

Chapter 52

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The work of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Committee) is crucial for a well-managed parliamentary system of government. It provides a vital link in the chain of accountability over public resources and contributes to the public's confidence in our system of government.

The Committee's discussions and recommendations to the Legislative Assembly (Assembly) promote a more open and accountable government and better management of government operations. By questioning, requesting information, and making recommendations in its reports to the Assembly, the Committee acts as an agent of change for the management practices of government. This is evident, in part, through the high extent of implementation of the Committee's recommendations. The Committee's reports during the previous five years contained 539 recommendations. The Government has fully implemented 78% of the Committee's recommendations. Of the recommendations that are not yet fully implemented, 81% are partially implemented.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides an overview of the composition, role, and responsibilities of the Committee. It briefly describes what the Committee does, how it works, and how it reports to the Assembly.

It also sets out the extent to which the Government has implemented the Committee's past recommendations and the status of the Committee's review of our Reports.

3.0 OVERVIEW OF COMMITTEE'S ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

3.1 Committee Composition

On March 4, 2013, *The Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan*¹ changed to expand the Committee from seven members and a membership based on the ratio of party standings in the Assembly to eight members, including two members of the opposition for the duration of the 27th Legislature. At the beginning of each Legislature, the Assembly appoints members to the Committee. The Chair of the Committee is a member of the Opposition and the Deputy Chair is a member of the Government. See **Exhibit 6.1** for the composition of the Committee.

¹ www.legassembly.sk.ca/about/rules-and-procedures (22 October 2013)



3.2 Responsibilities Include Review of Public Accounts and Our Reports

The Committee is key to helping the Assembly hold the Government accountable for its management of public resources. *The Rules and Procedures of the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan* requires the Committee to review and report to the Assembly on the results of its review of the Public Accounts and of the Reports of the Provincial Auditor. The Assembly refers the Public Accounts and the Reports of our Office to the Committee.² The following provides a brief description of each.

- ▶ The Public Accounts consist of two reports. The first report contains the Summary Financial Statements of the Government, the financial statements of the General Revenue Fund (GRF), a Financial Statement Discussion and Analysis section, and other financial information. The second report contains details on revenues and expenditures of certain agencies that receive money from the GRF, details on capital asset acquisitions of those agencies, a listing of suppliers who received \$50,000 or more for goods and services supplied to the GRF, key financial information of some pension plans and trust funds administered by the Government, a listing of taxes and fees, and information on road-use fuel tax accountability.³
- ▶ The Reports of the Provincial Auditor contain the results of our examinations of the Government and its various agencies. The Committee has asked us to monitor compliance with its recommendations and to report on their status. Chapters within our Reports provide an update on the status of the Committee's recommendations. Also, each year, our Office provides our business and financial plan and an annual report on operations.

Because of its role to scrutinize the Government's management of public resources and to review our Reports, we view this Committee as the audit committee for the Assembly and thus, for the public.

The Committee's meetings are televised and open to the public. In its deliberations, the Committee is not fundamentally concerned with matters of policy; rather, it questions the economy and effectiveness of the administration of government programs. The Committee reviews the activities, performance, and reports of government ministries, agencies, and certain Crown corporations. During its review, the Committee may inquire about past performance, current concerns, and future objectives. The Committee's discussions include broader issues such as strategic plans, key risks to achieving goals and objectives, and performance measurement.

Government officials attend the Committee meetings to answer questions about the administration of their agencies. Our Office attends the meetings to help the Committee in its reviews. The Committee discusses and recommends actions on issues that Committee members and our Office raise.

² Certain chapters within our Reports are referred to the Standing Committee on Crown and Central Agencies.

³ www.finance.gov.sk.ca (22 October 2013).

3.3 Reports of the Committee

The Committee formally reports its findings and recommendations to the Assembly in written reports. Typically, it does this at the end of each legislative session. Its reports, once tabled in the Assembly, are made available to the public on the Assembly's website.⁴ It requires the Government to respond in writing to its reports. The Government's response is also made public on the Assembly's website.

Information about the composition of the Committee as well as records of the Committee's meetings (i.e., Hansard verbatims, minutes, videos, and reports) are available to the public on the Committee's website: www.legassembly.sk.ca/legislative-business/.

The Committee presented its most recent report called the *Third Report to the 26th Legislature* (4th Session of the 26th Legislature) on September 6, 2011.⁵ The Third Report contains over 230 recommendations. It was moved by the Deputy Chair of the Committee and agreed to by the Legislative Assembly "that the draft Third Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be adopted and that the final report be approved by the Steering Committee and filed with the Clerk pursuant to Rule 135(6)." The Government responded to this report on December 20, 2011.⁶

The Committee's previous reports were the First and Second Reports to the 26th Legislature. They were presented to the Assembly on March 25, 2009 and March 7, 2011,⁷ respectively. The Committee's reports during the previous five years contained 539 recommendations.

