

Government of the Northwest Territories Response to Committee Report 2-18 (3): Report on the Review of the 2015-2016 Public Accounts

Background

The Comptroller General and his staff were pleased to have the opportunity to review the Government's 2015-2016 Public Accounts with the Standing Committee on Government Operations and looks forward to reviewing the 2016-2017 Public Accounts with Committee in the near future.

In response to the Report on the Review of the 2015-2016 Public Accounts that was tabled on October 17, 2017, I provide the following responses to the Committee's recommendations contained within:

Recommendation 1

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the table titled "Completion of Entities Consolidated within the Public Accounts" be included annually in the unaudited *Financial Statement Discussion and Analysis* section of the Public Accounts.

GNWT Response

As done in the previous year, the Department of Finance will continue to include this information within the annual Public Accounts on an ongoing basis.

Recommendation 2

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Office of the Comptroller General in the Department of Finance work with all Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) public agencies to assist them to complete their audited financial statements to meet statutory reporting deadlines, and to seek the necessary extension where those deadlines cannot be met.

GNWT Response

The Department of Finance will continue to work closely with GNWT departments, boards and agencies to ensure that the audited Public Accounts are prepared as soon as possible and within statutory requirements.

Recommendation 3

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories continue to include information in the *Financial Statement Discussion and Analysis* section of the public accounts, indicating how the GNWT has met the provisions related to debt servicing and infrastructure financing in the *Fiscal Responsibility Policy*.

GNWT Response

As in the previous year, the Department of Finance will continue its disclosure related to the *Fiscal Responsibility Policy* within the annual Public Accounts on an ongoing basis, including disclosure on meeting the policy's performance measures related to infrastructure financing and affordable debt.

Recommendation 4

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Minister of Finance work with the Minister responsible for Public Engagement and Transparency to develop plain language materials that summarize the Public Accounts for a given year, in a manner that is understandable for an interested non-professional reader, focusing on the key financial highlights and significant audit issue arising for that year.

GNWT Response

The plain language materials were developed and made available for the year ended March 31, 2016 in consultation with the Minister Responsible for Public Engagement and Transparency's Office. The plain language materials will continue to evolve and be prepared annually on an ongoing basis. In addition a statement of key financial highlights will be developed for the year ended March 31, 2017 and included as an appendix to the plain language materials annually.

Recommendation 5

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Department of Finance, after consultation with the Information and Privacy Commissioner for the Northwest Territories, reconsider amending the Non-consolidated Schedule of Bad Debt Write-offs, Forgiveness and Student Loan Remissions to protect the privacy of individuals by removing the names of those who have received student loan remissions and reporting only the amount of the remissions.

GNWT Response

The Department of Finance is legally required to disclose the names of students who have received student loan remissions. The Department reviewed the current practice and has determined that this level of disclosure is required in accordance with the *Financial Administration Act*. The disclosure of this information also supports the principles of transparency and accountability to the public. The Comptroller General did communicate with the Information and Privacy Commissioner during, and after the review. The Comptroller General also consulted with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, who have since amended their student loan application form to ensure students are aware that any student loan remissions will be disclosed in the Public Accounts.

Recommendation 6

The Standing Committee on Government Operations recommends that the Government of the Northwest Territories provide a response to this report within 120 days.