



Summary of Proceedings

Public Hearing

Held on **Wednesday February 16, 2022** from 10:17 a.m. to 12:21 p.m.

Subject matter: An Inquiry into the Impact of Work-from-Home and Alternative Work Arrangements, Policies and Initiatives on Public Sector Productivity and Service Delivery

Venue: Virtual via the Zoom platform

Committee Members

The following Committee Members were present:

- Mr. Paul Richards
- Mrs. Penelope Beckles, MP
- Mr. Roger Munroe, MP
- Ms. Vandana Mohit, MP
- Mr. Rohan Sinanan
- Mr. Avinash Singh
- Mr. David Nakhid

The following Committee Member was excused:

- Mr. Esmond Forde, MP

Witnesses who appeared

The following officials appeared before the Committee:

Ministry of Public Administration

- Mr. Claudelle McKellar Permanent Secretary Ag.
- Mrs. Sherry Ann Smith-Simmons Human Resource Manager

- Ms. Candice Mohan Public Management Consultant

Ministry of Digital Transformation

- Mr. Richard Madray Permanent Secretary
- Mr. Charles Bobb-Semple Chief Executive Officer, National Information and Communication Technology
- Ms. Denyse White Deputy National Chief Digital Officer
- Ms. Cynthia Reddock-Downes Chief Executive Officer, Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago

Ministry of Planning and Development

- Mrs. Joanne Deoraj Permanent Secretary
- Ms. Meera Ramesar Director Ag, Socio Economic Policy Planning Division

Personnel Department

- Dr. Daryl Dindial Commander (Ret'd) Chief Personnel Officer
- Ms. Sherraine Genas Director, Legal Services

Key Issues Discussed

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Ministry of Public Administration**:

Human Resource Management Software

- i. The current eHRM system used is a PeopleSoft-based system called IRIS.
- ii. This system was implemented in 1999/2000. The system has been primarily used for payroll administration. However, the full functionality of the software has not been utilised.
- iii. The IRIS system was previously assessed by a consultant. The consultant found that there is a need for change management to improve acceptance and optimal utilisation of the system within the public Service.
- iv. There is still a need for broad-based training in the use of the eHRM system.
- v. There is also a need for manual systems to be integrated with electronic systems.
- vi. There is also a need to evaluate whether other software systems are better suited for use in the Public Service.

- vii. There is no specific timeline established for completing an assessment of the eHRM system. However, this assessment is included in the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) for 2022.

Assessment of Work from Home Experience

- viii. Work-from-home has the possibility to contribute to the modernisation of the Public Service.
- ix. The Ministry of Public Administration did not receive any complaints regarding staff using personal phones for work-related/ customer service calls.
- x. Jobs in the manipulative class such as Messenger, Maid and Driver are unable to be done from home.
- xi. Work-from-home is not a right. It is a mechanism to allow the work of the organisation to continue within the context of jobs that are able to be done remotely.
- xii. Work-from-home has the possibility to improve the Ease of Doing Business by improving productivity and efficiency due to factors such as reduced traffic congestion.

Public Service Productivity and Service Delivery

- xiii. Digitisation is not a panacea but can alleviate some of the challenges associated with productivity.
- xiv. The National Productivity Council is engaged in a process to analyse Public Sector Productivity. This Council falls under the Ministry of Labour.
- xv. The TTCSI highlighted that its comprehensive report on the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sectors amongst its membership will be completed by the end of 2021.
- xvi. The view that there is low productivity and poor service delivery in the Public Service has not been substantiated by data.
- xvii. There must be baseline studies to determine the level of productivity and output in the public service. Once baseline figures have been established, then there can be an evaluation of the impact of WFH on Public Service productivity and service delivery.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Ministry of Digital Transformation**:

Mandate of the Ministry

- i. The Ministry of Digital Transformation became a standalone Ministry in July 2021 and has oversight for the National Information and Communication Company Limited (iGovTT) and the Telecommunications Authority of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT)
- ii. The mandate of the Ministry is to transform the way public goods and services are delivered to the public using digital technology.
- iii. The Ministry is at the beginning phase of delivering policies that will underpin the digitisation and digitalisation process of the Public Service.
- iv. TATT and iGovTT both spearheaded initiatives that support WFH in the Public Service.

- v. There is a need to conduct an assessment on the baseline standards for ICT support needed to effectively facilitate WFH in the Public Service.
- vi. The Ministry is working on a document that provides a framework to guide ministries how to support employees engaged in WFH and other remote work arrangements.
- vii. The document will outline minimum standards required for hardware and software applications.
- viii. The document will also cover issues of security and data classification of sensitive versus non-sensitive matters

Security of Information

- ix. Employees are expected to keep information confidential.
- x. Ways to protect confidentiality of documents accessed by employees include signing of Nondisclosure Agreements/Confidentiality Agreements.
- xi. Employees needing to access information remotely should do so via a Virtual Private Network (VPN).
- xii. There are existing ramifications for disclosure of confidential information whether this information is accessed from digital or paper-based sources.
- xiii. If employees are using shared devices, they should set up a unique, password-protected profile that is inaccessible to other members of the household.
- xiv. The Communications Amendment Bill is currently before the Ministry of Digital transformation and will be forwarded to the Office of the Attorney General. This Bill will include provisions for electronic transactions

