

## Chapter 37

### Government Relations—Assessing Public Concerns

#### 1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Ministry of Government Relations (Ministry) is responsible for setting the legislative framework for municipal governments in Saskatchewan.

The Ministry works with municipalities, their representative associations, and other provincial agencies to help foster effective local government. When the public does not understand municipal government legislation or has concerns about municipal administration or services, they often express these concerns to the Ministry. The Ministry uses these concerns as a source of information to assist it in identifying areas for improvement to the system of municipal government.

By September 26, 2016, the Ministry implemented all the recommendations we made in 2014 related to its processes to assess public concerns regarding municipalities. The Ministry:

- › Gave its staff central guidance on tracking, assessing, and documenting analysis of public concerns
- › Required staff responsible for assessing public concerns to document potential conflicts of interest, and then assigned staff accordingly
- › Documented key information about public concerns in its electronic system

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes our first follow-up of management's actions on the four recommendations we made in our *2014 Report – Volume 2*, Chapter 33, resulting from our audit of the Ministry's processes to assess concerns raised by the public for implications on the system of municipal government in Saskatchewan.

To conduct this review engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance*. To evaluate the Ministry's progress towards meeting our recommendations, we used the relevant criteria from the 2014 audit. Ministry management agreed with the criteria in the 2014 audit. To complete our follow-up, we discussed progress with management and reviewed supporting documentation.

#### 3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

This section sets out each recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at September 26, 2016, and the Ministry's actions up to that date.



### 3.1 Written Guidance Maintained Centrally and Provided to Staff

---

We recommended that the Ministry of Government Relations centrally maintain guidance for tracking and assessing public concerns regarding municipalities. (2014 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2015)

**Status** – Implemented

We recommended that the Ministry of Government Relations provide written guidance to staff on when and how to document their analysis of public concerns regarding municipalities. (2014 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2015)

**Status** – Implemented

In 2015, the Ministry developed two guidance documents for use by staff responsible for assessing public concerns.<sup>1</sup> Management approved and communicated this ministry-wide guidance in February 2015 and May 2015. The guidance sets out when, where, and how staff are to document their analysis of public concerns. It also describes the information staff must provide to senior management.

### 3.2 Potential Conflicts of Interest Documented and Used to Assign Staff

---

We recommended that the Ministry of Government Relations require staff responsible for assessing public concerns about municipalities to document potential conflicts of interest, and then assign staff accordingly. (2014 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2015)

**Status** – Implemented

In June 2015, senior management approved a conflict of interest documentation policy. The policy requires staff to take appropriate steps to avoid conflict of interest situations. It sets out steps staff are to take when such a situation arises. The policy requires staff to formally notify their branch head, as soon as possible, of any potential and/or perceived conflicts of interest. Branch heads are responsible for retaining this information and using it to assign work accordingly.

Management communicated the policy to all staff responsible for assessing public concerns regarding municipalities. We found that staff informed branch heads of

---

<sup>1</sup> These documents are called *Central Guidance to Branches for Tracking and Assessing Public Concerns for Implication on the Municipal Government System* and *Community Planning Branch-Documentation of Municipal System Issues*.

potential and/or perceived conflicts of interest. Branch heads used this information when assigning work to staff.

### 3.3 Key Information Included in Ministry's Electronic System

We recommended that the Ministry of Government Relations include key information about public concerns with potential impact on the system of municipal government received by the Community Planning Branch in its electronic system. (2014 Report – Volume 2; Public Accounts Committee agreement June 18, 2015)

**Status** – Implemented

The Community Planning Branch developed procedures for including, in the Ministry's electronic system (i.e., Provincial Municipal Relations database [PMR]), key information about certain public concerns that it receives—those with potential impact on the system of municipal government. These procedures set out what information to include in the PMR. We found the Community Planning Branch followed its procedures and updated the PMR accordingly.

