



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration

Held on Wednesday, May 16, 2018

[10:48 a.m. to 12:34 p.m.]

Follow up inquiry on the 2nd Report on the inquiry into the effectiveness of the state's interventions directed at socially displaced persons in Trinidad and Tobago.

Venue: The J. Hamilton Maurice Room, Mezzanine Floor, Office of the Parliament, Tower D, the Port-of-Spain International Waterfront Centre, 1A Wrightson Road, Port of Spain.

Committee Members

The following committee members were present:

1. Dr. Dhanayshar Mahabir – Chairman
2. Brig. Gen. (Ret.) Ancil Antoine, MP
3. Mrs. Christine Newallo-Hosein, MP
4. Ms. Khadijah Ameen
5. Mr. Taurel Shrikissoon - Guest

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials were present:

Ministry of Social Development and Family Services

1. Mrs. Jacinta Bailey-Sobers - Permanent Secretary

2. Ms. Natasha Barrow - Permanent Secretary (Ag.)
3. Mr. Vijay Gangerpersad - Chief Technical Officer
4. Mrs. Loraine Reyes-Borel - Director, Social Displacement Unit
5. Ms. Patricia De Leon Henry - Director, National Social Development Programme

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the key subject areas/issues discussed during the hearing:

Issues discussed with the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services (MSDFS)

- i. The continued collaborative work of the Ministry to provide an appropriate and effective national strategy to holistically treat with the socially displaced and eradicate street dwelling;
- ii. The collaborative and integrated approach by stakeholders to address the issues as it relates to the socially displaced;
- iii. The infrastructural and resource challenges faced while addressing the issues related to the socially displaced and street dwelling;
- iv. Approval of a four (4) level Continuum Care Programme which will facilitate the removal of street dwellers and in particular their treatment, assessment, rehabilitation and transition into society;
- v. The Continuum Care Programme is focused on research, engagement, temporary, primary and advanced care as well as monitoring and evaluation;
- vi. The status of the review of the Draft Standards of Care and Revised Draft Policy document regarding the Socially Displaced Persons Act, 2000.
- vii. These documents are being reviewed in the context of the Street Dwellers Working Committee Report and are scheduled to be sent for the consideration of the Ministry of the Attorney General and Legal Affairs by June 2018;
- viii. The efforts made by the Ministry to establish personal baseline data on the socially displaced as recommended in the 2nd Report of the JSC-SSPA;
- ix. The development of a multi-year research agenda in relation to data collection on socially displaced persons;

- x. The conduct of a National Street Count in November 2017 and an interim count in April 2018;
- xi. Statistics with respect to the National Street Count conducted in November 2017 whereby the Ministry calculated a national total of 414 socially displaced persons: 27 in Arima, 60 in San Fernando, 177 in Port of Spain;
- xii. 22 out of the national number of socially displaced persons are women;
- xiii. That the Survey conducted in April 2018 targeted the CSDP¹, the Socially Displaced Centre located on Picadilly Street, POS and New Horizons Centre.
- xiv. The purpose of the survey conducted in April 2018 was the categorisation of the socially displaced person in care. The socially displaced were categorised as the elderly, mentally ill, substance abusers, and strictly homeless;
- xv. The commencement of a client demographic baseline data assessment by June 2018. The assessment will allow the Ministry to obtain a detailed outline of the socially displaced population inclusive of the causes for their displacement and their needs;
- xvi. The establishment of a Street Dwellers Coordinating and Monitoring Committee that would be tasked with overseeing the implementation of the recommendations made in the Street Dwellers Working Committee Report;
- xvii. The establishment of the Coordinating and Monitoring Committee was noted as a key factor in the effort to address issues regarding the Socially displaced;
- xviii. The Ministry's commitment to ensuring the implementation of the recommendations of the JSC-SSPA and Street Dwellers Working Committee Report;
- xix. Significant strides in the Ministry's collaboration with the MoH² as it relates to the Socially displaced;
- xx. Site visits to the various Centres housing socially displaced persons are scheduled to be undertaken by the Ministry in May 2018;

¹ Centre for Socially Displaced Person (CSDP)

² Ministry of Health (MoH)