Access and Accessibility: Supportive Technology

- xv. There is currently a network provided to MDAs called GovNeTT Stabilisation.
- xvi. This network provides seamless access to e-mails and provides a platform for cross-agency collaboration.
- xvii. There is currently a 70% utilisation rate by government ministries of this platform.
- xviii. There is also a Microsoft Enterprise Agreement that gives access to Microsoft Teams, SharePoint, Online calling and Screen Sharing. There have been 7, 200 deployments at 113 out of 159 MDAs.
- xix. The systems currently in place do not cater for monitoring of service delivery and productivity. However, as the government moves towards increasing levels of digitisation and digitalisation, developing this level of functionality is in progress.
- xx. Digitalisation will help to monitor levels of access to public services. However, the process is not yet standardised across government entities. As such, data is collected as Ministries implement digital transformation technologies.
- xxi. Due to the increase in numbers of people working from home during the pandemic, there has been increased demand for internet service.
- xxii. There has been a need for higher standards of service provision with regard to reliability of internet connections to facilitate effective remote work and schooling.

- xxiii. There is no data available on Public Service employees using Access Centres as options for working remotely. However, there are no restrictions on anyone using these centres for this purpose.
- xxiv. TATT currently does not have data to determine the level of performance of TTTWiFi Access services as the project is in the early stages of implementation.
- xxv. Trinidad and Tobago has 100% mobile access. However, the rate of access to fixed line internet is 87% in Trinidad and 80-85% in Tobago.
- xxvi. Rural communities are disproportionately affected by lack of fixed line internet connectivity.
- xxvii. The Universal Service Fund has been used to reduce the cost of service provision to reduce gaps in access to internet service.
- xxviii. TATT provided additional spectrum¹ to mobile service providers to enable them to cope with the uptick in the use of online platforms.
- xxix. The results of the Digital Inclusion Survey will provide information regarding areas needing an improvement in internet service access across Trinidad and Tobago.

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Ministry of Planning and Development**:

Progress on WFH Policy

- i. The Ministry of Planning and Development is spearheading the development of the WFH Policy for the Public Service in the context of national development, as it relates to improving good governance by improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the public service.
- ii. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the sub-Committee of the Board of Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Department examined the impact of traffic congestion on productivity and were in the process of embarking upon a pilot WFH arrangement using select departments.
- iii. A WFH policy will have an impact on terms and conditions of employment.
- iv. The Ministry aims to complete the Terms of Reference and consultations regarding the development of the WFH policy by mid-June 2022.
- v. The Ministry plans to advertise for the consultancy to develop the policy by the end of the current fiscal year (i.e. by the end of September).
- vi. The MPD is working with partners, including the Ministry of Public Administration in the establishment of the Productivity and Work Ethic Unit to address the issue of productivity in the Public Service.

¹ Spectrum refers to the invisible radio frequencies that wireless signals travel over. Those signals are what enable us to make calls from our mobile devices. <https://www.ctia.org/news/what-is-spectrum-a-brief-explainer#:~:text=Spectrum%20refers%20to%20the%20invisible,everything%20on%20our%20mobile%20devices.>

- vii. The technical support committee also includes representatives from the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and members of the Tripartite Advisory Committee.
- viii. A survey of 1,068 Public Sector Employees indicated that 853 of them were able to work from home.
- ix. The Ministry developed a questionnaire on WFH but did not initially include members of the Private Sector. However, there are plans to widen the scope of the research to include the Private Sector given the linkages with the Public Sector.

Progress on Digitisation

- i. Legislative amendments needed to facilitate a WFH policy include liability for health and safety issues, e-transactions, e-signatures, confidentiality issues and remote access to databases.
- ii. Between mid-2020 and February 2022, approximately 5,810 applications to Town and Country Planning have been processed online

The following are the main issues arising from discussions with the **Personnel Department**:

Impact of WFH Policy on Terms and Conditions of Employment

- i. The Personnel Department will be responsible for any adjustment made to terms and conditions of employment related to the implementation of a WFH policy.
- ii. Majority Unions will need to be consulted should any changes need to be made to terms and conditions of employment.
- iii. There are currently 1,621 jobs in the Civil Service under evaluation.
- iv. 35% of these jobs can be done remotely while 36% are considered to be hybrid and can be done partially from home.
- v. Based on ILO guidelines, when employees are working from home, the home space becomes an extension of the work space.
- vi. There is currently no case law in Trinidad and Tobago to govern employer responsibility when employees work from home. However, there is precedent established in other jurisdictions.
- vii. The CPO is currently evaluating Civil Service jobs to determine which jobs can be done remotely.
- viii. The CPO is also examining which jobs have become obsolete, which jobs can be consolidated, and which positions need to be created.
- ix. The CPO anticipates that there will be a need to upgrade the ICT Human Resource capacity of the Public Service as the government moves to wards digitisation.

Productivity Indicators

- x. There is a need to adequately measure productivity in the Public Service.

- xi. The current performance evaluation system measures individual productivity but not organisational productivity.
- xii. Individual evaluations focus on technical competence but not behavioural competence. There is a need to include behavioural indicators when evaluating performance.

This public hearing can be viewed on demand via our YouTube Channel.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nb3f6k0KGHI>

Contact the Committee's Secretary

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Committees Unit

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