



STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Consolidated Review Report of the Lautoka City Council 2015- 2017 Annual Report



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF FIJI
Parliamentary Paper No. 34 of 2025

March 2025

Published and printed by the Department of Legislature, Parliament House, Government Buildings, SUVA

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CHAIRPERSON’S FOREWORD

I am pleased to present the Standing Committee on Social Affairs report on *the Consolidated Review Report of Lautoka City Council 2015-2017 Annual Reports*.

As mandated under Standing Orders 109(2) (b), the Committee looks into issues related to health, education, social services, labor, aviation, culture, and media.

The Committee reviewed the Annual Reports and identified important issues, which were then brought to the attention of the Lautoka City Council for necessary action.

Apart from its primary function of collecting rates and providing services to ratepayers, the Lautoka Council now faces other challenges. These include the drug situation, the flooding issue and the increase of informal settlements within the municipality.

The Committee is of the view that, given the current situation, the municipal council must review its functions and operational procedures as a matter of urgency to address the serious issues within the municipality.

The Committee conducted a site visit to the Lautoka City Council on the operations of the municipality. The Committee noted important issues that is addressed in this report.

Furthermore, the Ministry of Local Government will need to provide guidance and oversight to the Council’s operations, compliance, operational efficiency, and effectiveness.

I would like to sincerely thank the CEO of Lautoka City Council and his team, the Permanent Secretary for Ministry of Local Government, and her officials for their valuable contributions to this review process.

Finally, I would like to thank the current and former Hon. Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure, Hon. Sashi Kiran, Hon. Ioane Naivalurua, Hon. Viam Pillay and Hon. Parveen Bala for their valuable input and support. I would also like to thank Hon. Taito Rokomatu, Hon. Joseph Nand and Hon. Alipate Tuicolo for the assistance they rendered on several occasions as alternate standing committee members.

On behalf of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, I commend this report to Parliament.



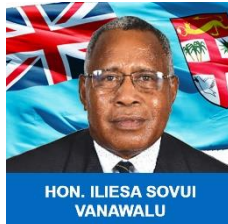
.....
Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu
Chairperson

ACRONYM

Acronym	
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSR	Colonial Sugar Refining
DOE	Department of Energy
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MP	Member of Parliament
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organization
SO	Standing Order

COMMITTEE REMIT AND MEMBERS

The Standing Committee on Social Affairs (**‘Committee’**) is established under Section 70 of the Constitution and SO 109. The Committee’s mandate and functions are provided under SO 109 (2) and 110 (1) (a)-(d) & (f). The Committee consists of the following members:



Chairperson

Government Member



Deputy Chairperson

Government Member



Member

Opposition Member



Alternative Member

Government Member



Member

Opposition Member

1. INTRODUCTION

The Lautoka City Council Annual Reports 2015 to 2017 was tabled in Parliament on 9th August 2024 and referred to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs.

Standing Orders 109 (2)(b) allows the Standing Committee on Social Affairs to examine matters related to health, education, social services, labor, aviation, culture, and media.

1.1. Committee Procedures

Deliberations on the Lautoka City Council began in late October 2024. The Committee read through the reports and prepared clarifications on key issues of interest, which were then sent to the Lautoka City Council.

The Committee held a Public Submission with the Lautoka City Council on 8th November 2024.

Upon receipt of all relevant information on the committee's queries, it was subsequently endorsed on 10th March 2025.

The Committee received the responses from the Lautoka City Council which can be viewed at the following link. <https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

2. LAUTOKA CITY COUNCIL

2.1 Background

The development of Lautoka City began in 1899 when the sugar milling company Colonial Sugar Refining Company Limited applied to the government to build a wharf at Lautoka to export sugar from western Viti Levu. In that year CSR decided to build a sugar mill in Lautoka, which was completed in 1903.

Establishment Timelines

- 01st Jun.1901 - declared a Port of Entry.
- 02nd Feb.1929 - proclaimed a Township.
- 01st Jan.1944 - Lautoka Town Board was formed.
- 28th Mar.1953 - Lautoka Town Council was established.
- 04th Nov.1972 - 1st Common Roll Election & introduction wards namely Waiyavi, Simla, Tavakubu & Veitari
- 25th Feb.1977 - was declared a City & known as The Sugar City

2.2 Committee Deliberation and Analysis

The committee noted and deliberated on the Lautoka City Council's undertaking to improve its operations and service delivery.

- The committee noted that for the period under review, 2015-2017, the Auditor-General issued a disclaimer opinion for all the years. The Committee noted that Lautoka City Council failed to comply with the relevant financial regulations.
- The committee noted that Lautoka City Council has 105 open spaces. Some of these are open spaces and parks which can be better utilized for development and income generation for the council.
- It is also crucial to review the relevant legislation and regulations to empower Lautoka City Council.
- Lautoka City Council is engaged in Public Private Partnership arrangements for commercial developments.
- The Committee noted that the Council does not have Risk Management Policy and a Business Continuity plan.
- The Committee noted the construction of the proposed Retention Dam to reduce flooding in the CBD areas.

3. KEY FINDINGS

Below are the key findings that the committee compiled through its deliberations.

- 3.1 Review of Legislations:** The Committee noted that the Local Government Act needs to be reviewed to better control the activities in all municipalities.
- 3.2 Financial Management:** The Committee noted that Lautoka City Council did not observe the proper accounting protocols for the period under review. Lautoka City Council has implemented a Finance Manual and departmental SOPs for each of the accounting functions and has strict check and review measures in place.
- 3.3 Collection of Rate Arrears:** The Committee noted the increase in rate arrears, which currently sits at \$10,081,820.00 M. Lautoka City Council has taken measures to address these issues with the small claims tribunal and has implemented other strategies for recovering rate arrears.
- 3.4 Status of Parks and Open Spaces:** The Committee noted that Lautoka City Council has 105 open spaces. The Council engages with Business houses, organizations and clubs in the maintenance and upgrade of parks.
- 3.5 Flood Mitigation:** The Committee noted Lautoka City Council experiences flash flooding during heavy rains.
- 3.6 Extended Rural Boundary Services:** The Committee noted that the council provides services to extended rural boundary for garbage collection. The Committee further notes that there is insufficient funding to cater for extended rural boundaries services.
- 3.7 Ministry of Waterways Government Grant:** Lautoka City Council used to receive government grant from Ministry of Waterways for improvement to undertake drainage, which has now seized.
- 3.8 Collaboration and Networking:** The Committee noted that the Ministry of Local Government and the Councils need to improve their coordination and collaboration to improve service delivery. The Council must establish its Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) and strengthen its network with other key agencies.
- 3.9 Security Plan:** The Committee noted that with the rise of criminal activities within the municipality, there needs to be a Plan for a more secure, safer, peaceful, and welcoming environment within the municipality.
- 3.10 Fight against Drugs:** The Committee noted that the Lautoka City Council has an anti-drug group comprising key stakeholders. The Council is working closely with Police on the installation of cameras in hot spot areas.

3.11 Monitoring and Oversight: The Committee noted the lack of proper oversight and monitoring from the Ministry of Local Government resulting in financial mismanagement and inefficient service delivery from Lautoka City Council.

4. COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee recommends the following:

- 4.1 That Lautoka City Council, in collaboration with the Ministry of Local Government with urgency, expedites the review of Local Government legislation.
- 4.2 That Lautoka City Council must take measures to fully comply with the financial regulations and procedures to meet standards from the Auditor General's Office.
- 4.3 That the Ministry of Local Government must strengthen its oversight and monitoring of all municipalities.
- 4.4 That the Committee recommends Lautoka City Council's continue its efforts to reduce outstanding rate arrears.
- 4.5 For a safer, secure, and clean City, the Committee strongly recommends that Lautoka City Council strengthen its collaborations and network with stakeholders and agencies to effectively confront social issues like drugs, loitering, littering, and criminal activities.
- 4.6 That Lautoka City Council puts more effort in maintaining its City parks.
- 4.7 That Lautoka City Council work closely with Fiji Roads Authority (FRA), Ministry of Waterways and other stakeholders to address the issues of poor road conditions, blocked drains, and malfunctioning street lights.
- 4.8 That Lautoka City Council work closely with Guangdong City in the construction of the Retention Dam to mitigate the flooding.
- 4.9 That Government must assist municipal councils with more funding to have a regular collections of garbage to the extended boundaries.

5. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND GENDER ANALYSIS:

The Lautoka City Council's commitment to the SDGs are as follows:

Goal 3: Good Health and Well Being

The Council is working with various stakeholders like in the Public and Private sector to ensure the health and wellbeing of citizens is enhanced in their respective work plans.

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

The Council also conducts regular monitoring in terms of sanitation standards within city area to benefit its citizens. Cleansing services are also provided to ensure good sanitation.

Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

The Council is adopting principle of clean energy in its operations and aims to mitigate impact of climate change as well as reduce carbon emission.

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

All staffs are accorded decent work and rights at workplace.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

The Council through its environmental health plan & development control are working on waste management initiatives endeavoring to achieve a sustainable Lautoka City.

Goal 13: Climate Action

Council is working with stakeholders to mobilize climate action like tree planting, sound waste management, investing in clean energy where possible and enforcing open fire bylaws etc.

