



Office of the Auditor General of Ontario

The Work of the
Standing
Committee on
Public Accounts



December 2020

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Role of the Committee

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Committee) is empowered to review and report to the Legislative Assembly its observations, opinions and recommendations on reports from the Auditor General and on the Public Accounts. These reports 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 government programs in achieving their objectives.

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.

The Committee typically holds hearings throughout the year when the Legislature is in session relating to matters raised in our reports and may present its observations and recommendations from hearings in its reports to the Legislative Assembly.

Appointment and Composition of the Committee

Members of the Committee are typically 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 may vote on motions, while the Chair votes 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.

In accordance with the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly and following the June 2018 election, Committee members were appointed on July 26, 2018. The Chair and prior Vice-Chair were elected on August 8, 2018, at the Committee's first meeting of the 42nd Parliament. Since we last reported on the Committee's activities in our *2019 Annual Report (Volume 1, Chapter 5)*, there were Committee membership changes on March 2, September 22, and October 1, 2020. As of October 31, 2020, the Committee membership was as follows:

- Catherine Fife, Chair, New Democrat (effective August 8, 2018)
- France Gélinas, Vice-Chair, New Democrat (effective October 30, 2019)
- Michael Parsa, Progressive Conservative (appointed July 26, 2018)

- Toby Barrett, Progressive Conservative (appointed November 28, 2018)
- Jill Andrew, New Democrat (appointed October 28, 2019)
- Stan Cho, Progressive Conservative (appointed October 28, 2019)
- Stephen Crawford, Progressive Conservative (appointed October 28, 2019)
- Deepak Anand, Progressive Conservative (appointed March 2, 2020)
- Christine Hogarth, Progressive Conservative (appointed March 2, 2020)
- Daryl Kramp, Progressive Conservative (appointed September 22, 2020)
- Stephen Blais, Liberal (appointed October 1, 2020)

Auditor General's Advisory Role with the Committee

In accordance with Section 16 of the *Auditor General Act*, at the request of the Committee, the Auditor General, often accompanied by senior staff, attends Committee meetings to assist with its reviews and hearings relating to our reports and Ontario's Public Accounts.

Committee Procedures and Operations

The Committee meets weekly when the Legislative Assembly is sitting and, with the approval of the House, at any other times of its choosing. All meetings are generally open to the public except for those dealing with setting the Committee's agenda and the preparation of its reports. All public Committee proceedings are recorded in Hansard, the official substantially verbatim report of debates, speeches and other Legislative Assembly proceedings.

The Committee identifies matters of interest from our reports and conducts hearings on them. It typically reviews value-for-money reports, the Public Accounts chapter, and follow-up reports. Normally, each of the political parties annually selects a minimum of three audits or other sections from our current or past audits for Committee review.

At each hearing, the Auditor General, senior staff from her Office and a Research Officer from the Legislative Research Service brief the Committee on the applicable section from our Report. A briefing package is prepared by the Research Officer that includes the responses of the relevant ministry, Crown agency or broader-public-sector organization that was the subject of the audit or review. The Committee typically requests senior officials from the auditee(s) to appear at the hearings and respond to the Committee's questions. Because our reports deal with operational, administrative and financial rather than policy matters, ministers are rarely asked to attend as witnesses. Once the Committee's hearings are completed, the Research Officer may prepare a draft report pursuant to the Committee's instructions, as the Committee typically reports its findings to the Legislative Assembly.

In addition, the Clerk, at the direction of the Committee, requests those auditees that were not selected for hearings to provide the Committee with an update of the actions taken to address our recommendations and other concerns raised in our reports.

Meetings Held

The Committee held 14 meetings between November 2019 and October 2020. Topics addressed at these meetings included the public accounts of the province, Ontario Works, Metrolinx—LRT construction and planning, government advertising, the Fair Hydro Plan, Tarion, Waterfront Toronto, Metrolinx—GO station selection, food safety, climate change and the Office of the Chief Coroner

and Ontario Forensic Pathology Service. Many of these meetings included hearings in which government and broader-public-sector witnesses were called to testify before the Committee and respond to questions regarding observations contained in our reports. Other meetings were spent on Committee business, writing the Committee's reports or hearing briefings from the Auditor General. The Committee did not meet between March 18, 2020, and September 16, 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee resumed on September 23, 2020, with hybrid virtual and in-person meetings.

Reports of the Committee

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

Committee reports typically include recommendations and a request that management of the ministry, agency or broader-public-sector organization provide the Committee Clerk with responses within a stipulated time frame. As of October 31, 2020, the Committee had tabled seven reports in the Legislature since we last reported on its activities in our *2019 Annual Report (Volume 1, Chapter 5)*:

- November 5, 2019: Public Health: Chronic Disease Prevention
- December 11, 2019: Ontario Works
- December 11, 2019: Darlington Nuclear Generating Station Refurbishment Project
- December 12, 2019: Government Advertising
- February 18, 2020: Public Accounts of the Province
- February 18, 2020: Metrolinx—LRT Construction and Infrastructure Planning

- June 2, 2020: The Fair Hydro Plan

These reports addressed audits from our *2017* and *2018 Annual Reports* and *2017 Special Report on Fair Hydro*. The writing of five other reports is in progress.

In our Follow-Up Volume this year, we include follow-ups on the recommendations the Committee made in the final eight reports that were tabled in 2019 and early 2020 (Settlement and Integration Services for Newcomers, Real Estate Services, Cancer Treatment Services, Public Health: Chronic Disease Prevention, Ontario Works, Darlington Nuclear Generating Station Refurbishment, Government Advertising, and Public Accounts). In each of these sections, you will find:

- the recommendations contained in the Committee's report;
- the auditee's responses to the Committee's recommendations; and
- a table summarizing the status of each action from the Committee's recommendations (for example, fully implemented, or in the process of being implemented).

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 across Canada. CCPAC holds a joint annual conference with the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors to discuss issues of mutual interest.

The 41st annual conference was to be hosted in Victoria, British Columbia, from August 16 to 18, 2020. However, in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the conference was held virtually on September 10, 2020. Next year, the 42nd annual conference will be held in Edmonton, Alberta, on August 14 to 18, 2021.



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ISSN 1911-7078 (Online)
ISBN 978-1-4868-4886-7 (PDF, 2020 ed.)

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