- xxi. The establishment of a Street Dwellers Assessment Centre as recommended by the Street Dwellers Working Committee;
- xxii. The challenges faced by the Ministry in acquiring suitable locations for the Assessment Centre with respect to geographical location and ease of access for clients. The Ministry was able to identify two (2) suitable locations as a short-term remedy within the Port-of-Spain and South regions. The Property and Real Estate Division of the MPAC³ has been engaged to secure the property and the design plan is scheduled to go before Cabinet by May 2018;
- xxiii. Continued dialogue between the Ministry and the San Fernando City Cooperation in relation to the expansion of the existing facilities at Court Shamrock which currently accommodates 26 persons;
- xxiv. Necessary electrical upgrades and pump installation at CSDP to be completed at the end of May, 2018, in accordance with OSH⁴ requirements. Renovations at the Centre of Hope and New Horizons Centre, also in accordance with OSH requirements and public health compliance, are expected to commence in fiscal year 2018;
- xxv. A street count of socially displaced persons to commence during the fiscal year 2018;
- xxvi. The need to proclaim the Socially Displaced Persons Act. Due to challenges encountered by the Ministry with regard to staffing deficiencies and allocation of funds, the Act has not yet been proclaimed;
- xxvii. The review of the Act by the Street Dwellers Committee and recommendations for amendments. The primary amendment being the elimination of the Ministry's role with regard to the removal of street dwellers so that it will remain under the remit of the MoH;
- xxviii. The Socially Displaced Persons Act treats with staffing of the SDU⁵ and a Street Dwellers Board. However, the Board was not established and the Street Dwellers Coordinating and Monitoring Committee would be replacing the Board;

³ Ministry of Public Administration and Communication (MPAC)

⁴ Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

⁵ Socially Displacement Unit (SDU)

- xxix. The Ministry to meet with MoH and other relevant stakeholders with regard to the recommendations for amendments to the Act;
- xxx. The SDU that was established since 1999, as the centralized Unit tasked with the responsibility to co-ordinate the response to the issue of the socially displaced;
- xxxi. As part of its day-to-day operations, the SDU collaborates with service providers to treat with the socially displaced;
- xxxii. The IAU⁶ was formed to undertake the Street Dweller Initiative. However the Unit was discontinued;
- xxxiii. The Street Dwellers Coordinating and Monitoring Committee as an overarching Committee that will comprise of officials from the private sector, NGOs and Ministries;
- xxxiv. Persons are able to voluntarily admit themselves to the CSDP for assessment;
- xxxv. The CSDP in Port of Spain and San Fernando are the main facilities that accommodate walk-ins. The total number of walk-ins from March 2017 to March 2018 are as follows:
- CSDP (PoS)- 29 person;
 - CSDP (San Fernando)- 39 persons
 - New Horizon- 5 persons; and
 - Piparo Empowerment Centre– 5 persons
- xxxvi. Furthermore, the number of persons who received intervention at the various socially displaced centres to date are as follows:
- CSDP (PoS)- 115 person;
 - CSDP (San Fernando)- 27 persons;
 - New Horizon- 21 persons;
 - Elderly Facility (Arima) – 17 persons; and
 - Piparo Empowerment Centre– 17 persons

⁶ Inter-Agency Unit

- xxxvii. With regard to the Committee recommendation that rehabilitated persons be employed as life coaches, to date there is one rehabilitated person employed as a life coach at the Piparo Empowerment Centre;
- xxxviii. The need for Social Workers to be employed within the SDU. Currently one (1) social worker is employed under the SDU. However, the Ministry is scheduled to conduct interviews within the next two months;
- xxxix. CSDP review of the socially displaced conducted in February-March 2018. Most cases regarding the socially displaced are referred to CSDP;
- xl. The need for the Ministry to engage the private sector with regard to the employment of persons who were socially displaced and seek to reenter society;
- xli. The Ministry is currently engaging in the recruitment of contract staff to fill the current vacant positions in various Units including the SDU. This is to be completed by June 2018;
- xlii. The process involved in acquiring lands located at the corner of South Quay and Piccadilly Street for the establishment of an Assessment Centre and Transitional Housing. Other locations are being considered;
- xliii. A Cabinet Note on the acquiring the land for the establishment of an Assessment Centre and Transitional Housing has been drafted and is scheduled to be sent before Cabinet by the end of May 2018;
- xliv. The Ministry visited and made preliminary assessments of the Spree Simon Building located at Picton Road, Port of Spain and the former Site of the Besson Street Police Station in April 2018. However the Ministry determined that the latter location is more suitable for acquisition;
- xlv. The noted decrease in the number of socially displaced persons between the year 2016-2017;
- xlvi. The various challenges associated with conducting Street Counts;
- xlvii. At least 20% of socially displaced persons in the Port of Spain and San Fernando area are engaged annually by the Ministry for assessment and rehabilitation;
- xlviii. Lack of resources available to effectively and efficiently remove and assess street dwellers;