Goal 14 and Goal 15: Life below water and above land

Council cleansing services help keep the environment clean to support life.

Goal 17: Partnerships for Goals

Council continuously endeavors to engage with stakeholders like JICA, DoE, WAF, NGOs like Model Towns to work in partnership to achieve a common objective of fighting climate change.

Gender Analysis:





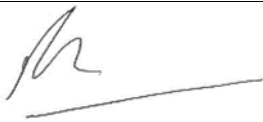
The Council addresses gender mainstreaming at all levels of decision-making. It maintains fairness and eliminates any form of bias during staff recruitment/tender evaluation of any contracts. Also reflected in promotions and staff trainings

6. CONCLUSION

In this review report, the committee highlighted various areas that needs to be strengthened by the council and relevant recommendations formulated for resolution.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS' SIGNATURE

We, the Members of the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, hereby agree with the contents of this report:

Committee Member	E-Signature
Hon. Iliesa Vanawalu Chairperson	
Hon. Ratu Rakuita Vakalalabure Deputy Chairperson	
Hon. Taito Rokomatu Alternative Member	
Hon. Viam Pillay Member	
Hon. Parveen Bala Member	
Date: 10th March 2025	

ANNEXURE

Published evidence

Written evidence, transcripts, and supporting documents can be viewed on the Parliament website at the following link:

<https://www.parliament.gov.fj/committees/standing-committee-on-social-affairs/>

LAUTOKA CITY COUNCIL

PRESENTATION TO

THE PARLIAMENT OF FIJI
The Social Affairs Committee

7 November 2024





Question 2.

The most common challenges faced by the Council from 2015 to 2017 and how they have evolved over time:

Some challenges faced by Council during these periods was defaulting rate payers, lack of civic pride by citizens in compliance to legislations and standards and high turnover of trained staffs due to other competing employment markets.

Council has been engaging with citizens and stakeholders through awareness programs to highlight these challenges and seeking their support. Council has worked very closely with staff union and been awarding COLA on annual basis as well as recognizing their labor rights to retain staffs.

Drainage blockages during heavy rainfall periods – People's behavior, releasing of solid waste into the drainage system during times of heavy rainfall periods with ripple effects on the ageing infrastructure.

Question 3.

Year	No. of Ratepayers	Rates Collected (\$)
2015	8,012	3,409,436
2016	8,030	3,854,285
2017	8,064	3,983,709

a) Causes of accumulation of rental arrears

Rental Arrears – There was no profit according to the tenants. Also, the Council was very lenient in terms of debt collection from the tenants.

Rates Arrears - Increase in unemployment and those that were making payments have retired.

b) Challenges faced in the collection of rental arrears and their methods of collection

Council was dependent on tenants to deposit directly into Council bank account, or at the cashier. Direct deposits were verified after the bank statements were received. Now, with the online banking system, defaulting tenants can be identified quickly and measures taken to recover debts.

c) Any survey or research done by the Council on the reasons for the non-payment or delayed payment of town rates.

Last survey/research was done in 2021, called the ratepayer profiling. There is no record of any such profiling done in 2015 – 2017.

Question 3.

d) **Council's plan to address this issue and the punitive and non-punitive measures are taken against non-compliant ratepayers:**

Punitive measures:

- Confiscation of monthly rental
- Legal action (Small Claims Tribunal, Magistrate Court and High Court)

Non-Punitive Measures:

- 30 days demand notice
- Deduction of salary/wages
- Constant follow up on payment plans

e) **How is the non-collection of rates impacting the service delivery of the Council:**

With the non-collection of rates, the Council is unable to undertake the required investments in its municipality to enhance the service delivery to the ratepayers.

Operational activities have been restricted to strict budget, thus pushing projected activities to a later date and capital works are delayed.

The Council provides services such as solid waste management services, beautification and open space upkeep, sanitation control management, organising national events and the performance of regulatory and enforcement functions inclusive of transport, traffic, building and litter.

Question 3.

f) **Provide details of vacant lots in the municipality**

Below are the details of the vacant lots that are in arrears of rates. We need to do a thorough site visit of the ones that are actually vacant. We only kept record of the vacant lots who are in arrears.

No.	Assessment#	Owners	Physical Address
1	224	YOUNG WOMEN CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION	1A RAVOUVOU STREET
2	940	APPAL SWAMY NAIDU & NARENDRA NAIDU	32 ORIANA PLACE
3	1121	ERONI NAMATA	28 AJODYA PRASAD ROAD
4	1176	SIKELI RATU	16 MUNIAPPA NAICKER STREET
5	2685	ARUN SINGH F/N KUAR SINGH & MANGELA KUMAR	19 KULA PLACE
6	2879	ERONI SOWAKULA & MERE SOWAKULA	7 BIOLETTI STREET
7	2999/1	WALTER JAMES SMITH	36 GANGES ROAD
8	3199	COLATI VAKALOLOMA	35 JINNU ROAD
9	5342	SAMUELA RAIQAVI	10 WAQATABU PLACE
10	5641	MIKAELE MATAKA & VANI RADITORA MATAKA	14 DAWAI STREET
11	6786	HOUSING AUTHORITY	SARU ROAD
12	6787	HOUSING AUTHORITY	TAVAKUBU RESERVOIR
13	5787/22	TRANS PACIFIC SEAFOODS (FIJI) LIMITED	24 ROYAL PALM ROAD
14	5820/48	Ragoneiaia Cava Naitau	1 DR SEMESA SERUVATU PLACE
15	786/35	MICHAEL JOHNS & EMMA VERESONI	2 JAVA STREET

Question 4.

a) **What improvements have been brought about in the in the collection of arrears by the Council.**

- The strengthening of field visits on defaulters.
- Roadshows on rates matters to the different wards.
- Constant follow-ups via phones and emails.
- Offer reasonable payment plans for arrears.

b) **What measures have been put in place to address the grievances of ratepayers.**

Grievances are received and managed through the complaints management software. On updates of payments are referred to the accounts section to look into it. For services, these are referred to the respective Departments to attend to.

c) **How have the following services and facilities provided to ratepayers in the municipality been enhanced:**

- **Maintenance of public amenities**

Council has outsourced all works related to upkeep of public amenities to ensure citizens ensure optimum level of services. Regular monitoring to ensure works are attended on timely manner. 5 of the 13 public conveniences are on user pay, revenue generated meets costs of maintenance.

- **Rubbish collection and grass cutting**

Council also outsourced part of garbage collection and grass cutting works for effective service delivery. Garden and bulky refuse collection service is also user pay. Council has Litter Prevention Officers to ensure that citizens do not litter but utilize the user pay service whilst city wide clean-up is conducted annual basis.

Question 4.

c) How have the following services and facilities provided to ratepayers in the municipality been enhanced:

- Road maintenance and drainage

Road maintenance is managed by FRA. Drainage maintenance program has been strengthened through budgetary allocations for reconstruction for damaged drains on priority basis as to prioritize maintenance of drainage, which pose risk of further damages to other adjoining properties.

For improvements on Drainage Cleaning and its functionality, the monitoring of Contractors through checklist for works carried out and sign off for satisfactory completion between council supervisor and contractor representative. Enforcement of contract clauses for unsatisfactory works where appropriate to be undertaking by council and surcharge contractors through payment deductions to cover cost for works done by council

Question 4.

d) **How has the service delivery in the following areas been enhanced:**

- **Health and hygiene**

Council has recruited experienced staffs in services department and offer regular capacity building opportunities, which enables these staffs to ensure citizens, and stakeholders comply with health and hygiene standards and legislations. Awareness is followed up with monitoring and enforcement. Some activities include clean schools programs, grading of eateries, service of notices and legal action upon non-compliance, daily street sweeping in CBD/industrial and hot spot areas with twice weekly street sweeping in residential areas with kerb and channel streets. Daily garbage collection is done for Commercial/industrial/schools/ hospitals with twice weekly collection of residential areas to ensure the city is clean and healthy. Council also actively promotes waste minimization through home composting, market waste composting, green waste chipping etc.

- **Security and safety**

The council has installed CCTV cameras in Lautoka Municipal Market and Lautoka Bus Station area to curb on illegal activities and pick pockets for the safety of the general public. The council Enforcement Officers and Police have joint quarterly meeting with Shoe Shine Boys and Wheelbarrow Boys and formed Crime Prevention Committees and they have assisted the Police in apprehending some of the perpetrators.

The Council Enforcement officers have conducted joint operations with Social Welfare in profiling on street dwellers and beggars and have taken some of the street dwellers to the respective homes.

For the Safety of the motorists, the council enforcement officers carry out joint operations with the Police traffic departments. .

Question 4.

- **Impacts of climate change/environment**

Integrated waste management system (IWMS) which entails sound waste management systems from generation to disposal to reduce impacts when disasters actually do happen. Basically means 100% waste collection coverage, 3R Promotion, awareness, landfill management, public cleansing services (street sweeping, grass cutting, drain/creek cleaning etc.), quarterly clean ups, vegetation management etc. This ensures that citizens are all prepared and geared to face the disasters and can bounce back and recover quickly.

Town Planning and development control – council is actively involved in regulating developments to ensure that all developments comply with minimum standards prescribed under National Building Code and Town Planning Act.

