

APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Written Response received from
Levuka Town Council

Levuka Town Council

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Our Ref: LTC/nl/49/23

Date: 31st May, 2023.

Hon. Alitia Bainivalu
Chairperson, Standing Committee on
Social Affairs
Parliament Complex, Gladstone Road
P.O Box 2352, Government Buildings
Suva.

Dear Madam,

Re: Clarification of Issues --- Levuka Town Council Annual Report 2014 and 2015

Reference is made to your letter of 25th May, 2023 regarding the above and responses to the questions raised therein are provided as follows.

Levuka Town Council Annual Reports 2014 and 2015

Questions for the 2014 Annual Report

Question 1:

Levuka Town Council identified assets that are looked after by Council. Clarify with discussions on what has become of the two assets identifies below:

- a. Land at Vagadaci and
- b. Vacant land at Levuka village

Response:

(a) Land at Vagadaci:

The Council land at Vagadaci is leased by the State at the current annual rate of \$10, 000.00. Built on the land are Government staff quarters.

- (b) Discussions with stakeholders in the Ministry of Local Government and other relevant Government authorities is being pursued this year to develop the land for rental flats to cater for the high demand of rental flats in Levuka. This is envisaged to create additional revenue streams for Council with a view of contributing to the financial sustainability of Council in the long term.**

Council will seek Government technical and financial assistance and support in this project since it does not have the resources to meet the costs.

Question 2:

The Committee noted that in the 2015 Annual Report " Levuka was declared a historical port town in 2013". What is the current status of Levuka?

Response:

- (i) Levuka is still listed as a World Heritage Port Town, however, it is facing huge challenges in trying to maintain its Heritage status due to the lack of funds to maintain sites, infrastructure and buildings which are of Heritage status.
- (ii) Council, however, is very grateful to Government for continuously providing financial support to maintain these heritage sites and infrastructure.
- (iii) Home owners of heritage status, however, face great challenges and struggle financially to maintain their homes, given the strict heritage laws that govern them.

Question 3:

According to the organizational structure, an Accountant is employed by the Council, therefore the Committee would like to clarify why was there issues highlighted by the Auditor General's report when there is a qualified Accountant in the organisation?

Response:

One of the major challenges faced by Council over the years was its inability to attract and retain qualified and experienced staff in its Accounting and Administrative sections due to the lack of funds. For this reason, Council has resorted to employing staff who lack the expertise for these jobs due to affordability.

The above situation resulted in the issues highlighted by the Auditor General over the years. As regards the Accountant's post in Council's organizational structure, the qualified Accountant was only recruited in 2021, after Government introduced the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) in 2016.

With the Council's scarce and limited resources, Council has not been able to recruit clerical support staff for the Accountant, so segregation of duties is nonexistent and so is internal control. With these important elements missing in the organisation there is bound to be errors in processes and procedures even with presence of a qualified Accountant.

The way forward for Council now, in consultation with our line Ministry, the Ministry of Local Government, who will assist in conducting training workshops for Council staff in the areas of accounting and administration.

Question 4:

Can Levuka Town Council clarify whether staff identified in the annual report are still employed with the Council?

Response:

Only two(2) of the staff identified in the annual report are still employed by Council.

Question 5:

Can Levuka Town Council explain the reasons of the increase in cash and cash equivalent at the end of the financial year 2015?

Response:

The reasons of the increase in cash and cash equivalent at the end of the financial year 2015 was due to Government Grants which has been accounted as Income.

Question 6:

Can Levuka Town Council explain the reasons of the increase in the net loss for the year 2015?

Response:

As per the financial statement for the year 2015, there was a surplus of \$249,526.00 and not a loss. The surplus was due to the increase in Government Grants as mentioned in our response at (5) above.

Comparative Analysis for the Annual Reports 2014 and 2015:

Questions 7:

Environmental Scan - SWOT Analysis

The Committee noted the same SWOT Analysis for 2014 and 2015 . Can Levuka Town Council explain whether any actions were taken after identifying the weaknesses and challenges in 2014?

Response:

1. Isolation – Traffic has improved since we have two shipping companies operating from Levuka to Suva and return.
2. Lack of space for development – still an issue for Levuka due to the mountainous terrain. The way forward for Levuka Town Council is to identify vacant buildings within town and negotiate with property owners to purchase and develop them for rental purposes which will generate revenue for council.
3. Migration – This is a big challenge for Levuka given its small and vulnerable economy and the lack of employment opportunities on offer hence the continuous migration.

Financial Statements for both the Years Ended 31 December 2014 and 31 December 2015

Question 8:

For the Year 2014 and 2015 of the independent Auditors report, there were issues that were identified in the Basis of Disclaimer Opinion, Emphasis of Matter and other information. Can the Levuka Town Council clarify whether these identified issues have been resolved? What steps have been taken to avoid recurrence of the matter?

Response:

Levuka Town Council agrees with the audit findings and advise that some of the issues highlighted have been resolved.

Steps that Council has taken to avoid recurrence:

- Proper documentation and approval for procurement
- Proper documentation of policy and procedures for fixed assets, staff matters etc
- Ensure proper statutory government regulations are followed.
- Ensure processes and procedures required under the IFRS are adhered to.

General Questions - Sustainable Development Goals

Question 9.

Can Levuka Town Council highlight its contribution towards SDG 5 – Gender Equality and its implementation in the organization?

Response:

- Levuka Town Council with the collaboration of the Social Welfare Department, and other key stakeholders in Levuka ensure that the interests of women and children are taken care of.
- Leadership roles for women are supported, especially market vendors
- Raise police awareness of existing legislation and policies that compel police response and representations for women to attain fair outcomes.
- Encourage women in decision making and participation in all areas of society.

Question 10:

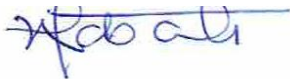
Can Levuka Town Council highlight to the Committee the achievement towards sustainable cities and communities?

Response:

- Proper sanitation in the informal settlement that is within the town boundary
- Collection of garbage not only in town but also in the rural areas
- Workshop and awareness of garbage separation and disposal
- Upgrading of streetlight in informal settlements, town and rural areas
- Quarterly cleanup campaigns in town and rural areas
- Upgrading of heritage sites, infrastructure and buildings in consultation and financial support from government.