- xlix. MoH encountering human resource constraints as it relates to Mental Health Officers who are tasked with the responsibility of the removal of street dwellers;
 - l. The SDU is tasked with the responsibilities of both policy development and implementation;
 - li. The Ministry is guided by the Mental Health Act Chap. 28:02 in lieu of proclamation of the Socially Displaced Persons Act, in relation to socially displaced persons who are mentally-ill;
 - lii. The Ministry works collaboratively with other stakeholders such as the MoH and NGOs in the absence of adequate staff to carry out its mandate as it relates to the socially displaced;
 - liii. A total of 4 persons currently employed within the SDU;
 - liv. The one (1) Field Officer within the SDU is tasked with the responsibility of engaging street dwellers nationwide. The Senior Social Worker (Head of the Unit) will make visits in the absence of the Field Officer;
 - lv. The process adhered to by the Unit when reports/referrals are received from the public in relation to the engagement of socially displaced persons;
 - lvi. International best practice dictates that Street Counts of socially displaced persons should be conducted during the hours of 10:00 p.m. to 5:00 a.m.;
 - lvii. The NGOs that work in conjunction with the Ministry;
 - lviii. The establishment and terms of reference of the Street Dwellers Coordinating and Monitoring Committee;
 - lix. That the NGO Unit within the Ministry is responsible for monitoring the expenditure of NGOs in receipt of government subvention on a monthly and quarterly basis;
 - lx. Quarterly investigations are conducted by the Audit Unit of the Ministry into the NGOs in receipt of government subvention;
 - lxi. The proposed establishment of an M&E Division within Ministry. Currently the Division has a Director but is in need of additional staff. The M&E Division is currently conducting an evaluation of CSDP;
 - lxii. Referrals to the SDU are sent directly to New Horizons Centre and Hernandez Place;

- lxiii. Intervention is provided to socially displaced women. Currently there is not a high population of socially displaced women at Centres;
- lxiv. The New Horizons Centre provides accommodation for socially displaced women which is separated from the male population. Specific care for these women is provided by female staff members of the Centre;
- lxv. Other jurisdictional challenges and the interim response to matters surrounding the socially displaced;
- lxvi. Currently, there are 60 beds available at the various intervention centres to accommodate 415 socially displaced persons; and
- lxvii. One of the main initiatives under the Ministry's PSIP (2017-2018) budget allocation is the establishment of a shelter.

Recommendations proffered during the Public Hearing

The following recommendations emanated from the discussions:

- i. The creation and implementation of an updated timetable by the Ministry, to address issues arising with respect to the socially displaced. Furthermore, that the Ministry recommend in this document timelines for other stakeholders with respect to their roles and responsibilities in the socially displaced response;
- ii. That the Ministry review their mandate and responsibilities in addressing the issue of the socially displaced;
- iii. That international standards and best practice be considered by the Ministry toward the development of its engagement of socially displaced persons for assessment and rehabilitation;
- iv. That the Ministry seek to adequately resource the SDU as a matter of urgency to improve the Unit's co-ordinating capacity and ensure that site visits can be readily conducted;
- v. That the Ministry endeavour to increase the number of beds available at the various intervention centres to accommodate socially displaced persons on at least a nightly basis;
- vi. That the Ministry engage private audit firms toward gaining audit services at a discounted price, as it results in ensuring that NGOs effectively and efficiently account for their expenditure; and

- vii. That the private sector be engaged by the Ministry regarding the employment of persons who have been rehabilitated. Furthermore, that the life coach position is regularized to be filled by rehabilitated persons.

View the Hearing

The hearing can be viewed on our YouTube channel via the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0mxHJ-lmCw>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

May 23, 2018