Blue Infrastructure – Council is working with stakeholders to ensure that coast line is protected through planting mangroves and building sea walls.

Energy Efficient – this is becoming integral component of councils all new developments not only to be energy efficient, reduce costs, ensure post disasters, these public facilities continue to operate.

Water Ways maintenance – council is partnering with Ministry of Waterways to ensure that waterways are dredged cleaned and banks protected to minimize any impact from flooding.

Water Supply – council has own water supply via borehole, which not only suffices need of the council but the citizens as well as post disaster.

Vector control works – this ensures minimization of any vector borne diseases post disaster especially dengue.

Establishment of temporary and permanent waste storage sites.

Adopting a **Disaster Management Plan** to ensure that the council and the city is well prepared for any disasters, which in return accelerates recovery/rehabilitation efforts and minimizes impacts.

Enforcement of relevant legislations.

Food Safety Work (awareness, monitoring, food condemnation, licensing etc.) to ensure reduce risks associated with consumption of food salvaged from disasters.

Question 4.

- **Poverty**

Council has developed municipal market giving opportunity for farmers and food vendors to engage in business to sustain their livelihoods. BBQ stall business are also promoted from parks to support the unemployed. Council hosts flea market from Thursday to Saturday in Shirley Park giving opportunity for small businesses. Council hosts wide range of sports events from its sporting facilities as well as number of cruise liners berth, an economic spin off effect especially for eateries, shops, taxis etc.

The planning and development department has emphasized on processing of development applications in an effective and timely (fast track) manner for continued developments construction to the business houses and individuals hence enhancing opportunities with demand in construction workers, job creation upon completion and commissioning of the industries and commercial business.

Accommodating developments on conditional basis with consent of DTCP for individuals going into SME's from properties of other land use namely residential with intent to establish businesses in order to support their families for example catering, tailoring and canteen businesses.

- **Squatter settlements within town boundaries**

All the squatter settlements both within and adjacent to boundaries of Lautoka city enjoy the same services like other citizens especially garbage collection and grass cutting/drain cleaning services. Council has been working closely with Housing Authority for squatter upgrade and rehabilitation projects.

- **Disaster risk analysis**

Council has adopted a Disaster Management Plan for LCC to ensure that council is fully prepared to respond to disaster needs before, during and post disasters. Council ensures waterways cleaning/upkeep, vegetation management and pre disaster cleanup campaign to mitigate the impacts of disasters.

- **Gender mainstreaming**

Addressed at all levels of decision-making. It maintains fairness and eliminates any form of bias during staff recruitment/tender evaluation of any contracts. Also reflected in promotions and staff trainings.

Question 5.

We note that the auditor issued a disclaimer of opinion on pages 5 and 6 of the audited financial statements for 2015 report, pages 6, 7, 8 of 2016 and 2017 reports. What measures has the Council undertaken to address all this issues and what internal controls are in place to prevent their re-occurrence?

The draft financial statements for the years 2020 to 2022 were prepared by PKF Aliz Pacific. Currently the Council is carrying out due diligence checks before it is provided to the Auditor General for audit. We have put in place measures like monthly or timely reconciliations, monitoring that processes are followed, working closely with the Ministry of Local Government and proper safekeeping of documents for the current financial year to ensure that we are able to get an unqualified audit opinion for the Council.

Question 6.

In terms of public health and safety compliance, under stray dog trapping, the committee noted that costs were incurred on the types of baits used to trap stray dogs. Could the Council provide further clarification on the types of baits that were utilized in conjunction with the cost?

Actually, the baits are meat off cuts from butcher shops like fish and some cheaper meat by offcuts, which range from \$3.00/kilo to \$5.00 per kilo. The trapped dogs are handed over to Ministry of Agriculture for further interventions like neutering or euthanizing.

Question 7.

In the Council's recent submission of the 2015 – 2017 Annual Reports regarding the plans to address the frequent flooding in certain areas of the city, could the Council provide an update on the progress made.

Flooding in CBD.

Previously all debris used to enter underground and block the drainage system making it difficult for the council to clear as water receded. This also reduced the discharge capacity of the drain, causing overflow onto streets.

The council progressively installed gratings to trap the debris before the drain get underground to maintain discharge at full capacity. Since the drain is underground and developed with building over, there is no space for expansion of the drainage system.

Consideration was given to somehow retain the storm water and slowly discharge into underground drains by creation of a retention pond at Coronation Park. The area was backfilled to create ponding area and installed gratings in the drain to trap debris before drain connects to the underground drainage system.

Thereafter, water is retained at Coronation Park. Due to debris clogged in the gratings, water overflows over the street and outfalls into drain again at the other side of street before entering underground drain.

The council also installed an automatic pump at the Marine drive Foreshore area which reduces the impact of backflow of seawater into street gullies during times of king tides and simultaneous heavy rainfall. The pump automatically runs draining storm water into ocean maintaining water in the well to an acceptable level hence avoiding flood along Foreshore Seawall and streets.

Question 8.

Does the Council have a risk management policy, assets capitalization policy and disaster recovery plan/business continuity plan to govern aspects of its operations and activities?

The Council currently does not have a risk management policy and will need to develop one within the next 3 months or by end of January 2025.

Asset capitalization policy is included as part of the Finance Policy Manual for Municipal Councils prepared by the Ministry of Local Government in 2021.

For the Business Continuity Plan (BCP), the Council has the Natural Disaster Management SOP in lieu of the BCP and the Council will develop one within the next 3 months or by end of January 2025.

Question 9.

Does the Council have any plans on the clean-up and maintenance of the drains? What are some of the challenges?

For improvements on Drainage cleaning and its functionality, the monitoring of Contractors through checklist for works carried out and sign off for satisfactory completion between council supervisor and contractor representative. Enforcement of contract clauses for unsatisfactory works where appropriate to be undertaking by council and surcharge contractors through payment deductions to cover cost for works done by council to maintain acceptable drainage cleanliness.

Furthermore, council engages casual workers prior to rainy seasons for vegetation management and drain cleaning purposes. This is to ensure removal of overgrowth from within the drains and accumulated silts and debris for effective function of the drains including cleaning of culvert mouth and underground drains. The works also include cleaning of siltation of roadside gully pits for effective drainage preventing street flooding and overflows into properties.

Challenges are aging infrastructure with inadequate capacity hence unable to cater for the increased rainfall intensity and coupling factor is the unethical behavior from people throwing rubbish and debris into the drainage system during heavy rainfall times blocking the normal drain including underground drainage limiting its function on full capacity.

Question 10.

Does the Council have plans to create inclusive recreational facilities and public spaces to cater for gender needs?

There are plans for upgrading of festival ground for improved drainage, accessibility, lighting and CCTV whereby a planning and design is accepted through planning consultant.

The children's park also requires upgrading whereby council will seek assistance from relevant business house in charge to the facility for upgrading and improvement.

Council in collaboration with interested organizations and clubs willing to upgrade parks of their choices for greater benefit of their communities and citizens in their locality.

With its planning and facilitation, the council is also emphasizing community engagement to meet the growing demands for recreational facilities in the municipality.

Question 11.

In terms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), how is it relevant and achieved during the years under review?

Almost all the SDG goals are cross cutting and relevant to Council. The significant ones are elaborated below:

Goal 3: Good Health and Well Being

Council works with various stakeholders like WAF/MOHMS and citizens as well businesses and works with its annual work plans to ensure health and wellbeing of citizens is enhanced.

Goal 6: Clean Water and Sanitation

Council again liaises and works with WAF in above matter. Council also conducts regular monitoring in terms of sanitation standards within city area for benefit of its citizens. Cleansing services are also provided it ensure good sanitation.

Goal 7: Affordable and Clean Energy

Council is adopting principle of clean energy in its operations and projects to mitigate impacts of climate change as well as reduce costs.

Question 11.

In terms of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), how is it relevant and achieved during the years under review?

Almost all the SDG goals are cross cutting and relevant to Council. The significant ones are elaborated below:

Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth

All staffs are accorded decent work and rights at workplace.

Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities

Council through its environmental health, Planning & development control as well as waste management initiatives endeavor to achieve a sustainable Lautoka City.

Goal 13: Climate Action

Council is working with stakeholders to mobilize climate action like tree planting, sound waste management, investing in clean energy where possible, enforcing open fire bylaws etc.

Goal 14 and Goal 15: Life below water and above land

Council cleansing services help keep the environment clean to support life

Goal 17: Partnerships for Goals

Council continuously endeavors to engage with stakeholders like JICA, DoE, WAF, NGOs like Model Towns to work in partnership to achieve a common objective of fighting climate change.

Construction of Market to cater for increasing number of vendors from rural communities.

New construction and upgrading of the Churchill park turf and synthetic athletics track for improved sporting facility to the western schools and other sports of rugby and soccer.



Question 12.

When will the Council submit its outstanding Annual Reports?

The 2018 and 2019 Annual Reports will be submitted by the end of November 2024.

The 2020, 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports will await the completion of the audit before it can be submitted.

The 2023 and 2024 financial statements will be prepared in-house and will be submitted to the OAG after the completion of the audit of the 2022 financial statements.