Respectfully submitted as requested.

Yours Sincerely



Nunia Labati
Acting Chief Executive Officer
Levuka Town Council

Appendix 2

Supplementary Response
received from Levuka Town
Council

LEVUKA TOWN COUNCIL

Additional Information Requested by the Standing Committee on Social Affairs on the 27th June 2023.

Question 1:

There were some development work that has been completed or still in progress from the year 2014 to date. Respectfully if the committee could be provided with the list of completed development projects and development works still in progress. The reason for this question is that the committee would like to confirm on some developments such as road construction by FRA, Levuka Market which was mentioned by the Ministry of Local government. Further to the above if the development works were assisted by government or donor agencies or other stakeholders.

Response:

Tabulated here below projects from 2015 – 2017. Attached are projects from 2018 todate.

Year	Donor	Project	Amount Given	Completion Date
2014	Japan Embassy	New Compactor Truck	\$184,155.87	2014
2014	Ministry of Local Govt. (PSIP)	Drains at Nigau Hill	\$210,000.00 Inclusive of Admin & Projects works	2014
		Heritage Plaque		2015
		Retaining wall at Nasova creek		2014
		Batiniwai creek		2014
		Public convenience		2015
		Fountain repairs		2014
		Ovalau Club		2015
		Fencing of Levuka Market		2014
2014	City Wide Project –	Provision of Bathroom & Toilets in Baba	\$100,000.00	Completed in 2014

	Department of Housing	settlement (informal settlement in town area)	Inclusive of Admin & Project works	
2014	Ministry of Local Govt. (PSIP)	Dumper truck	\$75,000.00	completed
2015	Ministry of Local Govt. (PSIP)	DEPOT upgrading & Town Hall renovations	\$100,000.00 Inclusive of Admin & Project works	
2015	Japan Embassy	Seawall project destroyed by TC Winston	\$244,000.00	Completed in 2016
2015	New Zealand	Beautification project in town	\$14,000.00	Completed in 2015
2016	Department of Heritage	Town retaining wall & Pavilion	\$100,00.00 Inclusive of Admin & Project work	2016
2017	Ministry of Local Govt. (PSIP)	Drainage works	\$50,000.00	2017

Question 2:

The Back to Levuka Carnival held in October 2015, has this been an ongoing festival from 2015 till to date or not? The money collected from the festival from 2015 till to date what was the money used for and where was this projected to?

Response:

The Back to Levuka Carnival was not held from 2020 to date. Part of the reason were the COVID 19 that restrict large gatherings and also these were mainly hosted by Sponsors like Vodafone Fiji. Council is looking into organizing the same event but this will depend heavily on the sponsors. Funds collected from sponsors are for the committees cost for running the show and for the queens. Charity funds collected from the queens in the tikina representative are given back to these tikinas for their village projects. The main objective of the event is to create activity in Levuka and to encourage villages to participate in the one week festival.

Question 3:

From the Animal Fiji VET that was hosted in 2015, who hosted this event and is this an ongoing event? How many domesticated and wildlife animals were saved and how is this beneficial to Levuka?

Response:**Hosted Animals Fiji VET from UK for one week on de-sexing clinic.**

In 2015, the Council have noticed the rapid increase on the number of stray dogs within town area. Council approach the Ministry Agriculture and Animal Fiji for a collaboration works of a one-week clinic in trying to control the number of stray dogs. The main focus of the visit was on the castration of these dogs but nevertheless it was a good opportunity to other pet owners for spaying, castration and checkups for their pets as well. And also awareness on the best practices to help in elevating the stray animal problems.

Question 4:

There was a JICA volunteer that resumed work for the council who was a heritage architect, what were the benefits that this architect brought to Levuka and was there an architect in Fiji that can help with restoring heritage site?

Response:

JICA volunteer really benefited Levuka in the sense that:

1. Levuka Town Council did not pay for his accommodation and other expenses while in Levuka that time
2. Identifying buildings that needs urgent attention for preservation purposes
3. Work in collaboration with the Heritage Department in Levuka in identifying and documenting of these heritage buildings,

Now under the Heritage department, they have one that assist in these areas.

Question 5:

Briefly what will the Heritage Bill do for Levuka as a heritage site:

Please find below comments from the Heritage Department regarding the Heritage bill:

THE BENEFITS OF HERITAGE PORT TOWN OF LEVUKA ON THE UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE LISTING

The Heritage Port Town of Levuka known in the UNESCO World Heritage Listing is a 9 year old UNESCO World Heritage Site. Even though, Fiji ratified the UNESCO 1972 World Heritage Convention in 1990. Most of the preliminary work to list Levuka Town was done in almost 20 years by the National Trust of Fiji and relevant not until after it was handed to the former Department of Heritage and Arts at the Ministry of Education, Fiji Government to take the lead role to compile the nomination dossiers and work on the submission to list Levuka. Extra effort has been done to have Levuka Town listed as World Heritage Sites amongst well known heritage sites like Taj Mahal of India, Great Wall of China, Petra Heritage Site Jordan, Rice Terrace, and Philippines etc. The Fijian Government has continued its commitment to the 1972 UNESCO World Heritage Site Convention by providing budget for the past financial year. We hoping that Fijian Government will continue to pump in lot of funds to protect and manage Levuka in the upcoming years when the world economy begins to improve from the devastating effect of COVID19 and in Fiji the effects of Tropical Cyclone, Winston, TC Yasa, and TC Ana. To show Fiji government's commitment an example, this financial year 2022-2023 the Fijian government funded a \$3.3million Capital Project for Levuka Community Centre for its restoration work apart from grants given to National Trust of Fiji and other relevant stakeholders that work in Levuka Town or with Levuka Town Council.

