

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Role of the Committee

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Committee) is empowered to review and report to the House its observations, opinions and recommendations on reports from the Auditor General and on the Public Accounts, which are deemed to have been permanently referred to the Committee as they become available. The Committee examines, assesses and reports to the Legislative Assembly on a number of issues, including the economy and efficiency of government and broader public-sector operations and the effectiveness of programs in achieving their objectives. The Committee typically holds a number of hearings throughout the year relating to matters raised in our Annual Report or our special reports and presents its observations and recommendations to the Legislative Assembly. Under sections 16 and 17 of the *Auditor General Act*, the Committee may also request that the Auditor General examine any matter in respect of the Public Accounts or undertake a special assignment on its behalf.

Appointment and Composition of the Committee

Members of the Committee are appointed by a motion of the Legislature. The number of members from any given political party reflects that party's representation in the Legislative Assembly. All members except the Chair are entitled to vote on motions, while the Chair may vote only to break a tie. The Committee is normally established for the duration of the Parliament, from the opening of its first session immediately following a general election to its dissolution.

At the time of our Annual Report last year, the Committee had been dissolved, and the Legislative Assembly had been prorogued.

On February 20, 2013, the Committee was reactivated by motion of the Legislature under Section 113 of the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly, with the following members:

Norm Miller, Chair, Progressive Conservative

Toby Barrett, Vice-chair, Progressive
Conservative

Dipika Damerla, Liberal

France G elinas, New Democrat

Helena Jaczek, Liberal

Phil McNeely, Liberal

Jerry Ouellette, Progressive Conservative

Shafiq Qaadri, Liberal

Jagmeet Singh, New Democrat

On September 9, 2013, Committee membership was revised by a motion of the Legislature as follows:

Norm Miller, Chair, Progressive Conservative
Toby Barrett, Vice-chair, Progressive
Conservative

Lorenzo Berardinetti, Liberal
France G elinas, New Democrat

Helena Jaczek, Liberal

Bill Mauro, Liberal

Phil McNeely, Liberal

Jerry Ouellette, Progressive Conservative

Jagmeet Singh, New Democrat

AUDITOR GENERAL'S ADVISORY ROLE WITH THE COMMITTEE

In accordance with section 16 of the *Auditor General Act*, the Auditor General, sometimes accompanied by senior staff, attends all committee meetings to assist the Committee with its reviews and hearings relating to our Annual Report, Ontario's Public Accounts and any special reports issued by our Office.

COMMITTEE PROCEDURES AND OPERATIONS

The Committee may meet weekly when the Legislative Assembly is sitting, and, with the approval of the House, at any other time of its choosing. All meetings are open to the public except for those dealing with the Committee's agenda, audit report briefing or the preparation of its reports. All public committee proceedings are recorded in Hansard, the official verbatim report of government debates, speeches and other Legislative Assembly proceedings.

The Committee identifies matters of interest from our Annual Report and our special reports, and conducts hearings on them. It typically reviews reports from the value-for-money chapter of our Annual Report. Normally, each of the three political parties annually selects two or three audits or

other sections from our Annual Report for Committee review.

At each hearing, the Auditor General, along with the Committee's researcher, briefs the Committee on the applicable section from our Report and the responses to our findings and recommendations from the ministry, Crown agency or broader public-sector organization that was the subject of the audit or review. The Committee typically asks senior officials from the auditee(s) to appear at the hearings and respond to questions from committee members. Because our Annual Report deals with operational, administrative and financial rather than policy matters, ministers are rarely asked to attend. Once its hearings are completed, the Committee provides its comments and recommendations to the Legislative Assembly.

The Clerk of the Committee also requests that those auditees that were not selected for hearings update the Committee on actions they are taking to address the recommendations made and concerns raised in our reports.

MEETINGS HELD

The Committee met 14 times during the February 2013–September 2013 period. A few of the meetings were administrative in nature and the others related to our Office's March 2012 special report, *Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services*. These meetings included a number of sessions in which witnesses were called to testify before the Committee and respond to questions.

REPORTS OF THE COMMITTEE

The Committee issues reports and letters on its work for tabling in the Legislative Assembly. These reports and letters summarize the information gathered by the Committee during its meetings and include the Committee's comments and recommendations. Once tabled, all committee reports and letters are publicly available through the Clerk of the Committee or online at www.ontla.on.ca.

Committee reports typically include recommendations and request that management of the ministry, agency or broader public-sector organization provide the Committee Clerk with responses within a stipulated time frame. Our Office reviews these recommendations and responses, and we take them into consideration in any subsequent follow-up section or audits of that operational area.

In June 2013, the Committee released its first interim report on our Office's March 2012 special report, *Ornge Air Ambulance and Related Services*. This report summarized the results of the 20 committee hearings held in 2012, including ongoing concerns identified by the Committee. The Committee intends to issue a second interim report for

the 2013 hearings, and a final report containing the Committee's recommendations.

CANADIAN COUNCIL OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEES

The Canadian Council of Public Accounts Committees (CCPAC) consists of delegates from federal, provincial and territorial public accounts committees from across Canada. CCPAC holds a joint annual conference with the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The 34th annual conference was hosted by Saskatchewan and was held in Regina from August 24 to 27, 2013.