The OAG has scheduled the audit for the 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 financial statements to commence from 16/12/24, 21/03/25, 08/05/25 and 12/06/25 respectively.

The OAG has also stated the 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 financial statements to be submitted for audit by 30/11/24, 28/02/25, 11/04/25 and 09/05/25 respectively.

Vinaka



[VERBATIM REPORT]

STANDING COMMITTEE ON **SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

ANNUAL REPORTS

2015-2017 Annual Reports

SUBMISSION: Lautoka City Council

VENUE: Big Committee Room, Government
Buildings, Suva

DATE: Thursday, 7th November, 2024

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 THURSDAY, 7TH NOVEMBER, 2024, AT 10.51 A.M.

Interviewee/Submittee: Lautoka City Council

In Attendance:

- (1) Mr. Mohammed Anees Khan - Chief Executive Officer
- (2) Mr. Sairusi Bulai - Head of Finance and Admin
- (3) Mr. Saidi Nazrana - Principal Accounts Officer

Ministry of Local Government

- (1) Ms. Seema Sharma - Permanent Secretary

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Honourable Members, and the Secretariat, a very good morning to you all. It is my absolute pleasure to welcome everyone, especially the viewers who are watching this session

For information purpose, pursuant to Parliament Standing Order 111, 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 via the Parliament Channel at the Walesi platform and will also be streamed live on the Parliament *Facebook* platform.

For any sensitive information regarding this submission that cannot be disclosed in public, this can be provided to the Committee either in private or in writing. However, please, be advised that pursuant to Standing Order 111, there are only few specific circumstances that allow for non-disclosure, and these include:

- (1) National security matters;
- (2) Third party confidential information;
- (3) Personnel or human resources matters; and
- (4) Committee deliberations on all issues before it develops its recommendations and reports.

This is a Parliamentary meeting, and all information gathered is covered under the Parliamentary Powers and Privileges Act. However, note that the Committee does not condone liable, slander or any allegations against individuals who are not present today to defend themselves, and any information brought to this Committee must be based on facts.

In terms of other protocols of this Committee meeting, please, minimise the usage of mobile phones and all mobile phones are to be on silent mode while the meeting is in progress.

I also wish to remind honourable Members and our guests, that all questions asked are to be asked through the Chairman. I would also like, at this time, to introduce the honourable Members of our Committee.

(Introduction of members of the Standing Committee)

I will now give you the floor to introduce yourselves, first, before you continue with your presentation.

(Introduction of Officials from Lautoka City Council)

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Mr. Chairman and honourable Members, without further ado, it is my pleasure to present the Lautoka City Council responses to the questions raised by the Standing Committee.

On Question No. 1, previously, in the years in question from 2015 to 2017, we could not find, in the records, a system of monitoring performance indicators. Rather, the Council was dependant on financial performance and budget variances as performance indicators and completion of projects for their strategic objectives.

Recently, the Council is in the process of developing a balance scorecard system to track and monitor progress of strategic objectives. A copy of the sample scorecard is given in Excel Sheet.

Basically, the Council's business is divided into four quadrants, namely the:

- (1) customer and repair services;
- (2) operations which include health, building, et cetera;
- (3) human resources and innovation; and
- (4) financial and corporate performances.

That is similar to some of the corporate organisations and statutory entities that use that in Fiji and using our experiences across the management, we are developing one for the Council and we have consulted the Permanent Secretary and the other Councils so that we can have a robust monitoring system for all Councils that could developed and implemented.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, can I just start off with a question to the CEO of Lautoka City Council. Do you have a Master Plan for the Municipality?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- In terms of development, we have what we call the Town Planning Scheme and for the development of the Council, we have a Strategic Plan. There is a five-year Strategic Plan. Currently, because of the Government's Development Plan, we are trying to align our Strategic Plan and the Government's plan. So, it is a revision of our Strategic Plan which we want to conclude in January 2025.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- A further question on that, Mr. Chairman, if I may, when would you be able to have that synchronised or converged with the NDP? Do you have the timeline?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- We are targeting January 2025.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- *Vinaka*, CEO. I also have a question to ask, and I apologise if this is too early. We believe that your key performance indicator was not actually in place for a couple of years when we refer back to this report. While awaiting the balance scorecard which is in draft format, how do you look at it moving forward, will the balance scorecard bridge that gap in order for you to get a real indicator on the ground on how the business of the Council is running?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Thank you for the question. The way the balance scorecard works is from the Strategic Plan, you derive your Annual Business Plan. So, if it is five-year Strategic Plan. What do you this year sets the platform to achieve your five-year goal from the Strategic Plan. Then you develop it for the entire Council and that sets the performance indicators for the CEO and the Board. From each indicator, then you break it down to what each Department has to do. Then it

trickles down to performance indicators for the Head of Departments, the Supervisors and officers of the respective departments. So, a master balance scorecard, and then subsequent balance scorecard which is used to monitor progress either on a monthly basis or quarterly basis. It is a guideline for the Council, with every review either monthly or quarterly, the finance we have targetted to achieve, what are the hurdles faced and how we can overcome that.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Sir, you may continue.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- On Question No. 2, some challenges faced during this period was:

- (1) defaulting ratepayers which is still continuing;
- (2) the lack of civic pride by citizens in compliance to legislations and standards; and
- (3) high turnover of trained staff due to other competing employment markets.

The Council has been engaging with citizens and stakeholders through awareness programmes to highlight these challenges and to seek their support. The Council works very closely with the staff union and has been awarding the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) on an annual basis, as well as recognising the labour rights to retain staff.

Drainage blockages during heavy rain has been another challenge in the recent past because of people's behaviour in managing solid waste and there are high incidents of cases where we have found people releasing solid waste into the drainage system during times of heavy rainfall, which has ripple effect on the aging infrastructure that the Council has.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, a supplementary question in regards to blocked drains. Recently, I think there was a heavy downpour and there were reports of flooding. What concrete actions have you taken since it is now the rainy season.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Lautoka actually is not a municipality located on a riverbank, so we do not have any major problems, like river flooding. The flooding that occurred was mainly due to the three small creeks running across the city coming from the Ba end, the first one is the Vunato Creek, which originates through Waiyavi and then crosses through Vunato and crosses Lautoka. The second one is the Musuniwai Creek which, if you remember is where the LTA and the old FNP Office. As soon as you reach Natabua Junction, there is the Saru Creek. So, there are three creeks that cross Lautoka.

To supplement the drainage, there are two major drains which originate from residential areas, mainly in Simla and on the Government Quarters' side, which runs directly across to the Natabua High School and between the Police Station. Those two drains come and as soon as they reach the CBD, they go underground. In front of the mosque and Meenoos, there is one major drain that goes underground and discharges in front of the R.C. Manubhai Office at Vakabale Street. The second major drain is after the Coronation Church or Coronation Park in front of BBQ Chicken, which goes underground and discharges near the South Seas Club.

When those drains were designed, the City was quite small at that time. Now, there are lots of subdivisions and residential houses built upstream, which aids to the storm water load coming in. So, the major cause of drainage recently which was in the news media and the social media was drain at Coronation Park where the drain just goes underground.

To mitigate that, the Council has identified two retention ponds - one at the Hospital Junction and is called the Fenner Park and the second one is the Coronation Park. Having said that, there is

still a lot of debris that come in. This year, it was mostly floating debris. Last year, we found that someone had deliberately cut banana plants and shoved them under the drain, which caused the blockage. So, we are consulting with FRA to see whether there is a blockage and water does rise, what is the alternative for the water to flow back into the creek and reach the sea, instead of running across the street, on to Narara Parade and falling on to Vitogo Parade.

The second is, upon heavy rain, these drains are flowing under pressure. That means that the drain cross-section is full of water as it goes underground. As the drain flows from, for example, underneath Meenoos and discharges at R.C. Manubhai, it connects all the chambers into this drain. So, the market chambers and chambers for all other businesses around that area all connect to this drain. If this drain is working under pressure and there is high tide pushing water from the other side, the slow flowing water from the chambers do not really enter the high-pressure drain. So that causes flooding, in one instance, at the Lautoka Market and the video was on social media. That chamber is connected to the underground drain, which was flowing at full capacity, so the water was not able to come in, so it back-flowed and water piled up on the gutter and started flowing from the gutter. We are looking at how the gutter systems are connected. Do we need to allow for some atmospheric pressure relief on this? So, those are the things that are being looked at by the Council.

Question No. 3 is on the statistics on ratepayers. From the year 2015 to 2017, we have seen a slight increase in the rates collected generally averaged from \$3.8 million to \$3.9 million.

Causes of accumulation, feedback we get from the ratepayers is, there is no profit from the tenants on some of the properties that are rented out. In those days, we have seen from the records that the Council was not very aggressive in debt collection from the tenants. One of the reasons was the increase in unemployment and those who were making payments had retired.

On the challenges faced in the collection of rental arrears and methods, the Council is dependent on tenants to directly deposit into the Council's bank account or with the cashier. Direct deposits were verified after bank statements were received. So, there was a bit of backlog in how the verifications were done on the deposits. Now, with the online banking system, we have defaulting tenants and defaulting ratepayers who can easily be identified quickly and measures taken to recover debts.