BENEFITS

Some of the benefits of being listed as the UNESCO World Heritage Site for Levuka and Fiji as a State Party / Country:

- ✓ 1) Recognition of the site's exceptional character, authenticity, uniqueness, and unrepeatability by more than 1000 other UNESCO World Heritage Sites around world

- ✓ 2) Protection of the site's exceptional heritage by the Fijian Government through legislations and mechanisms, strategies in addition to advisory roles and support given by UNESCO and other interested organizations around the world.
- ✓ 3) Attraction to tourism locally and internationally which contribute to economic activities to Levuka Town and Fiji as a whole and increase economic earnings for Fiji will benefit Levuka.
- ✓ 4) Positioning the destination as an international tourist spot. Levuka is listed in the UNESCO World Heritage list with big heritage sites amongst the
- ✓ 5) Eligibility to receive funds for the site's protection and conservation.
- ✓ 6) Technical assistance provision of advisors / consultants paid by UNESCO Headquarters and UNESCO Apia Samoa Office for those UNESCO World Heritage Sites like Levuka.
- ✓ 7) Capacity Building for Levuka World Heritage Site staff and stakeholders in terms of heritage management and related matters/topics.

CURRENT STATUS

The Fijian Government in collaboration with the relevant stakeholders is still working very hard to pass the Heritage Bill which will help manage and protect the Levuka Town as UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is important to note that ownership of the property is still with the property owner but owners are also responsible to keep their house /property under **all** the relevant laws of Fiji that protect the Levuka Town boundary. In the new financial year, the department of Heritage have requested Government to continue the funding support for the Upgrading Levuka World Heritage Structure and other activities to help boost the World Heritage Site which we have a lot of passion and interest in its management and protection. The legalization will enhance the protection and management of the site as it is we have no legal mechanisms (penalty) to take people to account for their actions that may damage the heritage sites, buildings, natural features and monuments within the protected zone.

WAY FORWARD

For future development of Levuka Town, it will be good to note that we have a Fiji Levuka World Heritage Sites Policy for Levuka and it will be good to be shared by all stakeholders for familiarizations. It is also to be noted for UNESCO World Heritage Sites "best practices" that any development that will hinder/ tarnish or damage/ disturb the Outstanding Universal Values (OUVs) must be done in consultation with Levuka Town Council and relevant authorities. It is recommended that any new development must be outside the UNESCO World Heritage Site with proper consultation with relevant authorities. The re-use of historic buildings for other purposes must also follow UNESCO World Heritage Operational Guidelines and Levuka Management Plan. Therefore, other sites for future development options outside Levuka Town need to be identified by the relevant stakeholders of Levuka Town Council in consideration with relevant laws.

LEVUKA TOWN COUNCIL



Revenue earned for the Back to Levuka for the Years 2015 - 2019

YEAR	REVENUE
2015	\$20,745.00
2016	\$41,740.00
2017	\$33,319.00
2018	\$41,282.85
2019	\$30,981.20
TOTAL	\$168,068.05

LEVUKA TOWN COUNCIL –**PROJECT 2018-2023**

YEAR		GOVT. FUNDED	COST	STATUS/DESCRIPTION	COMPLETION DATE
2018	City Wide Project	Govt. Funded	\$100,000.00	Road access to Baba settlement Project Completed The settlement has better access of transportation of home building materials from town to the area and also emergency situations to hospitals.	2018
2018	Seawall Reconstruction – Beach Street	Govt. Funded	\$299,970.28	Reconstruction of Seawall that was damaged by Cyclone Winston Project Completed	2019
2018	Drainage Upgrade	Govt. Funded	\$15,000.00	Drainage Upgrade in town Project Completed	
2018	Beautification in town	Govt. Funded	\$4,000.00	Taxi Relocation Project completed	2018
2018	Totogo Creek & Drainage upgrade	Govt. Funded	\$51,000.00	Project Completed	2019

LEVUKA TOWN COUNCIL –**PROJECT 2018-2023**

2019	Totogo Creek & Drainage upgrade	Govt. Funded	\$49,000.00	Upgrading of Totogo Creek & Drainage in town	2019
2019	Drainage Upgrade	Govt. Funded	\$50,000.00	Upgrading of drainage in town Project completed	2020
2020	Beautification	Govt. Funded	\$25,000.00	Project completed	2020
2021	Beautification – Nasova House Rehabilitation	Govt. Funded	\$31,250.00	On going	July 2023
2021-22	New LTC Market	Govt. Funded	\$2,605,534.99	On going	August 23

Appendix 3

Verbatim Report

[VERBATIM REPORT]

MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

ANNUAL REPORT

Levuka Town Council 2014-2015 Annual Report

INSTITUTION: Levuka Town Council

VENUE: Big Committee Room (East Wing)

DATE: Wednesday, 7th June, 2023

VERBATIM REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS HELD AT THE BIG COMMITTEE ROOM (EAST WING), PARLIAMENT PRECINCTS, GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS, ON WEDNESDAY, 7TH JUNE, 2023, AT 11.00 A.M.

Interviewee/Submittee:

Levuka Town Council

In Attendance:

- | | | | |
|----|-------------------|---|-----------------------|
| 1. | Ms. Joanne Rymell | - | Special Administrator |
| 2. | Ms. Nunia Labati | - | Acting CEO |

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Honourable Members, members of the media and the public, the Secretariat, viewers, ladies and gentlemen; a very good morning to you all. It is my absolute pleasure to welcome everyone, especially the viewers who are watching this session. I am privileged to Chair this meeting of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, which is being aired live on Parliament Channel through the Walesi platform and livestreamed through Parliament's *Facebook* page.

For information purpose, pursuant to Parliament Standing Order 111, it mandates that all Committee meetings are to be open to the public. Therefore, this meeting is open to the public and the media, and will also be aired live, as I had mentioned earlier.

For any sensitive information regarding this submission that cannot be disclosed in public, it can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing but, please, do note that this will only be allowed for a few specific circumstances, namely:

1. National security matters;
2. Third party confidential information;
3. Personal or human resources matters; and
4. Meetings where the Committee deliberates on all issues before it develops its recommendations and reports.

I wish to remind honourable Members and the invited submittee that all comments and questions asked are to be addressed through the Chairperson and, please, be mindful that only the invited submittee will be allowed to ask questions or give comments to the Committee. This is a parliamentary meeting and all information gathered is covered under the parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act and the Standing Orders of Parliament. Please, note that the Committee does not condone liable, slander or any allegations against individuals who are not present today to defend themselves.

In terms of other protocols, please, be advised that whilst the meeting is in progress, movement within the room will be restricted. Therefore, there should be minimal use of mobile phones, whereby answering of phones should be done outside this room, and all mobile phones are to be on silent mode.

