
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 for each session of the Legislature.

The membership of the Committee is approximately proportional to the respective party membership 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 May 4, 1998, soon after the commencement of the Second Session of the Thirty-sixth Parliament. Although the Committee was reappointed on April 29, 1999, soon after the commencement of the Third Session, the Committee did not have an opportunity to meet due to the dissolution of the House on May 5, 1999. The membership of the Committee at dissolution was as follows:

Marcel Beaubien, Progressive Conservative
Bernard Grandmaître, Liberal
Bill Grimmett, Progressive Conservative
Jean-Marc Lalonde, Liberal
Shelley Martel, New Democrat
Richard Patten, Liberal
Peter L. Preston, Progressive Conservative
Joseph N. Tascona, Progressive Conservative
Terence H. Young, Progressive Conservative

The Committee will be reconstituted upon commencement of the Thirty-seventh Parliament.

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, the Committee reviews and reports to the Legislature its observations, opinions and recommendations on selected matters in the Annual Report of the Provincial Auditor and the Public Accounts. These documents are deemed to have been permanently referred to the Committee as they become available.

PROVINCIAL AUDITOR'S ROLE IN THE PROCESS

The Provincial Auditor assists the Committee by providing appropriate audit information for use by the Committee in its scrutiny of government programs and financial activities.

Additionally, the Provincial Auditor and senior staff attend committee meetings during the Committee's review of the Annual Report of the Provincial Auditor and the Public Accounts and assist the Committee in planning its agenda.

7.00

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.

At meetings dealing with ministry operations, the deputy minister, usually accompanied by senior ministry officials, answers questions raised by committee members. Since the Committee is concerned with administrative rather than policy matters, ministers rarely attend. When the Committee is reviewing Crown agencies, the chief executive officer, usually accompanied by senior agency staff and, at times, the chair of the board, attend the meetings.

MEETINGS HELD

From October 1998 to September 1999, the Committee met regularly on its designated meeting day when the Legislature was sitting. The Committee's work during this period (six meetings from October 1 to December 17 and no meetings from April 22 to May 4) included:

- finalizing a report to the Legislature covering its 1997/98 activities; and
- reviewing the following from the Provincial Auditor's *1998 Annual Report*:
 - Ministry of Community and Social Services — Business Transformation Project/ Common Purpose Procurement.

REQUEST FOR SPECIAL AUDIT

On December 17, 1998, the Committee passed the following motion under section 17 of the *Audit Act*:

That the Provincial Auditor report to the Public Accounts Committee by mid-June on the corrective action taken by the Ministry of Community and Social Services on the administration of the Andersen Agreement.

Due to the dissolution of the third session of the Thirty-sixth Parliament, there was no Public Accounts Committee in mid-June; consequently, no report was made. However, the Provincial

Auditor will continue to monitor the Ministry's commitments to corrective action in the administration of the Andersen Agreement and will report to the Committee on an as required basis.

COMMITTEE PROCEDURES

The Committee conducts hearings and 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 Annual Report. This process enables each auditee to update the Committee on activities since the completion of the audit, such as any initiatives taken to address the Provincial Auditor's recommendations.

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 affording public access to full details of committee deliberations.

FOLLOW-UP OF RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE COMMITTEE

The Clerk of the Committee is responsible for following up on the actions taken by ministries or agencies on the Committee's recommendations. 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 in the Provincial Auditor's Annual Report.

STATUS OF COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION RESPECTING AMENDMENTS TO THE AUDIT ACT

Detailed information on this subject 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 of 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 twentieth annual meeting of CCPAC was held in Quebec City, from August 29 to 31, 1999. This year's annual CCPAC and CCOLA meetings also permitted the delegations to participate in a joint session specifically devoted to discussing subjects of common interest to strengthen ties between the two groups.

7.00