On the survey done on the Council for non-payment or delayed payment town rates, the last survey was done in 2021 which was called the ratepayer profiling. There was no such profiling done in 2015 and 2017.

Very recently, we did a ratepayer profiling. We want to understand the difficulties that the ratepayers are facing. Majority of them reside overseas, so we managed to contact them through email, so a lot of direct deposits are coming in. Those who are having difficulty, we are offering them monthly repayments and those Civil Servants and employees on salary, we are giving them direct deduction option as well.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- A supplementary question, Mr. CEO, while looking at your debt collection and in applying all these, as well as looking at your challenges, how do you look at it when you implement the direct bank deduction into the account, the new method that we use, is there any improvement in the system?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Yes, very recently, we have seen some improvements, together with some assistance from the Ministry of Local Government in terms of reducing interest rate to a simple interest system. This year, we have seen improved collection compared to last year.

Two to three years of COVID-19 has affected everyone so we do not take into account the collections from COVID-19. Prior to COVID-19 and post-COVID, this year's monthly collection for the last three months are better than the last two years.

The Council's plan is to address this issue, punitive and non-punitive measures. Punitive measures are confiscation of monthly rental legal actions, file cases in the Small Claims Tribunal, Magistrates Court and High Court. The non-punitive measures is that we give a 30 day demand notice and upon expiry of the notice, we try to approach and meet in person, do a field visit and those who are facing hardships, we do a hardship assessment and we ask the Ministry for consideration of partial or full waiver. For those who opt for salary or wages deduction, we do that, and we have system of constant follow-up on payment plans.

How is the non-collection of rates impacting the service delivery? With the non-collection of rates, the Council is unable to undertake the required investments within the municipality to enhance service delivery to the ratepayers. Operational activities have been restricted to strict budget, thus pushing projected activities to a later date and delayed capital works.

The Council provides services such as solid waste management, beautification, open space upkeep, sanitation control management, organising national events and performance regulatory and enforcement functions inclusive of transport, traffic, building and litter.

On the details of vacant lots in the municipality, from 2015 to 2017, we found through the records that there was a small list of vacant lots which we have put up but through the ratepayer profiling that we have done in 2021, we now can identify that there are a lot more vacant lots and some ratepayers who are not residing there are residing overseas or residing in other municipalities. So, the rate profiling exercise has given us a lot more data which will be presented in due course when it comes to the audit of the respective years.

What improvements have been brought about in the collection of arrears by the Council? The strengthening of field visits on defaulters, face to face meetings and very recently, we have started roadshow on rates matters to the different wards. Last year, we did a series of roadshows. We set up tents and tables, laptops and printers on the streets of wards with densely populated areas during after hours, where it is easy for the ratepayers to come and talk to the Council, discuss their difficulties, how best we can sort their issues out and how best they can help the Council by paying their rates. Constant follow-ups via phone calls and emails, as well as offer reasonable payment plans on arrears.

What measures have been put in place to address the grievances of ratepayers? Recently, we have implemented a complaints management software where complaints are registered in the software and the department responsible is directed and the time it takes when the complaint is registered. Every week and at end of the month, the software generates a report of complaints that are pending. So, each department is now benchmarking themselves for common types of complaints, how soon we are able to resolve and what can the Council do to resolve those pending complaints.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- What has been the most common complaint? We have heard from the Suva City Council and Nausori Town Council. In your case, what is the most common complaint?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Grass cutting and drain clearing in the residential areas. For commercial areas, it is street sweeping, blockages, traffic matters, et cetera? I can get a list of common complaints from the software management and present that to the Committee.

How have the following services and facilities provided to ratepayers in the municipality been enhanced? Breaking it down into maintenance of public amenities, the Council has outsourced all works related to the upkeep of public amenities to ensure level of services. We have regular monitoring in place to ensure works are attended on a timely manner. We have 13 public conveniences, five of which are on user-pay service, so the revenue generated from that is used to maintain and enhance their services.

Rubbish collection and grass cutting is also outsourced. Rubbish collection in residential areas and grass cutting were effective service delivery. Garden and bulky rubbish collection is on a user pay. This is a unique system that the Council offers, so apart from your weekly collection of garbage, if you have any other rubbish, green waste or you are doing a trimming or cleaning your compound for wedding or any function, you can pay a certain amount to the Council and the Council will arrange a truck that will be there to take that garbage away to dispose.

We also offer a city-wide cleanup on an annual basis and in between the free clean-up and user-pay service, if we find any ratepayer not complying and taking out rubbish not attended to, we fine them with a litter fine.

How have the following services and facilities provided to ratepayers in the municipality been enhanced? On road maintenance and drainage, the roads were transferred to FRA in year 2013-2014. Since then, the Council has not been putting any effort on the road, but we have been maintaining the drain and cleaning the road on behalf of FRA.

The Drainage Maintenance Programme has been strengthened through budgetary allocations. Reconstruction of damaged drains are on priority basis and then we identify those drains that cause further damage, we prioritize repairs to them.

For improvements on drainage cleaning and its functionality, the monitoring of contractors through checklist for works carried out and sign off system for satisfactory completion between the Council supervisor and the contractor representative. Enforcement of contract clauses for unsatisfactory works where appropriate to be undertaken by the council and surcharge contractors through payment deductions to cover cost for works done by the Council.

So, through the contractual services, what we have done is we have put in a clause that if the contractor fails to deliver, then the Council intervenes. So, we do not let the ratepayer be at the mercy of the contractor and the Council have an excuse that the contractor has not done its job, so the Council intervenes on behalf of the contractor and then we charge back to the contractor for the work that the Council does.

Although it is a contracted services on the responsibility of the contractor, but we have a system because all of the ratepayers know the Council. So, instead of telling the ratepayers to lodge a complaint because the contractor has not done the job, we go and do it ourselves, then we charge it back to the contractor. So, that is the system we have put in very recently to make sure that the services are improved.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, CEO. I have a question. When you talk about contractors and with areas of outsourcing, I believe there are certain defined aspects that need to be addressed first, whether the contracts are given or outsourced to other companies. What other methods is the Municipality is looking at, considering whether they are supposed to be tendered, or how do you work it out?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- We do a cost benefit analysis. First, we try to identify what resources the Council would need to undertake our services, not only machinery resources but human resources as well, and as you would know that there is a high turnover of labour and it is very hard to find some unskilled and unestablished staff to undertake that. So, we do an inhouse cost of the service, and then on that basis, we go to tender to see what the market offers. If we see that the market is reasonable, it reduces the overhead cost of the Council's delivery, then award it to the contractor. And then we have a thorough checklist and monitoring system to ensure that the service delivery that the Council used to offer is the same or better than what the contractor delivers.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- On health and hygiene, we have recruited experienced staff in the Services Department under the Health Section and we offer regular capacity building opportunities which enables staff to ensure citizens and stakeholders comply with health and hygiene standards and legislation.

The awareness programme is followed up with monitoring and enforcement. We have a Clean Schools Programme, grading of eateries, service of notices and legal action upon non-compliance, daily street sweeping in CBD, industrial and hotspot areas with twice weekly street sweeping in residential areas with kerb and channel street clearing. Daily garbage collection is done for commercial, industrial, schools and hospitals with twice weekly collection in residential areas to ensure the city is clean and healthy.

The Council actively promotes waste minimisation through home composting, market waste composting and green waste chipping. I can very proudly say that Lautoka Municipal Market would be the only market in the country where all green waste generated is composed and not wasted. We have promoted this to the Market Vendors Association forum through the Market for Change Project where the UN Women is undertaking with all the Municipalities and Nausori Town Council and Rakiraki Town Council had visited Lautoka to see how we have implemented this, and they are looking at implementing the same to all Municipalities.

In terms of solid waste management, civic pride and mindset is one challenge and what we do is run a Clean Schools Programme. There are about 28 schools participating – a combination of both secondary and primary schools. So, we promote 3Rs, recycling and composting within the children in school age so that when they grow up and become ratepayers themselves, they have the habit of minimising waste.

On safety and security, the Council has installed CCTV cameras around the Lautoka Municipal Market and the Bus Station areas, to curb illegal activities and pickpockets, for the safety of the general public. The Council's Enforcement Officers and Police have joint quarterly meetings with shoeshine boys and wheelbarrow boys in Crime Prevention Committees and they have assisted the Police in apprehending some of the perpetrators.

The Council's Enforcement Officers have conducted joint operations with Social Welfare in profiling street dwellers and beggars and have taken some of the street dwellers to their respective homes.

For the safety of motorists, the Council's Enforcement Officers carry out joint operations with the Police Traffic Department and LTA as well.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, CEO, you are fully aware of the drugs issue all over Fiji at this stage. My question is related to, do you have a drugs plan to support the counter narcotic fight?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Yes, very recently, we had a meeting with the Police IT Department. They have studied the current camera locations and mapping it out on a GIS map. They are in the process of identifying hotspot areas which are not currently covered by camera and where we can install additional cameras to monitor and have these areas under surveillance.

According to what they have told us, it is not only city-wide but in some suburban areas as well. They know the hotspot areas and we have shared what we have, so they will use it to enhance the CCTV camera coverage. So, there is only one aspect of it - daily patrols. We have offered two of the Council's infrastructure facilities - one at Shirley Park and the other at Lautoka Market as Police Posts for the Police to have their office present.