Without further ado, I will now ask the honourable Members of the Standing Committee to introduce themselves.

[Introduction of Committee Members]

With us this morning, we have representatives of the Levuka Town Council, who have been requested to provide a submission on their 2014-2015 Annual Report. The Committee, in its deliberation, have formulated questions which were sent to the Levuka Town Council, and it is required that they provide and present on their responses, which will then assist the Committee in formulating its recommendations in its Committee Report which will be tabled in Parliament.

Having said that, I now invite our guests to introduce themselves. Before we proceed with your submission, please, note that if there are any questions from Members of the Committee, this will take place after the presentation.

MS. J. RYMELL.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson. My name is Joanne Rymell and I am the Special Administrator from Levuka Town Council and both, myself and the Acting CEO, Nunia Labati, are here to represent on behalf of the Council.

MS. N. LABATI.- Madam Chairperson, *bula vinaka*. I will go straight to our presentation.

Questions for the 2014 Annual Report

Question No. 1

Levuka Town Council identified assets that are looked after by Council. Clarify with discussions on what has become of the two assets identified below:

- a. Land at Vagadaci; and**
- b. Vacant land at Levuka village.**

- (a) The Council land at Vagadaci is leased by the State at the current annual rate of \$10,000. Built on the land are Government staff quarters.
- (b) Discussions with stakeholders in the Ministry of Local Government and other relevant Government authorities is being pursued this year to develop the land for rental flats to cater for the high demand of rental flats in Levuka. This is envisaged to create additional revenue streams for the Council with a view of contributing to the financial sustainability of the Council in the long run. The Council will seek Government technical and financial assistance and support in this project since it does not have the resources to meet the costs.

Question No. 2

The Committee noted that in the 2015 Annual Report, “Levuka was declared a historical port town in 2013”. What is the current status of Levuka?

Levuka is still listed as a World Heritage Port Town, however, it is facing huge challenges in trying to maintain its heritage status due to the lack of funds to maintain sites, infrastructure and buildings which are of heritage status.

The Council, however, is very grateful to the Government for continuously providing financial support to maintain these heritage sites and infrastructure. The homeowners of heritage status, however, face great challenges and struggle financially to maintain their homes, given the strict heritage laws that govern them.

Question No. 3

According to the organisational structure, an Accountant is employed by the Council,

therefore, the Committee would like to clarify why there were issues highlighted by the Auditor General's Report when there is a qualified Accountant in the organisation?

One of the major challenges faced by the Council over the years was its inability to attract and retain qualified and experienced staff in its Accounting and Administrative sections due to the lack of funds. For this reason, the Council has resorted to employing staff who lack the expertise for these jobs due to affordability.

The above situation resulted in the issues highlighted by the Auditor-General over the years. As regards to the Accountant's position in the Council's organisational structure, the qualified Accountant was only recruited in 2021, after Government introduced the Open Merit Recruitment System (OMRS) in 2016. With the Council's scarce and limited resources, the Council has not been able to recruit clerical support staff for the accountant, so segregation of duties is non-existent and so is internal control.

With these important elements missing in the organisation, there is bound to be errors in processes and procedures even with the presence of a qualified Accountant. The way forward for the Council now is consultation with our line Ministry, the Ministry of Local Government, who will assist in conducting training workshops for the Council staff in the areas of accounting and administration.

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Can Levuka Town Council clarify whether staff identified in the annual report are still employed with the Council?

Only two of the staff identified in the Annual Report are still employed by Council.

Question No. 5

Can Levuka Town Council explain the reasons of the increase in cash and cash equivalent at the end of the financial year 2015?

The reasons for the increase in cash and cash equivalent at the end of the financial year 2015 was due to Government Grants which has been accounted as income.

Question No. 6

Can Levuka Town Council explain the reasons of the increase in the net loss for the year 2015?

As per the financial statement for the year 2015, there was a surplus of \$249,526 and not a loss. The surplus was due to the increase in Government Grants, as mentioned in our response in Question Number 5 above.

Comparative Analysis for the Annual Reports 2014 and 2015

Question No. 7

Environmental Scan - SWOT Analysis, the Committee noted the same SWOT Analysis for 2014 and 2015. Can Levuka Town Council explain whether any actions were taken after identifying the weaknesses and challenges in 2014?

The response is as follows:

1. Isolation: Traffic has improved since we have two shipping companies operating from Levuka to Suva and return.
2. Lack of space for development: Still an issue for Levuka due to the mountainous terrain. The way forward for Levuka Town Council is to identify vacant buildings within town and negotiate with property owners to purchase and develop them for rental purposes which will generate revenue for Council.
3. Migration: This is a big challenge for Levuka, given its small and vulnerable economy and the lack of employment opportunities on offer, hence the continuous migration.

Financial Statements for both the Years Ended 31st December, 2014 and 31st December, 2015

Question No. 8

For the Year 2014 and 2015 of the independent Auditors Report, there were issues that were identified in the Basis of Disclaimer Opinion, Emphasis of Matter and other information. Can the Levuka Town Council clarify whether these identified issues have been resolved? What steps have been taken to avoid recurrence of the matter?

Levuka Town Council agrees with the audit findings and advise that some of the issues highlighted have been resolved.

Steps that the Council has taken to avoid recurrence, include:

1. Proper documentation and approval for procurement.
2. Proper documentation of policy and procedures for fixed assets, staff matters, et cetera.
3. Ensure proper statutory government regulations are followed.
4. Ensure processes and procedures required under the IFRS are adhered to.

General Questions – Sustainable Development Goals

Question No. 9

Can Levuka Town Council highlight its contribution towards SDG 5 – Gender Equality, and its implementation in the organisation?

- The Levuka Town Council, in collaboration with the Department of Social Welfare and other key stakeholders in Levuka ensures that the interests of women and children are taken care of.
- Leadership roles for women are supported, especially market vendors.
- Raise policy awareness on existing legislation and policies that compel police response.
- Representations for women to attain fair outcomes.
- Encourage women in decision-making and participation in all areas of society.

Question No. 10

Can Levuka Town Council highlight to the Committee the achievement towards sustainable cities and communities?

Response is as follows:

1. Proper sanitation in the informal settlement that is within the town boundary.
2. Collection of garbage, not only in town, but also in the rural areas.

