

Ministerial Response to the Third Report of the Joint Select Committee on Social Services and Public Administration on an inquiry into the impact of Work-from-Home and Alternative Work Arrangements, Policies and Initiatives on Public Sector Productivity and Service Delivery

OBJECTIVE 1: To examine the types of Work-from-Home and Hybrid policies and arrangements utilised in the public service in Trinidad and Tobago during the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions.

Recommendation B

The Ministry of Planning and Development, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Public Administration and Ministry of Digital Transformation should develop Business Continuity Plan for the Public Service that includes formal policies for Work from Home and Alternative Work arrangements to be used during emergencies, natural disasters, pandemics and other extraordinary circumstances which may restrict employees being physically present in office.

Response

A sub-committee of the Board of Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Departments was established to develop a remote work initiative to improve the performance of public services delivery. The sub-committee comprises:

- The Ministry of Planning and Development (MPD)
- The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM)
- The Ministry of Public Administration (MPA)
- The Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT) (now separate from the Ministry of Public Administration)
- Ministry of Labour (MOL)
- The Ministry of Energy and Energy Industries (MEEI)
- The Personnel Department (PD)

A Terms of Reference (TOR) has been developed to engage a Consultancy to develop a policy and implementation strategy leading to the eventual implementation of remote working arrangements within the Trinidad and Tobago Civil Service. The MPA will pursue the procurement and management of the consultancy. Resources for same have been provided within MPA's capital budget, i.e. Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP).

Recommendation C

The Ministry of Planning and Development should provide a breakdown of expenditure from the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) toward digital transformation for fiscal years 2019/2020, 2020/2021 and 2021/2022.

Response

A list of allocations and expenditure for various digitisation/ICT projects during the periods Fiscal 2020, 2021 and 2022 under the PSIP is attached at **Appendix I**.

OBJECTIVE 3: To evaluate the efficiency of service delivery and infrastructural provisions in key ministries that utilise Work-from-Home and hybrid arrangements.

Recommendation A

The Ministry of Planning and Development in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Administration and the Ministry of Labour should develop standardised benchmarks to measure Service Delivery in the Public Sector.

Response

In principle, benchmarks for Service Delivery are an appropriate tool for establishing standards for the delivery of government services against which performance can be measured. Due to the diversity of services the Government currently offers, the execution of a successful benchmarking exercise would require, at a minimum, that all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) maintain the following:

- Established performance metrics or indicators for service delivery;
- Appropriate and consistent data collection;
- Participation in collaborative decision-making processes; and
- Coordination amongst MDAs offering similar services.

However, it should be noted that several challenges currently persist in pursuing the identification of baselines or benchmarks across the public sector, namely:

- Lack of robust performance management practices;
- Limited use of performance metrics or indicators;
- Inappropriate and inconsistent data collection and reporting;
- Infrequent participation in collaborative decision-making processes; and
- Weak coordination amongst MDAs in service delivery.

Therefore, while a benchmarking exercise may help to establish performance standards for service delivery, a broader performance management agenda needs to be pursued towards managing for results in the public sector. Beyond collecting benchmark data, Government must be empowered with the means to effectively set performance targets, and monitor and measure progress. This requires the development of a government performance management system, which should be undertaken over a medium-term.

Furthermore, leveraging this system to provide useful information on how service delivery is impacted by work from home employees will require the integration of said system with current human resource management (HRM) systems across the public sector, and the improvement of

these HRM systems to include the collection of employee performance data. In essence, without the establishment of continuous improvement mechanisms that enable regular reviews of operational effectiveness, benchmarking tools will not produce their intended effect.

In this regard, the following options and recommendations for pursuing WFH arrangements in the short to medium term are proposed:

- **Option A: Pilot Performance Management System with Service Delivery Benchmarking**
Develop a pilot project to develop and test a government performance management system in one (1) Ministry. This pilot should seek to establish performance management mechanisms, including routines for regular reviews of organizational performance. While different dimensions of organizational performance should be considered, a benchmarking approach for service delivery should be made a priority. This project should establish the test case for this approach and enable an assessment of its feasibility for the public sector at large.
- **Option B: WFH Service Delivery Self-Assessment**
Establish a framework to enable managers across the public sector to determine whether WFH arrangements are appropriate for their units. This framework should outline criteria for assessment and enable managers to self-test whether or not services can be delivered and provide guidance on which WFH arrangements may be most appropriate for efficient service delivery in their area. Approvals could be subject to a central authority or controlled at the level of the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry.
- **Option C: WFH as an Employee Benefit**
Establish a framework for staff to opt-in to WFH benefits. This framework should be grounded by established criteria, based on employees' job classifications, access to appropriate tools at home, and past-performance.

In conclusion, based on the aforementioned comments and recommendations, it is suggested that the MPD engage in further discussions with the MPA and the MOL to develop a more suitable approach and methodology that would more effectively address the issues of measuring service delivery in the public sector.

OBJECTIVE 4: To examine the feasibility of implementing Work from Home arrangements in the Public Sector as a (hybrid) working option

Recommendation A

The Ministry of Planning and Development should provide the Committee with a progress report on its National Work from Home Policy.

Response

The MPD prepared all the documentation required for the procurement of a consultant to develop the National Work from Home Policy. A draft Terms of Reference (TOR) was prepared and circulated for comments from various Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Comments were received from the MDAs and the TOR was subsequently amended. Tender documents, inclusive of a Request for Proposal (RFP) were prepared and submitted to the Central Tenders Board for review.

The project – *Development of a Work from Home Policy for the Public Service* has been transferred to the MPA who received a PSIP allocation for fiscal 2023 of One Million Dollars (\$1,000,000). The MPD has submitted all the relevant documentation to the MPA who will continue the implementation of this project.

Recommendation B

The Ministry of Planning and Development is welcome to review the findings of the JSC Social Services and Public Administration’s survey on the Public Sector Experience to supplement its research. The complete report can be found at Appendix II.

Response

The MPD wishes to thank the JSC Social Services and Public Administration for the invitation and accepts the offer to review the findings of the survey on the Public Sector Experience.

Recommendation C

The Ministry of Planning and Development should conduct a cost-benefit analysis to determine how a Work from Home Policy could provide cost savings to the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Response

The MPD agrees that a cost-benefit analysis should be done in order to determine the potential impact of a Work from Home Policy for the public sector. It is anticipated that this analysis will form part of the consultancy.

Recommendation D

The Committee endorses the Recommendations of the Ministry of Planning and Development with regard to interim WFH policy guidelines. These recommendations can be found on page 32 of the MPD’s Work from Home Policy Guidelines for the Civil Service of Trinidad and Tobago, which can be found at Appendix III, page 114 of this report.

Response

The MPD appreciates the Committee’s endorsement of the recommendations with regard to WFH policy guidelines.