We have identified another third location which is a very hotspot area but to develop it into a proper or a mini Police Post, we have asked the Police to give assurance that we will have officers manning it before the Council puts in resources to build a mini Police Post for them. So, we are constantly in touch, we have stakeholder meetings with the different departments within the Police - IT and their Enforcement, to ensure that we give our hands and shoulders to the Police whenever we need to fight this drug problem issues. That is something that we are very seriously working on.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, I was wanting to hear whether you are going to declare Lautoka as a drug free City. Is there an intention for that?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- We would love it. We will work very closely with the Police Statistics Department because they are monitoring the number of cases on a weekly and monthly basis. With these efforts, if there is a reduction, then I will be proud to say that we are working towards drug free Lautoka.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- *Vinaka.*

MR. M.A. KHAN.- On the impacts of climate change development, the integrated waste management system which entails sound waste management system from the generation of disposal to reduce impacts when disasters actually do happen, means that 100 percent of waste collection coverage, the 3R Promotion, awareness, landfill management, public cleaning services of street grass cutting, drain cleaning, quarterly clean-ups and vegetation management, all contribute to the citizens' preparedness that they are geared to face the disasters and can bounce back and recover quickly when disasters do happen.

On Town Planning and Development Control, the Council is actively involved in regulating developments to ensure that all developments comply with minimum standards prescribed under the National Building Code and Town Planning Act.

Blue infrastructure is another concept that we are working on with the stakeholders to ensure that the coastline is protected through planting mangroves and building seawalls.

Energy efficiency is becoming an integral component of all Council's new developments, not only to be energy efficient, but to reduce cost and ensure that post-disasters, these public facilities continue to operate.

On waterways maintenance, the Council is partnering with the Ministry of Waterways to ensure that waterways are dredged, cleaned and banks protected to minimise any impact from flooding.

On water supply, Lautoka City Council has its own water supply via borehole, which not only suffices the need of the Council but citizens, as well as post-disaster. So, we have a reticulation system of public water taps and we do not really close them when there is a water outage because we will use that one borehole at the Botanical Garden which was feeding the system. We have dug another borehole which was primarily to supplement the Churchill Park ground watering, but we can easily connect it to the public water system, which is free of the Water Authority system. So, we can assist the public in need of managing crisis.

On vector control works which is related to mosquito, it ensures the:

- minimisation of any vector borne diseases post-disaster, especially dengue.
- establishment of temporary and permanent waste storage sites. The current access to Vunato Rubbish Dump is beside a creek which gets flooded during disaster, so we have identified our Council's depot as a temporary disposal site. So, if there is a flood or excess washaway at Vunato Rubbish Dump, we can temporarily store some level of waste when a disaster happens.

We have adopted a Disaster Management Plan to ensure that the Council and the City is well prepared for any disasters, which in return accelerates recovery and rehabilitation efforts and minimises impacts.

We have a robust system of enforcement of relevant legislations.

On Food Safety Work, the awareness, monitoring, food condemnation, licensing, et cetera, to ensure there is reduced risks associated with consumption of food salvaged disasters.

On poverty, the Council has developed municipal market giving opportunity for farmers and food vendors to engage in business to sustain their livelihoods. BBQ stall business are also promoted from parks to support the unemployed. The Council hosts flea market thrice a week from Thursday to Saturday at Shirley Park, giving opportunity for small businesses. The Council also hosts a wide range of sporting activities from our infrastructure facilities, as well as a number of cruise liners that berth at Lautoka Wharf, providing an economic spinoff effect, especially for eateries, shops, taxis and handicraft.

The Planning and Development Department which is usually known as the Building and Engineering Department has emphasised on the processing of development applications in an effective and timely manner to fast-track continued development construction to business houses and individuals, hence enhancing opportunities with demand in construction workers which, in return, creates jobs upon completion and commissioning of the industries and commercial businesses.

Also, accommodating developments on conditional basis with the consent of the Director of Town and Country Planning for individuals going into Small and Medium Enterprises from properties of other land use, namely, if you want to do a commercial business in a residential area, then the guidelines are there, and we assist with that in order to support families, for example, in catering, tailoring and canteen businesses. So, this was in existence before COVID-19 but during COVID-19, we had an enhanced a number of applications, so the Council assisted SMEs to ensure that they meet their livelihood needs.

On squatter settlements within town boundaries, all squatter settlements both, within and adjacent to the boundaries of Lautoka City enjoy the same services as other citizens, especially garbage collection, grass cutting and drain cleaning services. The Council has been working closely with Housing Authority for squatter upgrade and rehabilitation projects.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- A supplementary question, when talking about squatter settlements, I believe it is the main issue with all the Councils. While providing this free service to them, are there any returns from them, I mean, to help out or assist in the collection of rubbish, or as part of their share, while giving that free service to them?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Currently, it is not existence but we work very closely with the Ministry of Housing because they have their projects of regularising the squatter settlements and there are two in progress in Lautoka. So, once those projects are done and handed over to the Ministry, including the transfer under the Municipal boundary, then the Council will appropriately carry out the full services and charge them city rates. Currently, these squatter settlements are not paying any city rates.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- According to some of the Councils, these are the areas where they actually misplace a lot of things, in terms of rubbish. They just throw it anyhow and they are not liable. Only those who are paying the rent are being tasked. As a way of moving forward, we are happy to see that you have plans ahead, so that they can be part of the Council too, to bear the cost. Thank you for that.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- In terms of waste collection, I know in squatter settlements, we do not go street by street. What we have encouraged is for the settlements to have their committees and identify a common collection area. They collect it within the area and the Council collects it from there, so we do not really go house to house, unless it is formalised. So, using this system and with the support from the community, we have found that we do not have a real waste collection problem in Lautoka yet.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- On disaster risk analysis, the Council has adopted a Disaster Management Plan to ensure that the Council is fully prepared to respond to disaster needs before, during and post-disasters. The Council ensures waterways cleaning and upkeep, vegetation management and pre-disaster cleanup campaign to mitigate the impacts of disasters.

On gender mainstreaming, this is addressed at all levels of decision-making. It maintains fairness and eliminates any form of bias during staff recruitment or tender evaluation of any contracts. This is also reflected in promotions and staff training.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- A supplementary question, by looking at your staff turnover from the beginning on Question No. 1, in relation to this question, how have you gone out to the market to get the right people to employ because we believe there is a lot of challenges in trying to get the right people for the right job? So, is the Council looking at other avenues on how best you can get the right people to look after your Council?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- What we have done an organisational restructure, to look at the functions of the Council and what positions can look after those functions. Then we identify a Head of Department position and we draft a Job Description (JD) accordingly. So, the JD should thoroughly cover whatever is required by the Council, not only to deliver the services to the ratepayer but also

comply with the statutory requirements of the Local Government Act, the Public Health Act, the Litter Act and Environmental Act. So, whatever the Council's operations are, it has to be captured within the JD, either with the Head of Department or with someone else. So, having that system in place and when you go to the market, you not only ensure that you select the best candidate with appropriate remuneration but also your Council's service delivery and Council's compliance is also maintained.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Sir.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- On Question No. 5, we noted that the auditor issued a disclaimer of opinion on pages 5 and 6 of the audited financial statements for the 2015 Report, pages 6, 7, 8 for the 2016 and 2017 Reports. What measures has the Council undertaken to address all these issues and what internal controls are in place to prevent their recurrence?

In response, the draft financial statements for the years 2020 to 2022 were prepared by PKF Aliz Pacific. Currently, the Council is carrying out due diligence checks before it is provided to the Auditor-General for audit. We have put in place measures like monthly and timely reconciliations, monitoring to see that processes are followed, we are working closely with the Ministry of Local Government, and proper safekeeping of documents for the current financial year, to ensure that we are able to get an unqualified audit opinion for the Council, going forward. So, we have taken on board the recommendations of the Office of the Auditor-General, line by line, and we have put in a gameplan to ensure that we overcome those issues and not be affected by it.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, this was the most serious part of the Report for the review year for the three years - the health state of your financials. We have taken note of your determination – the measures that you wish to do to improve the situation.

I have two questions. My first question is, the measures that you have undertaken, is it really working? Is it reflected in your 2020-2022 financials? The second question is for those who were implicated or perhaps, alleged to have misappropriated, or did something that was not right during the period, were they taken to task and referred to the appropriate authority as a result of that?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- I joined office in 2020 on the 4th day of the first lockdown. When I joined, the current financial statements on the table was for 2014. So, from 2020 to now, we have prepared almost nine financial statements and progressively, we have had them printed by the Office of the Auditor-General based on their availability and submitted them to Parliament.

Through those Reports, there were no major issues that were raised that would warrant a fully-fledged investigation and specific to the different projects that were audited. But, yes, we have a policy in place that if the audit highlights any issue that would warrant a fully-fledged investigation, the Council will have no hesitation but to forward that to the relevant authorities to pursue further.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, Madam PS, as we had asked with the other previous Councils, we would be really happy if you could inform or advise that there were cases that were referred in relation to Lautoka City Council.