3. Workshop and awareness on garbage separation and disposal.
4. Upgrading of streetlight in informal settlements, town and rural areas.
5. Quarterly clean-up campaigns in town and rural areas.
6. Upgrading of heritage sites, infrastructure and buildings in consultation and with financial support from Government.

Madam Chairperson, that is all we have from the Levuka Town Council, and we welcome any questions from honourable Members.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- *Vinaka* and thank you, Ms. Labati, for your presentation of responses to the questions that were sent to your office. I will give this time to the honourable Members to raise any supplementary questions that they might have.

First, I have one question with regard to Question No. 7 on the SWAT analysis. What the Committee noted from your response was that you have identified the challenges that were faced by the Council. However, what we were asking were the reasons on why you had the same SWAT analysis for the 2014 Annual Report and 2015 Annual Report.

Our understanding was whatever you had identified in your SWAT analysis for 2014 - the weaknesses and threats, the Council was supposed to have rectified that. But we have noticed from the 2015 Annual Report is a repetition of what you had written in your 2014 Annual Report.

That was clearly what the Committee was asking but I see from your response that you have identified the challenges. However, if you can just elaborate further on the SWAT analysis question that was raised by the Committee, please.

MS. N. LABATI.- Madam Chairperson, one of the challenges Levuka Town Council faces is the limited space, and that is reason why the capital was moved to Suva. That challenge will still be there. What the Council did this year in consultation with the Ministry is to come up with ideas, or what the Council can offer as a way forward.

From all those years, the SWAT analysis – challenges, strengths and weaknesses that the Council faced is mainly on the limited space in Levuka. You can understand from our town boundary that we cannot move forward because of the sea and when we move backwards, there are hills. Because of the mountainous terrain, we cannot develop Levuka. Therefore, in our presentation to the Committee, we have managed to put up one strategy or way forward for Levuka, and the only thing that we can identify is what Levuka has.

The opportunity is there, even with the challenges it faces. So, one of the opportunities that we can see is the properties that are there in Levuka. A way forward is to, at least, have a savings account for Levuka and to buy these properties. Never before have we managed to do that, but it is the only way forward for Levuka so that the Levuka Town Council can be sustainable to operate on its own. I believe, all these years it has been relying heavily on Government. So, we believe that the only way it can sustain itself is to expand its revenue stream and come up with income generating opportunities, and that is one.

We have been in consultation with the ratepayers also, and if they have to sell their houses, the first option is to come to Levuka Town Council. All these years, Levuka Town Council has not been sustainable so that is the only way, instead of relying on the Government all the time so, we have to sustain Levuka in the long term.

It has been noted that we have the same SWAT analysis from all these years. When I came in 2021, I noted the same thing as well, but what can we do, in spite of all the challenges that Levuka Town Council is facing? Madam Chairperson, that is one of the areas that we have looked into because of the lack of space for development and that is the only way whereby we can use those resources that are within Levuka Town to generate more income.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- I will now give the floor to the honourable Members for their supplementary questions.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Thank you so much for sharing that and sharing the Report. Yes, we have been a bit confused because it seems like copy and paste and maybe, we will discuss a little bit more later on that. One thing that is coming strongly is that it is not sustainable. I notice you say there is only 152 ratepayers, is that right?

MS. N. LABATI.- Right now, Madam, we have 144 todate.

HON. S. KIRAN.- At this point in time, you have only 144. I would like to know a little bit about the rate payment, whether it is up-to-date and your other sources of income currently as it stands. We realise that this Report is eight years old, and you said that you have taken on the office in 2021. If you can elaborate on what you just said and how do you intend to raise money because it is not sustainable, like you said, for Government to continue. I think once it was declared a heritage site, we thought it will raise its own money and look after itself and generate tourism. So, could you educate us a little bit on that.

MS. N. LABATI.- Thank you, honourable Member. As you may be aware, Levuka has been listed as a heritage site. So, from that, one of the challenges that the homeowners, especially the homeowners in Levuka, are facing is the payment of the repair and maintenance because the understanding is, they have to pay. On that, given the strict requirements to maintain the building, it is a big challenge for them. So, the Council is only there to facilitate. I have mentioned that currently we have 144 ratepayers and out of the 144 ratepayers, most of the rates that are not collected are from these residential homes. On the commercial side, we collected on the right time but on the residential homes, we have an issue there on the collection of rates.

On that note also, since Levuka Town Council is relying heavily on rates, it faces challenges in the continuity of work and paying its staff because we only rely on rates. We have garbage collection, solid waste management and rental properties but out of those revenue streams, rates is the largest portion of the revenue we have in Levuka. So, that is why we had a meeting with our Minister in our CEO Forum, to come up with other strategies that can make Levuka sustainable.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Madam Chairperson, through you, do you have tourism there at the moment or in any form? Is tourism marketed in any way for income?

MS. J. RYMELL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, thank you, honourable Member, for your question. Maybe, if I could just elaborate a little further on what our CEO had said earlier with regards to the SWAT Analysis. Yes, it has been pretty much a cut and paste from year to year because our strengths have remained the same, our weaknesses have remained the same, opportunities and threats have remained the same also.

We have really found that it is only just recently that we are coming up with other ways that we can exploit our strengths and look for further opportunities. So, as Acting CEO has said, we are looking, as a team, on how we can generate further income in order to make the Levuka Town

Council sustainable, and one of those ways that we can do that is by developing land that we have that is there, and we are exploring that with the Public Rental Board (PRB) at the moment. Levuka is in a position where it has more demand for rented accommodation than there is supply. So, this is a definite opportunity for the Levuka Town Council to use that land which currently is not being developed.

We met with the PRB earlier this year and they have viewed the land that is there. It does have some PRB rental flats on Ovalau, at the moment, and they are working with the residents who are currently there for them to vacate those premises within a period of three years, so they will be looking to rehouse them and to help them with buying their first home. We are working with PRB on how we can develop that land into lots so that people can build their first home there. So, that is one area that we are looking at in how we can generate income.

I will come on to your tourism one, Madam, it is there. But another area that we are looking at which the Acting CEO also mentioned was the one where we have a challenge in Levuka. Levuka is unique in terms of the buildings that it has. It is United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage-listed and is the only town in Fiji which has this. It is both, something which gives us massive opportunities but also imposes a great number of limitations on us as a town in terms of how we can develop, in particular, within the core zone. So, within the core zone, there are lots of rules and regulations with regards to development of that area.