4.0 IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS

Consistent with prior years, the implementation of the Committee's recommendations by the Government and its agencies remains strong. As of October 2013, the Government has fully implemented 78% (October 2012–72%) of the Committee's recommendations. The Government has partially implemented 81% (October 2012–70%) of the remaining recommendations.⁸

In **Exhibit 6.2**, we set out the status of the Committee's outstanding recommendations that are not discussed elsewhere in this report. The remaining outstanding recommendations are included in the relevant chapters throughout our Report. Reviewing these outstanding recommendations provides the Committee with an opportunity to ask Government officials how they are progressing towards meeting the Committee's expectations.

⁴ www.legassembly.sk.ca/legislative-business/legislative-committees/public-accounts/ (22 October 2013).

⁵ The Committee's *Third Report to the 26th Legislature* and the Government Response can be found at www.legassembly.sk.ca/legislative-business/legislative-committees/public-accounts/ (22 October 2013).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The Second Report summarizes the process undertaken for the Provincial Auditor Competition.

⁸ Calculations are based on the Committee's recommendations up to and including the *Third Report to the 26th Legislature* at September 6, 2011.



5.0 STATUS OF COMMITTEE'S REVIEW OF OUR REPORTS

Since the fall of 2012, three of our Reports which include the results of our examinations of the Government and its agencies have been referred to the Committee for its review.

Since that time, the Committee has met five times – at two of its meetings it reviewed our Reports. Its review included chapters from our *2011 Report (Volumes 1 and 2)*, *2012 Report (Volumes 1 and 2)*, and our *Business and Financial Plan for the Year Ended March 31, 2014*.

As of October 2013, the Committee has not completed its review of all chapters in our following Reports:

- › *2010 Report – Volume 2* (1 out of 23 chapters outstanding)
- › *2011 Report – Volume 1* (1 out of 15 chapters outstanding)
- › *2011 Report – Volume 2* (9 out of 25 chapters outstanding)
- › *2012 Report – Volume 1* (14 out of 18 chapters outstanding)
- › *2012 Report – Volume 2* (50 out of 55 chapters outstanding)
- › *2013 Report – Volume 1* (all 27 chapters outstanding)
- › *Special Report 2013 of the Provincial Auditor: The Need to Change – Modernizing Government Budgeting and Financial Reporting in Saskatchewan*

6.0 EXHIBITS

6.1 Composition of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts

As of August 2013, the members of the Committee were:

- › Warren McCall, MLA, New Democratic Party, Chair
- › Scott Moe, MLA, Saskatchewan Party, Deputy Chair
- › Jennifer Campeau, MLA, Saskatchewan Party
- › Herb Cox, MLA, Saskatchewan Party
- › Glen Hart, MLA, Saskatchewan Party
- › Laura Ross, MLA, Saskatchewan Party
- › Cory Tochor, MLA, Saskatchewan Party
- › Trent Wotherspoon, MLA, New Democratic Party

Effective August 31, 2013, Mr. McCall resigned from the Committee. On October 28, 2013, the Assembly adopted a motion to substitute Ms Danielle Chartier for Mr. McCall; the Committee is expected to formally elect a Chair at its next meeting.

6.2 Status of Previous Committee Recommendations

The following table provides an update on recommendations agreed to by the Committee that are not yet implemented and are not discussed elsewhere in this report. Our intent is to follow up on outstanding recommendations in the future.

| Committee Report Year | Outstanding Recommendation | Status |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| eHealth – Electronic Health Records (2009 Report – Volume 3) | | |
| 2011 | 10C-1 that the Ministry of Health's strategic plan include its strategy for the electronic health record system. | Partially Implemented (as of September 30, 2012) |
| 2011 | 10C-2 that the Ministry of Health develop an operational plan to guide the development and implementation of the electronic health record system. | Partially Implemented (as of September 30, 2012) |
| 2011 | 10C-3 that the Ministry of Health monitor its overall costs and timelines, compared to its plans, for development and implementation of the electronic health record system. | Partially Implemented (as of September 30, 2012) |
| 2011 | 10C-4 that the Ministry of Health develop performance measures to allow it to assess and report its progress in achieving the electronic health record benefits. | Partially Implemented (as of September 30, 2012) |
| eHealth – IT Security (2007 Report – Volume 3) | | |
| 2009 | 11F-6 that the Health Information Solutions Centre of the Ministry of Health have an approved and tested disaster recovery plan for systems and data. | Not Implemented (as of March 31, 2012) |

