

Chapter 33

Executive Council—Communicating Information about Government Programs and Services in a Non-Partisan Way

1.0 MAIN POINTS

The Office of the Executive Council promptly implemented the recommendation we made in our 2019 study of processes about communicating to the public about government programs and services in a non-partisan way.

In June 2019, the Government published its policy for non-partisan communications on its website, including the criteria for what constitutes non-partisan communications. Publishing criteria for non-partisan communications increases transparency, builds public confidence that communications remain neutral, and helps educate government officials involved in external communications.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

The Office of the Executive Council provides support to the Premier, Cabinet and Cabinet committees.¹ It also develops and advances the Government's plan for Saskatchewan, and manages the plan's implementation across government.

Its other functions include co-ordinating government business in the Legislative Assembly; maintaining all Cabinet documents, orders-in-council, and regulations on behalf of the Government of Saskatchewan; providing strategic direction in communications throughout government; administering policies on communications procurement, visual identity, and online development; and operating the Government's web, mobile, and social presence.²

2.2 Focus of Follow-Up

This chapter describes our follow-up of management's actions on the recommendation we made in our *2019 Report – Volume 1*, Chapter 13, about processes that selected government agencies use to make sure communications to the public about government programs and services are non-partisan.

To conduct this audit engagement, we followed the standards for assurance engagements published in the *CPA Canada Handbook—Assurance* (CSAE 3001).

We assessed the Government's public policy including its criteria for what constitutes non-partisan communications about government programs and services.

¹ *The Executive Government Administration Act* section 26 establishes the Office of the Executive Council.

² www.saskatchewan.ca/government/government-structure/ministries/executive-council-and-office-of-the-premier (5 September 2019).



3.0 STATUS OF RECOMMENDATION

This section sets out the recommendation including the date on which the Standing Committee on Public Accounts agreed to the recommendation, the status of the recommendation at September 24, 2019, and the Government's actions up to that date.

3.1 Non-Partisan Communication Criteria Made Public

We recommended the Government of Saskatchewan make public its criteria for what constitutes non-partisan communications about government programs and services. (2019 Report – Volume 1, p. 210, Recommendation 1; Public Accounts Committee has not yet considered this recommendation as of October 25, 2019)

Status—Implemented

In June 2019, the Government published its policy for non-partisan communications on its public, external website.³

The policy requires all Government of Saskatchewan agencies (including Ministries, Boards, Crown Corporations, and other government agencies) to communicate to the public in a non-partisan manner. It clearly defines the criteria for what constitutes non-partisan communications. For example, the policy requires government communications be presented in a factual manner, and focus on informing and educating the public about government programs, services and policies.

The policy directs each government agency to ensure its communications are non-partisan. It gives each agency the flexibility to develop additional guidance to help its staff apply the criteria within the specific context and environment in which the agency operates.

³ <https://taskroom.sp.saskatchewan.ca/Documents/NonPartisanCommunicationsPolicy.pdf> (24 September 2019).