The façade must be kept as it was with the original materials, as much as you can do that, and you must stick to the original colour scheme that was there, which often means getting paints hand-mixed - specific colours which are not off-the-shelf colours that you could buy. I am sure you all know the maintenance of a home is not a cheap business, it is quite costly and when you have these additional costs added on, for your average homeowner, this becomes very prohibitive and so it becomes easier to say, "I am not going to do it".

We now have a ratio which is detrimental to the development of Levuka where we have a higher ratio of deteriorating buildings than with buildings which are currently being repaired. So, if you look at the town, the streets and the town area - the streetscape, we actually have a number of dilapidated buildings, and that is one of the challenges for the Levuka Town Council where the owners of those buildings are usually no longer based in Levuka. They are either living in Viti Levu or they are overseas, and it is a great challenge for us to get in touch with them in order for them to do renovations on that building.

So, one of the opportunities we are looking at is trying to be the link - the coordinator, between the owner of the properties and people who want to rent the properties. So, we are trying to come up with deals so that they can rent the property for a number of years at rent-free or the reduced rent and the lessee will carry out the repairs on the property because the owners do not have the funds to do that. So that is one of the areas that we are looking at, how we can bring money into the town (Levuka).

In regard to your question, honourable Member, with regards to heritage and tourism, I think this was a fallacy, when we thought that when we were declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, that we would have a number of tourists arriving on our shores. We have not seen those tourists. I think one of the things that we really need to do is to say, "Are we serious about maintaining this UNESCO World Heritage list and status?" If we are, one of the things we really need to do is we need a Heritage Bill, so we need legislation to protect us and to support us. At this moment in time, honourable Member, we do not have a Heritage Bill, and that is still waiting to be debated in

Parliament. If we can have that, then we have the local legislation because we have the UNESCO legislation which we have to abide by, but we do not have any local legislation that will protect us.

Moving on from there, we have to say, how can we develop that tourism? What is the average tourist who wants to look at a heritage site? We have tourists who, all they do, is travel around the world to visit UNESCO World Heritage sites. How do we attract them to Levuka?

At the moment, Madam, as our CEO mentioned, we have two shipping companies that come to Levuka and we are very privileged to have that. We know a lot of maritime islands do not even have that. We have one shipping company that visits Levuka twice daily, so we are very privileged in order to have that.

But if you look at the average stay of a tourist who is coming to visit a World Heritage site, they are coming for a maximum of 10 days, Madam, and if you are going to travel to Levuka via a shipping company, you are going to take, at least, one day to get there and one day to get back. That is two days out of your annual holiday. Also, to get from Nadi to Suva, in order to get there, that is another day. So, we really have to look at what we can package in terms of how we get the tourist from Nadi or Nausori to Levuka and how we can develop that package, so it is attractive to our international and local tourists.

One of the areas that we are looking at developing within our tourism sector, Madam, is the local tourists. Every school child in Fiji should visit Levuka because of its significance to our history, so that is local tourism that we can pull on, first of all. Other than that, we have tertiary institutions, and we have our specialist areas and also that is what we can do right now.

Then with international tourists, I think that is more for the future. We have the infrastructure in place in order to be able to accommodate, get international tourists to Levuka so once they are in Levuka, we have to meet their expectations. At this moment in time, Madam, as much as it distresses me, I do not believe we are able to meet those expectations because of the current condition and we do need a lot of help financially in order to get it to the place where it should be. I hope that answers your question, Madam.

HON. S. KIRAN.- So, if you are talking about current tourism, is there a tourism committee that is working currently because you have, as you have said, a ship going twice a day, if the Fijians in Suva or around Viti Levu know that they could go and visit these heritage sites, so do you have flyers of what we have, for example, the Deed of Cession, et cetera? There are so many things, so do we have flyers available? Are we on social media? Are we promoting ourselves? We have a lot of expatriates in Suva who could have a day or weekend trip, anything been done so far.

MS. J. RYMELL.- We were very honoured earlier this year, we had a meeting with the honourable Minister, as well as with other interested stakeholders, such as Fiji Roads Authority, Tourism Fiji, Town and Country Planning, SMEs and a number of stakeholders, and from that we came up with action plans for three main areas and one of those was tourism - how we can best develop tourism.

The Levuka Tourism Association has not been operating probably for the last eight years. It was set up by tourism operators within the area and that has not been operating for a number of years. So, what we have decided just for Levuka Town, they said that the Levuka Town Council will Chair the Levuka Tourism Association in order to regenerate that because operating singularly, we do not have a very strong voice. So, we have to combine electively so that we can do things, like you have said, putting out flyers.

We do have our presence on social media, and we are working strongly. Now, we are trying to put together as snapshot of what we have at this point in time. How many beds do we have? How many rooms are air conditioned? Who offers breakfast? So that we know what we can offer so that we can go to Tourism Fiji and say, “please, can you help us on how we can develop this product? What is unique about us?” So, that is where we are, Madam. So, the Levuka Town Council has taken the chairperson’s role within Levuka Tourism Association.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Is there a timeline on that?

MS. J. RYMELL.- Yes. So, 14th June is a date to refer to our honourable Minister with this snapshot of where we are at this point in time and then we will work from there.

HON. I.S. VANAVALU.- It sounds like there are some further clarification on Question No. 6. I am a bit confused. It says here, can Levuka Town Council explain the reasons of the increase in the net loss for the year 2015?

In your response, you clarified that as per the financial statement for 2015, there was a surplus of \$249,526 and not a loss. The surplus was due to the increase in Government Grant. Are you classifying your Government Grant as your income in the financial report?

MS. N. LABATI.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, yes, as we have been reporting in the IFRS Standard, we have accounted grant as income. So, if you see in the financial statement as you have mentioned, detailed income on expenditure for the 31st December, 2015, we have a surplus. That is a consolidated report, but on the other paper too it says for the Government Grant only. So, when we do our reporting, we consolidate accounts, we report on both. That is why we recorded Government Grant as income.