MS. S. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, through you, with Lautoka City Council, I think we will have to check back on it, if there was any charges laid for any significant breaches. There was, as we had informed, for Nasinu, there was action taken for Nadi, but Lautoka is currently out of my mind right now. There were charges, but we can definitely come back to the Committee with the details,

However, moving forward, in terms of the Ministry's role as a monitoring agency, we are taking that very seriously. As we have mentioned, we have a Compliance Team within the Ministry, not just compliance with the Local Government Act, but compliance with audit implementation. We are actually coming down very hard on all the Councils now for the past six or eight months, and now since we have a Compliance Team in place, we are making sure we are going down to the Councils to the levels saying, "These were your implementation issues". A number of them have been recurring issues and they were minor procedural things that could have been done to correct them. So, we are going back to the Councils saying, "These were recurring issues, some have been reoccurring for over a decade, what have you done to correct it? When should it stop reflecting in your financials?"

This is actually a requirement that we need to report back by January to the Public Accounts Committee and these are things that will be ongoing, not something that we do it just for this implementation and forget about it. It is an ongoing audit and compliance checks on Councils.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, CEO. I believe a lot of us were discussing your financials and it is good to hear it from the relevant authority, especially from the Ministry who are here with us. We have been asking them for the last three days, this is the fourth day we are here, on the same subject area. Since you are a new team, we believe that there is a lot of learning and a lot of responsibility ahead of us. The Ministry is the monitoring arm of the Government and if you need help, they are always there, the door is always open to liaise and address issues beforehand. So, hearing what is happening this morning, we believe that we are all on the same page, moving forward, to take the Council to the next level. This is just a comment, so you may carry on, Sir.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- On Question No. 6 in terms of public health and safety compliance, under stray dog trapping, I think there was a note that the Council spent some money on the type of baits. The clarification is that the baits are meat offcuts from butcher shops, like fish and some cheaper meat offcuts, which ranges from \$3 to \$5 per kilogramme. So, when we do a dog trapping exercise, we make sure that we have the proper bait to get the dogs in. Once the dogs are trapped, we hand over to the Ministry of Agriculture for further interventions, like neutering or euthanising, as per their assessment.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- A supplementary question, is this – the stray dogs, a real issue with Lautoka?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Yes, it is an ongoing issue. This year, we have partnered with the Ministry of Agriculture, Animals Fiji, The Greater Good Foundation and Pacific Animal Shelter & Hospital (PASH) - the NGOs of animal activists and organisations, who have run a pilot project at Tavakubu Ward with the assistance of US Corp Veterinarians who happened to be in the country on one of their trips. So, it was arranged by them. The Ministry of Agriculture has some limitations - they do not have enough veterinarians in the Western Division.

Through their assistance, what they did was, we first had an awareness programme with the pet owners, we encouraged them to get their pet licence and those who opted to have their pet have a chip embedded in the collar. So, it was the NGO funding from the US, and they only charged \$1 per licence, so it was very cheap. You get your pet chipped so that it can be easily identified within the compound outside.

The second is, the pet owners were encouraged to get their pets desexed or neutered, and then they did a trapping exercise. So, all the stray dogs were trapped, neutered and then released back to the environment. So, this was done over two months. Currently, they are doing a feedback exercise.

They go back and see whether they have multiplied or whether it is reducing the numbers. So, if this campaign seems to be positive and working in the Tavakubu Ward, then we will extend it to the other parts of the City as well.

Animal activists from Animals Fiji and the US Corps have told us that this has been successful in certain countries - England, Turkey, et cetera, so Tavakubu is their pilot project. If it works well, they will try to look at more resources, more medicine and more Vets and grow it out city-wide and then country wide.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Sir.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- On Question No. 7, the 2025-2027 Annual Reports regarding the plans for frequent flooding in certain areas of the city, as I had earlier informed, all debris that used to enter underground and blocked the drainage system, made it difficult for the Council to clear and also reduced the discharge capacity of the drains, causing overflow onto the streets. So, installing grating traps to trap debris before it gets to the underground drains and a lot of buildings have already been built so there is no space for extension.

Consideration was given to somehow retain the stormwater through creation of a retention pond at Coronation Park and at Fenner Park upstream. The area was backfilled to create a ponding area and installed gratings in the drain to trap debris before the drain connects to the underground drainage system. Thereafter, water is retained at the Coronation Park. Due to debris clogged in the gratings, water overflows onto the street and outfalls into the drain again on the other side, before entering or going back underground.

We have also installed an automatic pump at the Marine Drive Foreshore which reduces the impact of backflow of seawater into the street gullies during times of king tides and simultaneous heavy rainfall. The pump automatically runs, draining stormwater into the ocean, maintaining water in the well to an acceptable level, hence avoiding flooding along the Foreshore seawall and streets. This is a level control pump which we installed at Marine Drive because of the very frequent king tides which forces seawater back into the streets and gullies. Sometimes, it is dry and the corner of Shirley Park just floods, so we installed these two pumps to ensure that that does not happen.

On Question No. 8, Mr. Chairman, on the years in question, the Council did not have a Risk Management Policy, but the Council is developing one. It is in a template shared by the Ministry of Local Government, and we intend to have it by the end of January.

The Asset Capitalisation Policy is included as part of the Finance Policy Manual. That was also implemented by the Ministry of Local Government in 2021.

The Council does not have a fully-fledged Business Continuity Plan, but we have is a Natural Disaster Management Plan SOP, and the Council wants to develop one and have it implemented by the end of January 2025.

On Question No. 9, for improvements on drainage cleaning and its functionality, the monitoring of contractors through checklist of works carried out and signed off for satisfactory completion between the Council supervisor and contractor representative. Enforcement of contractual issues for unsatisfactory works where appropriate to be undertaken by the Council, and surcharge contractors through payment deductions to cover cost for works done by the Council.

Furthermore, the Council engages casual workers prior to rainy seasons for vegetation management and drain cleaning purposes. This is to ensure removal of overgrowth from within the drains and accumulated silts and debris for effective function of the drain, including cleaning of culvert mouth and underground drains. This work also includes cleaning of siltation of roadside gully pits for effective drainage, preventing street flooding and overflows into properties.

Challenges are aging infrastructure with inadequate capacity, hence, unable to cater for the increased rainfall intensity, and the coupling factor is the unethical behaviour from people throwing rubbish and debris into the drainage system during heavy rainfall at times, blocking the normal drain, including underground drain, limiting its function on full capacity.

What we have recently implemented is, before every rainy season, we spend some resources on hiring casual labour to fast-track some of the work that the contractors have left to prepare for the rainy season. Once we have a good preparation, then we expect that during the rainy season, we do not have these issues.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Just on the issue that was discussed in terms of rain, here in Suva it always rains every now and then. I am not sure whether you have the same rain that we have here but look at how you have progressed in addressing the issues while, at the same time, looking at the future and getting things done on time. We are really happy for you; may be other Municipalities are able to look at how you do things in terms of preparedness and readiness because these are unforeseen. So, when disasters do happen and if you have a Disaster Risk Management Plan, you are ready at the same time, otherwise we are just doing things haywire, as we move along.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- On Question No. 10, there are plans for the upgrading of the festival ground for improved drainage, accessibility, lighting and CCTV whereby planning and design is acceptable through planning consultant.

The children's park also requires upgrading whereby the Council will seek assistance from relevant business houses in charge of the facility for upgrading and improvement.

The Council, in collaboration with interested organisations and clubs, is willing to upgrade parks of their choices for greater benefit to the communities and citizens within their locality.

With its planning and facilitation, the Council is also emphasising community engagement to meet the growing demand for recreational facilities in the Municipality.

The recent concept is, we ask business houses to sponsor a park and then they fund for its upgrading. So, the first example is the Punjas Children's Park which is beside the hospital. Punjas business takes care of all the facilities and maintenance of that, and the Council carries that out on behalf of Punjas. So, we have now listed a number of open spaces and public parks, and we will be inviting expression of interest for interested corporate organisations to sponsor us, so it will leave the Council's putting money into this.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Through you, Mr. Chairman, this is just a statement or perhaps, a suggestion to the CEO and his team in the West. The point is really on the type of recreational parks that we now build, which must be more inclusive, that is able to cater the young and the old, and that will keep them occupied, bring families in and help the young people to come and use, instead of resorting or using their time for something else. I am just wondering, with the growth of population in Lautoka, whether your plans are aligned to meeting some of these demands?

It is my further suggestion, CEO, because I have served in China and I know that the Chinese do very good parks, more complete, where there is an opportunity in future re-engagement with your headquarters to have a sister city arrangement with some of these provinces in China. I think it is one way forward, given the ability of our resourcing these parks during the high demand at this time.

I think whether it is Lautoka or Suva, they have sister city arrangements. You could invite them to come and have a look and ask the Chinese Embassy here to come and help in developing a model park, either one, two or three. They are good in doing that. This is just an additional comment that I wish to offer this morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Lautoka City Council has one sister city MOU sitting with us. Due to COVID-19, we have not been able to materialise any benefits yet. A delegation from Guangdong City visited Lautoka. It was a familiarisation trip; they have not come back on how they could assist but that does not stop us from exploring possibilities within the corporate sector and other NGOs in assisting us in developing parks. So, if the sister city does happen to assist, we will welcome that, but we will go ahead with the expression of interest with the business community and corporate organisations to assist the Council in developing these parks.

