about, say the review of the General Orders?

MS. B. WELCH.- Yes, the Civil Service Reform Management Unit is overseeing the review of General Orders but my staff from the Policy Division are providing the resources, they are assisting in that review. I have a couple of policy officers who are providing assistance but also that review is being done in consultation with all the other Ministries.

Sir, moving on from the Policy Division, the Training Division does have a similar role to the Training Division in the former PSC. It is responsible for running training courses and coordinating learning and development opportunities across the Civil Service where we have an overarching need.

As I was saying, once we embed the learning and development for the Civil Service Reforms like merit-based recruitment where we have developed some training courses, we have developed a course in application, writing and interview preparation so that people can learn more about how to engage themselves with the merit-based recruitment process.

We are working with the MOE in developing some procurement training courses, and we have been out into the market to develop a leadership training course for our tier-two leaders so that we can develop our next phase of leaders to come up into our most senior leadership positions. They also coordinate the offerings that come from overseas like JICA, Colombo Plan and other countries, China, United Kingdom and others, who offer scholarships and training opportunities. We send out the information from our Ministry. The nominations come back through us and we make the final decision based on the nominations we receive as to who gets to be put forward.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- Madam PS, in terms of training, there are a lot of Audit issues being highlighted to respective Ministries. One of the main causes of this is because of the lack of understanding by civil servants in terms of the operations of the accounting system in the respective Ministries. And there used to be a training, sort of, courses for people who are involved in the accounts section of respective Ministries, for example, H1, H2, et cetera. What is happening now to all those courses?

MS. B. WELCH.- The Ministry of Civil Service does not run those. I am not sure, what the MOE does. I know that they bring together the Accounting Heads.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- One of the process in training that all the people in the Accounts Division of respective Ministries used to undertake to allow them to progress in the Accounts Section. So, you are not aware of those or where they are now?

MS. B. WELCH.- I am not aware of where they are but I am happy to work with the MOE on asking about those courses and what we can do. This Ministry is very happy to support learning and development opportunities where they are required, which is why we are working with the MOE now in developing a couple of courses to teach people about proper procurement practice and tender evaluation, et cetera.

HON. A.M. RADRODRO.- There are some other courses for other respective cadre. Probably, the MOE can enlighten us on that.

MOE REP.- Deputy Chairperson, all the internal Service Exams were abolished. Now, it is only the induction courses conducted by the Ministries and Departments on the newly appointed officers.

HON. RATU N.T. LALABALAVU.- Thank you for that reply from the MOE. In fact, Madam PS, this is what I raised earlier on right from the outset, the Ministry of Civil Service is running a parallel programme to ensure it tapers off nicely before we take on board the new training programme that you are now pushing through like, the procurement courses, et cetera, because the argument that we always have in the House is that civil servants who are qualified did these internal exams to get them to where they are. To say that they are not qualified is something that I totally do not agree with, so for this, Madam PS, now that you have come to know that there was an old system in place, in which the MOE said that it has been abolished, so are we starting all over again?

MS. B. WELCH.- We are not going to have exams for civil servants to get promoted because what we are trying to do is to encourage people to come from all over and apply for jobs in the Civil Service. And if we are insisting that people who come into roles at certain levels must have a public service exam under their belt, we are then restricting those jobs to people who are already in the Service.

However, what we do need to do is make sure that we have got adequate learning and development for technical areas and remember as I said before, Ministries are able to put their people on training and development that they require as well, it is just not up to the Ministry of Civil Service.

But the other thing that we are doing is, we have funding from the Government to develop an online learning platform which we initially want to roll out for induction training across the Civil Service. Some for this induction training will be picking up on some of the things that were in the old Public Service Exams so that we can make sure that all public servants have that same basic level of induction, that they can access it at any time from their desk and go through that process of doing the induction training, and then it can be assessed as a part of the performance management system.

DEPUTY CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, I believe that that is the end of the written response. Is there any other question?

I thank you, Madam PS. I take it that there will no longer be any other questions. We do understand that most of the issues that are highlighted in this 2016 Report are inherited issues and not in actuality the operational ones and this is because of the transition that happened when all these major changes happened.

So on this note, I would like to thank you for your contribution, for your responses and since this is a new Ministry which has been incepted, we wish the Ministry all the best. There were a lot of supplementary questions but these questions were out of interest mostly, since this is the establishment of a new Ministry itself.

It was good to note that we learnt a lot of things, a lot of doubts were also cleared in regards to the different roles and responsibilities your Ministry has, as well as other Ministries.

I thank you for all the responses you made in regards to the supplementary questions we asked. We would like to just hear some concluding words from you before we conclude the session.

MS. B. WELCH.- Thank you, Sir. Thank you, Honourable Members. I always welcome the opportunity to have a conversation about what we are doing in the Ministry of Civil Service and I look forward to appearing again in the future. Rest assured, we are doing everything we can in this Ministry to make sure that we have a clear financial statement this time around, and that we are trying to do everything we can to improve the capacity building across the Civil Service. Thank you.

The Committee adjourned at 10.37 a.m.