HON. I.S. VANAVALU.- On the same subject area, when you talk about grant that was actually budgeted for a project or whatever, it has to be used for that purpose rather than accounting as your net income on your financial year report.

MS. N. LABATI.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, as this IFRS is the approved Standard, you can see that all Government Grants that come through the Council, we will account that as income. Even if it is from New Zealand or from the Embassy of Japan, in our report it will be accounted as income.

HON. I.S. VANAVALU.- I was a bit confused on the issue that when you are given a grant and it is not utilised on the right purpose of that project, the Government has the say in the next grant in the following year. So, to me personally through this Standing Committee, when projects are budgeted for, they must be well executed and completed so that it does not come up in the financial report that, that is still accounted as your net income. If that is how you do your financial report, that is why we are questioning it, whether it was a loss or a profit.

It does not really state in your response when we actually asked the question whether it was a loss or not, so hopefully in your next financial report (I am not sure we are talking about an aging report which is 2015 - eight years ago) which is yet to come so that we can see the trend and how best are those financial reports 2014 to 2016. Hopefully, somewhere down the line, it will materialise and that the grant that was given to you was used for that purpose. I believe in this case; we need to relook at the future reports that are coming in to get scrutinised and see the trend. If it has been going on for quite some time, there is no use because the Government of the day will want to see whether it is meaningful giving the grant or not, even though we have been hearing a lot of development that

needs to be undertaken at Levuka itself. I believe it was not during your term. We are looking at the reports and we are not talking about the person but what transpired during the reporting period.

On Question No. 10, just a question on what you have already alluded in the Report. There was a list in terms of your response. What I am trying to know more about is how best this response has been taken on the ground. If you get some numbers like in terms of percentage, how best you have set up your timelines to achieve your goals. It is just like you are generalising issues here.

In Parliament you have to talk in terms of debtors, figures, percentage so that moving forward, we can see we have this year say, 20 percent out of all these bulletpoints is your next target in the following year, perhaps 5 percent or 30 percent.

MS. J. RYMELL.- Honourable Member, thank you for your very valid point that was raised with regards to Question No. 10. With your permission, Madam Chairperson, I would like to kindly request if we can make a written submission with each of those points, as the honourable Member has suggested, and we can give those data to reflect what we have achieved over a number of years.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Madam Chairperson, through you, if I can just add on to Question No. 10, if you could enlighten us when you say, "Proper sanitation in the informal settlement, I would like to know what that means in terms of 'do we have sewerage treatment', 'does it go into the sea?'"

When we talk about garbage, not only in town but in rural areas, when we collect garbage, how is it processed? Is it brought to the mainland or is there a disposal? I know you have a few factories; I do not know what is happening with the chemical waste. Is it going into the ocean or is there better management? So, just learning a little bit more on how you make it sustainable.

This looks beautiful. If we can have water sanitation and garbage collection, I think we are doing really well, but where does it go from there, what is the end process? Whether you want to answer now, or you want to add it to the question, that is fine.

MS. J. RYMELL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, thank you honourable Member for your question. As the CEO has alluded to earlier, one of the restrictions or one of the challenges that we have in Levuka is lack of space, so all garbage that is collected within Levuka is taken to a landfill area which we lease from the landowners.

One of the challenges we face is to look at how we can better use that area. As you have said, we do have industries operating within Levuka too and we do collect their waste. We do have an Environmental Officer and we are moving more towards encouraging our large establishments, working with our schools and our business houses as well as our residential ratepayers, to have compost bins and we monitor them to use it. We give them training on how they can use their compost bins and how they can use the compost which comes out of it.

Also, outside of the town area, we feel we have a social responsibility to the whole of the island, to ensure that we encourage and carry out workshops and training with each village which has already been completed with all of the Villages on Ovalau. We are now doing some re-training and re-awareness with regards to Villages having their own landfill sites and trying to separate and have their compost areas within each Village on Ovalau.

HON. S. KIRAN.- So, if you are doing compost and if you are going to each village, I am curious about the food security issue because I am told that a lot of vegetables are being bought from the mainland or food actually goes from mainland to Levuka. So, just curious, if you are working

with each village on compost sites, whether you are working with any partners like Agriculture or other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to work on growing food using these compost and having some level of food security within the island?

MS. J. RYMELL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, yes, thank you, Madam. At the moment, we are not working with any other agencies or any other partners but your comments are duly noted and that is something that we can look at for future development with how we can best become self-sustainable. I believe we certainly are in terms of root- crops, but with regards to vegetables we do bring a lot from the main island and that is something that we certainly have to look at.

We do have a project which is in its implementation stage at the moment which is the Bureta Solar Power Project and that will also have a vegetable growing area underneath the solar panels. We hope that that will also go towards making us better food secure within the island.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, this is just a general question. I was in Levuka last Friday and what I gather from your presentation, I believe 100 percent that there is a lot of work needed to be done in terms of upgrading the infrastructure. I believe I am talking about what is actually on the ground.

I am trying to elaborate more on is how best, if we have a strategic plan in place, to get your annual report on time, so that we are talking about something that is real on the ground and not faced with something that is beyond your means but you are summoned to the Standing Committee. Is there any plan to get things organised - getting your annual reports on time so that we are debating on whatever is real time to be able to give us real time decision when you present?

MS. J. RYMELL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, I will allow CEO to answer that question because that is actually one of her KPIs.

MS. N. LABATI.- Thank you, honourable Member, and through you, Madam Chairperson, the financial report for 2016 and 2017 has been tendered to the Office of the Auditor-General's Office. I have already submitted the 2018 Report.

One of my key areas in coming back to Levuka is to upgrade the Levuka Town Council. I have been in Levuka from 2014 to 2015 as a Ledger Clerk. I resigned from Levuka and then pursued my education, so because of my love for Levuka since I was raised in Levuka, I had to go back and upgrade all the financial statements in accordance with the IFRS Standards.

Before, the Council used to hire chartered accountants. That is one of the areas we really looked at and we managed address that. Submission of the 2018 financial report has been done in-house rather than putting out to external chartered accountants, so we managed to save a lot of cost from there.