On Question No. 11 in terms of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), almost all the SDGs are crosscutting and relevant to the Council. The significant ones are elaborated and listed as follows:

- Goal 3 - Good Health and Well Being:
The Council works with various stakeholders, like Water Authority of Fiji (WAF), Ministry of Health and Medical Services and citizens, as well as businesses, and works with its annual work plan to ensure health and wellbeing of citizens is enhanced.
- Goal 6 - Clean Water and Sanitation:
The Council liaises and works with WAF in the above matter. We conduct our regular monitoring in terms of sanitation standards within the city for the benefit of citizens. Cleansing services are also provided to ensure there is good sanitation.
- Goal 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy:
The Council is adopting the principle of clean energy in its operations and projects to mitigate the impacts of climate change, as well as reduce costs.
- Goal 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth:
All staff are accorded decent work and rights at the workplace.
- Goal 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities:
The Council, through its environmental health, planning and development control, as well as waste management initiatives, endeavour to achieve a sustainable Lautoka City.
- Goal 13 - Climate Action:
The Council is working with stakeholders to mobilize climate action, like tree planting, sound waste management, investing in clean energy where possible, enforcing open fire bylaws, et cetera.
- Goal 14 and Goal 15 - Life Below Water and Above Land:
The Council cleansing services help keep the environment clean to support life.

- Goal 17 – Partnerships for Goals

- ❖ The Council continuously endeavours to engage with stakeholders like JICA, Department of Energy, WAF and NGOs like Model Towns in Koroipita, Naikabula, to work in partnership, to achieve a common objective of fighting climate change.
- ❖ Construction of market to cater for the increasing number of vendors from rural communities.
- ❖ New construction and upgrading of the Churchill Park turf and synthetic athletics track for improved sporting facility to the Western schools and other sports of rugby and soccer.

On Question No. 12, the 2018 and 2019 Annual Reports will be submitted by the end of November 2024. The 2020, 2021 and 2022 Annual Reports will await the completion of the audit before it can be submitted and we are talking with the OAG to see how we can fast-track that. The 2023 and 2024 Financial Statements will be prepared in-house and will be submitted to the OAG after the completion of the audit of the 2022 Financial Statement.

For the schedule of audit for 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, the dates have been given, and they will commence from 16th December, 2024; 21st March, 2025; 8th May, 2025; and 12th June, 2025 respectively.

They have also stated that the Financial Statements be submitted as per the dates provided. Although we are ready, however, our financials will be submitted to OAG based on their workload. We have also discussed with them the option of outsourcing. The Council can pay if OAG decides to outsource, so as to fast-track.

HON. J.N. NAND.- Mr. Chairman, my question is in regards to the termite programme. I believe there was a budget given by the Ministry. Do you have any figures on how many households have been assisted? I was in Drasa three weeks ago, it has reached as far as Drasa and I fear it is making its way towards Ba. Is there any way you can increase your engagement in that?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- First, the Termite Control Programme is run by Biosecurity of Fiji (BAF) and the Council is only assisting in the processing of the applications. We receive applications and we process them in the District Office. We have two staff dedicated to that. How far have they processed and who has benefitted? The details can be sought from the BAF Office.

I am also aware that a contract has been awarded to a private contractor for baiting and through *Facebook* posts, the first few houses have been successful, but it is a matter of time before the bait kills the colonies that we see the effect.

As far as the increasing footprint of the termite problem, I myself reside in Drasa, my house has been affected. I have got three baits in my house that I pay myself, but as far as I know, I think it has gone beyond and include other areas as well.

Nadi is also having some problems with the termite. There are reports coming in, but there is one stigma - the people are not reporting it. They fear that their property value will go down if the people know, so this is one major hurdle and the reason why people are not reporting.

We have talked to BAF and the Taskforce that are working on this baiting programme that they create awareness. People should not be afraid that the property value of their house will go down. In fact, you can capitalize on that. If you have a good baiting programme and if BAF certifies that your house is eradicated from termite, your property value might go up.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Mr. Chairman, I will ask a question in relation to finances. Can the CEO very briefly inform the Committee on the health status of your finance at the Lautoka City Council at this point in time, and what is the future outlook like?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- The financial statements?

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Yes, the health state of your Financial Statements.

MR. M.A. KHAN.- I can say that the Council's financial status is healthy. We have some term deposits at our bank which are there which is not only as interest revenue to the Council but in terms of aging infrastructure. We have a lot of aging infrastructure.

Some of our major properties do not have cyclone insurance because they were built a long time ago and they do not comply. In order for us to go ahead we have identified some retrofitting that we could do to make sure that certification is there but until such time, we have some money sitting in the bank. In case there is a major roof blown off from the market or from Churchill Park, we have some funds to cater for that.

So, our current revenue streams and our expenditure, we are monitoring it on a monthly basis, to ensure that we have these funds, sitting as term deposits, are kept safe and we continue spending on our operational expenses from the revenue that we generate. We are also able to save enough to have some capital works done.

HON. I. NAIVALURUA.- Do you have specific contingency funding put aside?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- Yes, term deposits are like contingencies. We do not touch it unless the Board approves first in certain circumstances.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you, Mr. CEO. As part of your financial issues, I believe you have got investment portfolios, apart from your fixed deposit, et cetera. Is there any for the Municipality?

MR. M.A. KHAN.- No, we do not have any specific investments yet, but what we are currently exploring is public private partnership on the allotment of some Council properties which have been lying idle for some time. So, there is currently \$1 million, we are cashing with a local investor for composite accommodation and commercial complex, so it will have shops at the bottom and accommodation - either a hotel or some sort of dormitory, on top.

We have also just recently completed having a Council's own subdivision of five commercial lots which is on the foreshore, but we want to finalise the foreshore's reclamation and foreshore project so that this development supplements whatever we want to construct on the foreshore. So, we have options available. Currently, if we do not want to commit the Council's resources, then we have the option of going public private partnership.

Also, if we want it for the future Council's own development, then we are looking at a commercial edge in every development we do so that the revenue generated through the development pays off itself, instead of using the ratepayers' money.

MR. CHAIRMAN.- Thank you very much for that. I believe the Ministry is here. We were talking about financial literacy. We are looking at some to be given to the Municipality whereby we have standard financing apps or whatever that is relevant to the authority so that when we talked

about finance, everything is aligned in respect to what the Ministry and the Government requires on how to operate your Council. Please, give us a brief before we sum up.

MS. S. SHARMA.- Mr. Chairman, as we had informed in the last two meetings that we are actually working with the Suva City Council and I think Nasinu Town Council with regards to engaging a consultant who would do an assessment of the capabilities and the capacity of all the Councils and their needs in terms of across Council standardised financial software. So, Lautoka City Council is taking the lead in it in terms of finalizing the contract and I think the contract is near final, and we should be engaging this consultant who would do an assessment and then recommend to the Ministry what could be the best software. Then based on the needs, the licensing will be determined. Some small Councils may need lesser licenses, but the cost of the software would have to be borne by the Councils because it is their service.

We would look at essential access to it also, so we need to get our monthly or quarterly information with regards to how the rate collections are improving, just looking at certain financials. We would have certain limited access to the system. We do not want to have that kind of thing where the Councils think that we are interfering with the system, but only a view on the access where we can obtain data and have real time data as to how the Councils are, first of all, performing in their revenue collections and how their financial status is being maintained.

As you have mentioned, finances has an impact across everything. If the finances are not in order, then you have the governance issue. The Ministry is actually working closely with the Ministry of Public Enterprises, and they have actually referred us to a very experienced person who could come in and provide certain governance training, basically a whole day training for the CEOs, their Finance Teams and the Special Administrators.

The Councils run as entities on their own, they are obviously limited, we do not have everyday control because it is not a department of the Ministry but are legal entities on their own, so it is important for everyone to realise what their responsibilities are - transparency and accountability, and responsibility when you make a decision. That, obviously, in the end has an impact when audit is done, whether it is a performance audit or whether it is a financial audit.

We are actually working on a number of these things. We are also working on a review of the Financial Manuals, Human Resource Manuals and a number of policies that have already been provided to the Councils.

In preparation for elected councils to come in, at the moment, we have a Code of Conduct and detailed guidelines for Special Administrators, we are reviewing it and improving those with the support of the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. So, these are things that set the foundation of governance, accountability and transparency, not just at the operational level, but also at the policy level which is your Council CEO or your Special Administrators.

The Ministry monitoring is critical for us because if we do not monitor, we are actually failing in our responsibilities. So, monitoring has become a cornerstone of how the Ministry moves forward - monitoring, doing spot checks and audit of accounts. When the audit is undertaken by the Office of the Auditor-General, issues are not recurring and when Councils are saying in their audit updates, "This is the policy and the procedures we have put in place", they are actually following it, it is not just on paper. We will be moving in and then giving timelines to Councils to say, "Implement it and make sure when the next audit happens, these things are cleared".

MR. CHAIRMAN.- At this juncture, I wish to sincerely thank you all for availing yourselves to this meeting. We thank you for your time and hope that you will avail yourselves for any further queries or clarification that the Committee may have on these annual reports.

With those concluding remarks, I now close this meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 12.05 p.m.