

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts

Appointment and Composition of the Committee

Members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Committee) are appointed under the Standing Orders of the Legislative Assembly. The number of members from any given 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 only vote to break a tie. The Committee is 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, a Standing Committee on Public Accounts was appointed on December 10, 2007, for the duration of the 39th Parliament. The membership of the Committee as of September 2011 was as follows:

Norm Sterling, Chair, Progressive Conservative
Peter Shurman, Vice-chair, Progressive Conservative
Wayne Arthurs, Liberal
Aileen Carroll, Liberal
France Gélinas, New Democrat
Jerry Ouellette, Progressive Conservative
David Ramsay, Liberal
Liz Sandals, Liberal
David Zimmer, Liberal

Role of the Committee

The Committee examines, assesses, and reports to the Legislative Assembly on a number of issues. These include the economy and efficiency of government and broader-public-sector operations, the effectiveness of programs in achieving their objectives, and any issues that arise with respect to Ontario's Public Accounts. The Committee 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.

AUDITOR GENERAL'S ADVISORY ROLE WITH THE COMMITTEE

In accordance with section 16 of the *Auditor General Act*, the Auditor General and senior staff attend committee meetings to assist the Committee with its reviews and its hearings relating to our Annual Report and Ontario's Public Accounts.

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 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 or our special reports and conducts hearings on them. It typically focuses on reports from the value-for-money chapter of our Annual Report for review. In recent years, each of the three political parties has selected three audits or other sections from our Annual Report to hold hearings on. The Committee also considers whether to hold hearings on any special reports we have tabled during the year.

At each hearing, the Auditor General, along with the Committee's researcher, briefs the Committee on the applicable report section and the responses to our findings and recommendations from the ministry, Crown agency, or organization in the broader public sector that was the subject of the audit. The Committee then requests that senior officials from the auditee(s) appear at the hearing and respond to questions from committee members. Because our Annual Report deals with operational, administrative, and financial rather than policy matters, ministers are rarely requested to attend. Once its hearings are completed, the Committee reports 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 what actions they are taking to address the concerns raised in our reports.

MEETINGS HELD

The Committee met 19 times during the October 2010–June 2011 period. Some of these meetings were held to complete Committee reports about the hearings on sections from both our 2009 and 2010 Annual Reports as well as on our October 2009 *Special Report on Ontario's Electronic Health Records Initiative*.

Four value-for-money audit sections and two follow-up sections from our *2010 Annual Report* were chosen for hearings in 2011, as follows:

- 3.03–Family Responsibility Office;
- 3.07–Infrastructure Stimulus Spending;
- 3.08–Municipal Property Assessment Corporation;
- 3.09–Non-hazardous Waste Disposal and Diversion;
- 4.05–Commercial Vehicle Safety and Enforcement Program; and
- 4.11–Hospital Board Governance.

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 on-line 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 responses, and, in any subsequent audits of that operational area, we take the Committee's recommendations into consideration.

During the period from October 2010 through June 2011, the Committee tabled the following 17 reports stemming from hearings held on sections

from our 2009 and 2010 Annual Reports (AR) as well as on one of our special reports:

- *Unfunded Liability of the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board* (Section 3.14, 2009 AR) (tabled on October 5, 2010);
- *Unspent Grants* (Chapter 2, 2009 AR) (tabled on October 20, 2010);
- *Teletriage Health Services* (Section 3.13, 2009 AR) (tabled on October 26, 2010);
- *Bridge Inspection and Maintenance* (Section 3.02, 2009 AR) (tabled on November 1, 2010);
- *Ontario's Electronic Health Records* (October 2009 Special Report) (tabled on November 4, 2010);
- *Ontario Disability Support Program* (Section 3.09, 2009 AR) (tabled on November 24, 2010);
- *Education Quality and Accountability Office* (Section 3.04, 2009 AR) (tabled on November 25, 2010);
- *Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat* (Section 3.07, 2009 AR) (tabled on December 6, 2010);
- *Infection Prevention and Control at Long-term-care Homes* (Section 3.06, 2009 AR) (tabled on February 28, 2011);
- *Assistive Devices Program* (Section 3.01, 2009 AR) (tabled on May 18, 2011);
- *Commercial Vehicle Safety and Enforcement Program* (Section 4.05, 2010 AR) (tabled on May 18, 2011);
- *Infrastructure Stimulus Spending* (Section 3.07, 2010 AR) (tabled on May 18, 2011);
- *Hospital Board Governance* (Section 4.11, 2010 AR) (tabled on May 18, 2011);
- *Municipal Property Assessment Corporation* (Section 3.08, 2010 AR) (tabled on May 30, 2011);
- *Family Responsibility Office* (Section 3.03, 2010 AR) (tabled on May 30, 2011);
- *Non-hazardous Waste Disposal and Diversion* (Section 3.09, 2010 AR) (tabled on May 30, 2011); and
- *Public Accounts Committee Best Practice: Assistive Devices Program* (Section 3.01, 2009 AR) (tabled on May 30, 2011).

The last report described the Committee's process in following up on its earlier (May 18) report stemming from our 2009 audit of the Assistive Devices Program.

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 32nd annual conference was hosted by Nova Scotia and was held in Halifax from August 28 to 30, 2011.