Now, as I have been telling Management, we really need one support staff as an Accounts Clerk to support my role. I am the Acting CEO and Accountant and doing all these tasks takes time, so as I have mentioned, the interest to retain people to work in Levuka is not there because of the pay. We cannot retain qualified people in Levuka so the 2019 to 2021 financial reports will be submitted towards the end of this financial year. Then the 2022 will be on track again. That is one of my key areas in coming back to Levuka, to upgrade all the financial statements.

HON. I.S. VANAWALU.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, my last question is on the organisational structure. I believe it is clearly demarcated, well defined and everything but according to the presentation, there is a lot to be filled in the structure. Hopefully, quick action needs to be there because when you submit this structure to us, we believe that this is what is actually on the ground.

We come to know now that there are a lot of vacancies, even one Accounts Officer is already in the structure. The structure needs to be implemented so that you can execute your task. That is the recommendation on how best you can get the structure all filled up, you get the maximum use of your manpower to alleviate all these running around because we are here to do business.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Madam Chairperson, through you, I would like to go back to Question No. 9 and if you can bear with me, I will go over this in some detail. If you are to talk about gender equality and basically, as you have said, you are working with Social Welfare and other key stakeholders to ensure the interests of women and children are taken care of. Can you provide some detail on how it has been done and what exactly are you talking about, including the leadership roles for women who are supported through market vendors through the UN Women Project because I am aware of that.

For outcomes of women, do you have domestic violence issues? Do you have enough police? What is exactly been talked about in bulletpoint three and bullet point four on encouraging women in decision-making participation? What exactly are we talking about? How many trainings, if any, or how do you engage women? What sort of numbers are you looking at? Could you educate me a little bit on that, please.

MS. L. LABATI.- Thank you, honourable Member. Through you, Madam Chairperson, as you have mentioned, leadership roles are also encouraged in Levuka Town Council, especially now in the current structure. We have Madam Special Administrator (SA), including myself, the Health Inspector and the Environment Officer, we are all women. So, that is one way that we have encouraged women to take leadership role. Also, we are looking at our labourers as field workers and we are also including women in that structure.

For part A of the question, as I have mentioned, we have been collaborating with the Social Welfare Department and we have *Viber* group in place for all Departments. We conducted HOD meetings every month, all issues that were brought out from each month, we discuss it in the HOD meetings.

A lot of workshops have been conducted in Levuka regarding the encouragement of women. We also have the Police Department coming on board with us, not only for women but also for children. They are trying to alleviate crime, so we are in partnership with them in doing this kind of work.

MS. J. RYMELL.- Through you, Madam Chairperson, if I could just add on to that, please, honourable Member, I think we are the only Town Council where 50 percent of our Management Team are female - two SAs, myself and another gentleman and 50 percent of our SA Team are also female.

We would like to see some of our female field workers, at the moment, they are all male, but we would like to see some female field workers in there. We do have one volunteer who is a female field worker, who goes out and does the beautification of the town.

We do work very closely with other stakeholders, as our CEO has alluded to, with regards to the HOD meeting which happens every month. Our Station Officer in Levuka is also a female, we have a good relationship with her with regards to any matters that are happening.

We have an Outrigger Canoe Association which has been set up in association with our Community Policing to try to engage young people who have dropped out of school or who are at risk - to try to give them an activity to do in order that we try and mold them, talk to them about other issues, while they are carrying out their activity.

We do also have the Ovalau Events Management Committee which is chaired by a female and that is spearheaded from the Levuka Town Council also where we try to organise the first capital market. Maybe, this is an opportunity for me to say that. We mentioned it to our honourable Minister that we no longer want to be referred to as the Old Capital, 'oldie' notes something that is in the past and decrepit. We are the first capital, and we are the first people there, so we have the first capital market which happens on the first Saturday of every month.

I invite everyone here, whoever wants to join us where majority of our members are ladies, doing art and craft, food and whatever they may do. That is helping to generate money and boost the economy as well.

In terms of gender equality, I think with SDG 5, we are doing the best that we can and doing a lot of effort in that area.

HON. S. KIRAN.- Madam Chairperson, that is wonderful. It is so good to know that there has been a lot being done. Is it possible when you submit the rest to put some sort of numbers and figures because you are really doing a lot.

Your Saturday market, perhaps if you advertise to Suva as well, maybe people will come across in the morning and return in the afternoon so that could be something.

I just want to add one thing in the gender discussion, I am aware that something like 1,500 women work at PAFCO. I am just wondering when you are talking about this, whether you work with the Management as well in terms of developing any programmes for women.

One of the things that was highlighted to me was that women do not reach or have access to programmes until it is too late. So, going forward, if you want to plan along those lines, it would be great, but I am quite happy to hear that you are doing a lot with regard to SDG 5. That is all from me, Madam Chairperson. Thank you.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- *Vinaka*, just one last question from me before we round off our discussion and this is with regard to Municipal Elections. I note that that is still on the consultation stage. With all the challenges and limitations that Levuka Town Council currently faces, what is your view? How do you perceive Municipal Elections to be in changing the problem for the Council? How will it impact and what good will it bring to Levuka Town Council?

MS. J. RYMELL.- Thank you, Madam Chairperson, for your question. As we all know, that is still at the consultation phase, and we recently had our consultation in Levuka which was very well attended. We advertised to all our ratepayers as well and there were some non-ratepayers there too, people who are interested in the town. We had a very good turnout. We had more than 80 plus members, and our Permanent Secretary presented to us.

I think that was something that was discussed at the consultation and would like to happen. But I think one of the challenges we have in Levuka is support. I think all Municipalities have that as well, I could think that is specific to Levuka. So, I hope that with elected Counsellors, if you are electing someone to be in that position, then you are more likely to support them because you have voted for them to be in that position. So, I hope that they will have more local support from our elected Counselors, Madam. I hope that answers your question.

MADAM CHAIRPERSON.- Thank you, very much. Thank you again for your very clear presentation and responses. Thank you, honourable Members.

I would also like to thank the team from Levuka Town Council - Ms Joanne Rymell and Ms. Nunia Labati. Thank you, again, for availing yourselves for this meeting. We thank you for your time and we also hope that for any future queries that the Committee might have, Levuka Town Council will be ready to assist us in a timely manner.

I would also like to thank the Secretariat for their hard work and in putting our submission together for the Levuka Town Council. May you all have a blessed afternoon. *Vinaka vakalevu.*

The Committee adjourned at 11.57 a.m.