



18th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories

Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning

Report on Transition Matters

Chair: Mr. Tom Beaulieu

**MEMBERS OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PRIORITIES AND PLANNING**

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**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
PRIORITIES AND PLANNING**

REPORT ON TRANSITION MATTERS

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PRIORITIES AND PLANNING

REPORT ON TRANSITION MATTERS

INTRODUCTION

The Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning (SCOPP) is one of the standing committees of the 18th Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories charged with the responsibility of providing oversight over the ongoing business operations of the Government of the Northwest Territories.

The purpose of this report is twofold:

1. To briefly highlight the work completed by the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning during the 18th Assembly; and
2. To identify outstanding issues that SCOPP's successor Committee in the 19th Legislative Assembly may wish to consider.

MANDATE OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

The mandates of the Legislative Assembly's standing committees are set out in Appendix 3 to the Rules of the Legislative Assembly.¹ The Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning is responsible for:

- review issues which have government-wide implications, including the overview of the budget and fiscal framework;
- review Government of the Northwest Territories reports on financial and performance results and program and policy evaluations to ensure anticipated outcomes are being achieved and accountability is maximized;
- coordinate Sessional business scheduling and planning in cooperation with appropriate Ministerial representatives;
- coordinate Committee public consultation efforts with respect to budget and fiscal matters;
- coordinate Committee strategic planning efforts;

¹ *Rules of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories*, May 27, 2015.

- monitor and evaluate Ministerial performance issues;
- consider the budgets and financial management of any boards and agencies that are outside the responsibility of any Standing Committee; and
- Consider any other matter referred by the House.

WORK OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE

Highlights

During the 18th Legislative Assembly, the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning undertook work ranging from strategic planning, review of government budgets, a comprehensive review of the mandate midway through our term, and public hearings on issues of interest to residents of the Northwest Territories.

Committee wishes to highlight the work undertaken in the following three areas:

Amendments to the Mandate

The Mandate of the 18th Legislative Assembly was the most ambitious of any Assembly, with over 200 specified actions. The Mandate was debated at length first in February 2016, then again in October of 2017. There were 26 motions to amend the mandate moved by Committee Members in 2016, with a further 5 motions in 2017. Of particular note, the Committee amended the Mandate to include the development of legislation establishing the Office of the Ombud, and was pleased to review the legislation and see it passed in the House. We wish the new Ombud well in her role.

Adjustments to the budget

There were particular divisions over the direction of the Northwest Territories early in the life of the 18th Assembly, which came to the fore during the debates over the budgets. Several programs that were initially not deemed as priorities ended up receiving increased funding due to the advocacy of Committee Members, notably junior kindergarten and 9-1-1 services.

Accessibility of Committee Meetings

Openness and transparency are often cited as key hallmarks of democratic governance. The Standing Committee was pleased to amend the operating procedures of the

Committees to ensure that they are now open by default, as well as finding new ways to broadcast Committee proceedings via Facebook Live, Twitter and the Legislative Assembly website. This ensures that as many people as possible can access Committee proceedings, an essential requirement in a territory as vast as ours.

TRANSITION MATTERS

We provide the following suggestions based on our experience as a Committee, in the hopes that our successor Committee finds them informative.

House Planning

Early in the 18th Assembly, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee began a House Planning exercise during each morning meeting during session. The Deputy Chair attended the daily meetings with the Speaker and Government House Leader, where government business was shared with Members, and Members Statements and questions were shared with government. The Committee found that this resulted in a better flow of information, and encourages its successor committee in the 19th Assembly to consider a similar protocol.

Public Consultation by SCOPP

The 18th Assembly has made strides in improving transparency and accountability to the public. Committee meetings are now open by default, with set reasons to go *in-camera*. We would encourage our successor Committee to consider how to continue to make meetings more public, and adopt a protocol early in the life of the 19th Assembly to open the work of government to public scrutiny.

Ongoing Training on Procedure and Rules

Our Committee has seen a lot of turnover in staff, with four Clerks and two Advisors over the course of the last 4 years. This has affected the corporate memory of the Committee, and impacted our ability to advance priorities. We recommend to our successor Committee to consider ongoing training to Committee Chairs and Deputy Chairs on procedure and rules of the Assembly. We further recommend that all Members receive a more comprehensive education on the powers and privileges of Committees, so that they may be used more effectively, with a particular focus on the investigative powers of Committees.

Political Advice to Regular Members

While Members appreciate the services provided to the Committee by the Clerk and Advisor, their advice is limited and apolitical, as befits their positions as employees of the Legislative Assembly. The Committee notes that each Minister is assigned a Ministerial Special Advisor who can provide political advice, independent of the apolitical advice provided by departments. Cabinet as a whole is served by the Principle Secretary, a Deputy level position responsible for advancing the political priorities of Cabinet. Regular Members do not have access to the same level of political advice, which has hampered our ability to advance our priorities. Our successor Committee may wish to establish a role independent of the Legislative Assembly to provide political advice to Committee and to individual Members.

Committee Cohesion

There will always be differences of opinion when 11 independent politicians are working together. However our Committee found that public reporting on our differences often overshadowed the highly collaborative work that was underway. For example, almost all Members worked on the cannabis legislation, under tight timeframes and punishing travel to consult with as many communities as was possible. We would also note that the vast majority of bills, including budgets, passed with overwhelming support in the House. We would encourage our successor Committee to fully embrace the Code of Conduct that was adopted at the end of the 18th Assembly and to use its provisions to ensure all Members are fulfilling their duties.

Regulations

Most proposed Bills undergo public review by a Standing Committee, with the possibility of extensive hearings where public interest warrants. However, many important matters of concern to the public are addressed in regulations, which typically are approved by a Minister or the Cabinet without the involvement of Regular Members. The Mineral Resources Act and the Corrections Act are examples of Bills that originally proposed leaving substantial matters to regulations. Members worked hard to incorporate more in the body of the Act, however much is still to be determined in regulation. The 19th Assembly may wish to consider instituting processes for standing committee review of such regulations.

CONCLUSION

This concludes the Standing Committee on Priorities and Planning Report on Transition Matters. Members respectfully suggest that the Members of our successor committee consider requesting updates on the above matters from committee staff and from the appropriate Ministers in the 19th Assembly, and wish them the utmost success in their service to the people of the Northwest Territories.