
CHAPTER SEVEN

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts

APPOINTMENT AND COMPOSITION OF THE COMMITTEE

The Standing Orders of the Legislature provide for the appointment of an all-party Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The Committee is appointed for the duration of the Parliament (that is, the period from the opening of the first session immediately following a general election to the end of a government's term and the calling of another election).

The membership of the Committee reflects proportionately the representation of parties in the Legislature. All members are entitled to vote on motions with the exception of the Chair, whose vote is restricted to the breaking of a tie.

In accordance with the Standing Orders, a Standing Committee on Public Accounts was appointed on November 1, 1999, soon after the commencement of the First Session of the Thirty-seventh Parliament. The activities of the Committee effectively came to an end with the dissolution of the House on September 2, 2003. The membership of the Committee at dissolution was as follows:

John Gerretsen, Chair, Liberal
Bruce Crozier, Vice-chair, Liberal
Garfield Dunlop, Progressive Conservative
Raminder Gill, Progressive Conservative
John Hastings, Progressive Conservative
Shelley Martel, New Democrat
Al McDonald, Progressive Conservative
Richard Patten, Liberal

ROLE OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee examines, assesses, and reports to the Legislature on a number of issues, including: the economy and efficiency of government operations; the effectiveness of

programs in achieving their objectives; controls over assets, expenditures, and the assessment and collection of revenues; and the reliability and appropriateness of information in the Public Accounts.

In fulfilling this role, pursuant to its terms of reference in the Standing Orders of the Assembly, the Committee reviews the Provincial Auditor's Annual Report and the Public Accounts and reports to the Legislature its observations, opinions, and recommendations. Under the Standing Orders, the documents are deemed to have been permanently referred to the Committee as they become available.

PROVINCIAL AUDITOR'S ROLE WITH THE COMMITTEE

In accordance with section 16 of the *Audit Act*, the Provincial Auditor and senior staff attend committee meetings at which the Committee reviews the Provincial Auditor's Annual Report and the Public Accounts and assist the Committee in planning its agenda.

COMMITTEE PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS

GENERAL

The Committee meets on Thursday mornings when the Legislature is sitting. At times, the Committee also meets during the summer and winter when the Legislature is not sitting. All meetings are open to the public with the exception of those dealing with the setting of the Committee's agenda and the preparation of committee reports. All public Committee proceedings are recorded in Hansard (the official verbatim report of the debates in the House, speeches, other proceedings in the Legislature, and all open-session sittings of standing and select committees).

The Committee selects matters from the Provincial Auditor's Annual Report and the Public Accounts for hearings. The Committee then requests senior ministry and agency officials to appear and respond to questions at these hearings. Since the Committee is concerned with administrative rather than policy matters, ministers rarely attend.

Once hearings are completed, the Committee then reports its comments and recommendations to the Legislature. Committee procedures include the following:

- in-depth briefings and preparation;
- when practical, the inclusion of ministry responses in committee reports; and
- follow-up of committee recommendations.

The Committee also follows up in writing with those ministries and Crown agencies not selected for detailed review by the Committee regarding their plans and timetables for addressing the concerns raised in the Provincial Auditor's reports. This process enables each auditee to update the Committee on activities undertaken since the completion of the audit, such as any initiatives taken to address the Provincial Auditor's recommendations.

MEETINGS HELD

From October 2002 to September 2003, the Committee met regularly on Thursday mornings when the Legislature was sitting and also met during the winter recess to consider the reports of the Provincial Auditor. The Committee's work during this period relating to the work of this Office included:

- considering Bill 5, Audit Statute Law Amendment Act, 2002;
- reviewing the following items from the Provincial Auditor's *2002 Annual Report*:
 - Ministry of Finance—Corporations Tax Program and the Public Accounts of the province;
 - Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care—Long-Term Care Facilities Activity;
 - Management Board Secretariat and the ministries of Environment, Finance, Health and Long-Term Care, Natural Resources, and Public Safety and Security—Consulting Services;
 - Ministry of Public Safety and Security—Community Services Program;
 - Ministry of Tourism and Recreation—Tourism Program;
 - Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities—Training Division; and
 - the following follow-ups of recommendations contained in the *2000 Special Report on Accountability and Value for Money*:
 - Ministry of Public Safety and Security—Institutional Services and Young Offender Operations; and
 - Ministry of Natural Resources—Forest Management; and
- finalizing reports to the Legislature.

REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE

GENERAL

The Committee issues its reports to the Legislature. These reports contain a précis of the information reviewed by the Committee during its meetings, together with comments and recommendations.

All committee reports are available through the Clerk of the Committee, thus enabling public access to full details of committee deliberations.

After the Committee tables its report in the Legislative Assembly, it requests that ministries or agencies respond within 120 days or within time frames stipulated by the Committee in its individual recommendations.

During the period from October 2002 to September 2003, the Committee submitted the following reports to the Legislative Assembly:

- *Report on Ontario Innovation Trust,*
- *Report on the Road User Safety Program,*
- *Report on the Integrated Justice Project,*
- *Report on the Food Industry Program,*
- *Report on Violence Against Women Program,*
- *Report on Community Reinvestment Fund,*
- *Report on Corporations Tax,*
- *Report on Training Division,*
- *Report on Long-Term Care Facilities,* and
- *Report on Consulting Services*

FOLLOW-UP OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE

The Clerk of the Committee is responsible for following up on the actions taken on the Committee's recommendations by ministries or agencies. The Office of the Provincial Auditor confers with the Clerk to ascertain the status of the recommendations and, if considered necessary, brings any significant matters to the attention of the Legislature through the Provincial Auditor's Annual Report.

Detailed information on the Committee's recommendation respecting amendments to the *Audit Act* and other related matters is contained in Chapter Two of this report.

OTHER COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees (CCPAC)

CCPAC consists of delegates from federal, provincial, and territorial public accounts committees from across Canada. CCPAC meets at the same time and place as the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors (CCOLA) to discuss issues of current interest. The

twenty-fourth annual meeting of CCPAC was held in Winnipeg, Manitoba from September 14 to 16, 2003. The annual CCPAC and CCOLA meetings also permit the delegations to participate in a joint session to discuss subjects of mutual interest to politicians and legislative auditors. The 2003 joint session with CCOLA was on the subject of “Reporting Principles and Parliamentary Effectiveness.” Due to the dissolution of the Ontario Legislature on September 2, 2003, it was not possible for Ontario to be represented at the 2003 meeting of CCPAC.