STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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Mr. Herb Cox
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Mr. Glen Hart
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Mr. Warren Michelson
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Ms. Nicole Sarauer
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Mr. Randy Weekes
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[The committee met at 08:00.]

The Chair: — Good morning everyone. Welcome to Public Accounts. Today we are going to be reviewing several chapters, consideration of the Provincial Auditor's report, several chapters from the Ministry of Social Services. Welcome today to the officials from Social Services. We have Greg Miller, the deputy minister here today. So welcome. You'll have an opportunity in a few minutes to introduce your officials and make some comments.

Welcome to my fellow committee members. Mr. Doke, Mr. Weekes, Mr. Buckingham, Mr. Merriman, Mr. Cox, Ms. Campeau, and Ms. Sarauer are here today. I'm Danielle Chartier, the Chair of PAC [Public Accounts Committee]. Welcome to our Provincial Auditor, Ms. Judy Ferguson. And we have, as always, folks from the Provincial Comptroller's office. Welcome Terry Paton, the Provincial Comptroller, and to Carina Chow, an analyst with that office. Welcome to your first PAC meeting today, I think. With that, we have a . . . Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Sorry, I do have some comments I need to make before we begin the agenda. So just let me know when it's an appropriate time to step in.

The Chair: — Okay, we're about to start the agenda. So if you have some comments, you can make them now.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I want to follow up on some matters that we've had outstanding on PAC. On February, as the committee well knows, there was several undertakings that were made by GTH [Global Transportation Hub] and Ministry of Highways officials to provide documents to this committee. It's been I believe just over a month now and we have yet to receive those documents or have any word on those documents.

So I'd like to table a motion to ask the Chair to follow up with the officials to ask them for the status of that documentation. As we know from asking those questions, there were a lot of undertakings that were made, and a lot of information that was left outstanding that we do need to have the opportunity to follow up on. And I always worry when there isn't a deadline, if it's being pushed to the bottom of somebody's plate, and it has been over a month.

So at some point in time we'll probably, once we are able to see the documents, we will want to have those officials probably here at a later date to ask them some questions with respect to those documents. I know in particular when we were talking in February there was an email that was dated December 6th that we had a lot of questions about. But through the context of the email it was the answers from the officials that were able to uncover some of the more important aspects of that email. That's just an example of why it's important to have officials here to testify with respect to documentation.

But this particular motion today is only with respect to asking for follow-up, for an update from the Global Transportation Hub and Ministry of Highways officials . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . Yes, I'll table that motion right now. And I

know the government members are getting used to automatically voting against whatever motion I table, but I urge them to take a look at this motion carefully. And it's an extremely reasonable motion, is what I'm trying to say. So take a look. Members opposite will have the opportunity to, if they do have comments, to comment after I'm done commenting. It's usually the respectful thing to do.

So at that time I'll table this motion.

The Chair: — Could you please read your motion?

Ms. Sarauer: — Absolutely.

That the Standing Committee of Public Accounts formally requests an update from the Global Transportation Hub and the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure on the outstanding information and documentation promised to the committee throughout the questioning of officials on the auditor's *Special Report: Land Acquisition Processes, The Global Transportation Hub Authority and Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure* by Friday, March 17th, 2017.

The Chair: — Ms. Sarauer . . .

Ms. Sarauer: — Sorry, I'll maybe speak to the deadline. It's just asking, all we're asking for is for the Chair to send an email, and I think it's pretty reasonable to expect that an email can be sent and a response can be sent back as to an update.

We're not asking for the documentation by the 17th. We're asking for an update from the officials as to where they are with respect to providing us that documentation by the 17th. So to me, understanding how emails work, it's pretty reasonable that that can be done by the 17th.

The Chair: — So Ms. Sarauer has moved:

That the Standing Committee of Public Accounts formally requests an update from the Global Transportation Hub and the Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure on the outstanding information and documentation promised to the committee throughout the questioning of officials on the auditor's *Special Report: Land Acquisition Processes, The Global Transportation Hub Authority and Ministry of Highways and Infrastructure* by Friday, March 17th, 2017.

Is the committee ready for the question? Mr. Doke.

Mr. Doke: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I don't know as we need a motion for that. We get status reports on all ministries and where they're at with questions, whatever. I think that's just procedure. We can ask for a status report, but I don't think it has to be handled by way of a motion.

The Chair: — I think we do, Mr. Doke, that this this committee needs, just in terms of . . . I need direction from the committee to be able to follow up with the GTH and Highways, I believe, to find out where the status is. If it's an order of the committee, and then they will, they . . .

Mr. Doke: — Do we ask for a status on anything else?

The Chair: — Well the committee has the ability to ask for status on anything else.

Mr. Doke: — I still don't think we need a motion for that. I think that's just procedure. If the Chair wants to follow up with the status on those, that's fine. But putting a date to it by way of motion, I don't think that's necessary.

The Chair: — And you're . . . And you will vote accordingly.

Mr. Doke: — Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: — Is there any further comments?

An Hon. Member: — Questions.

The Chair: — Questions. Mr. Merriman.

Hon. Mr. Merriman: — Thank you, Madam Chair. I guess I was just a little concerned with the comment that this is going to be pushed to the bottom of the plate from officials. Again, we rely on the officials. They are doing their normal course of work and Public Accounts is something that they have to appear in and have to report to, but they are doing their day-to-day job.

I know I've spoken to Highways and they're getting the information back as fast as they can, but they do have a normal amount of work to do. And I'm very confident that the officials will get back in a timely manner. We've never had a problem at Public Accounts that I've been made aware of. And I don't know, Madam Chair, if you have been made aware of anything that's been late in getting back to Public Accounts, so I don't see the purpose of this motion. Thanks.

The Chair: — Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. Just a few follow-up comments. I thank Mr. Merriman for the comments. And his comments express my concern that these officials are extremely busy, and I recognize that. And we're asking for documentation in addition to their daily activities, which is why I made the point that sometimes that results in things, especially if there's not a deadline, being pushed to the bottom. And I think it would be more prudent for the committee to get an update from the officials directly rather than the Government House Leader, Madam Chair.

And if you feel more comfortable having direction from the committee about sending an email, it sounds like other committee members see that as being a reasonable request. And if you feel more comfortable not doing it without that direction, then I think it would be appropriate to vote in favour of the motion.

The Chair: — Thank you for that. Any further discussion? Mr. Cox.

Mr. Cox: — I guess further to the comment you made, Madam Chair, that it's a normal course of business to follow up. If you feel that this has been longer than it needs to be, I think you have the authority to go ahead and contact them and ask them, number one, you know, update and when can we expect it. I think that should be the normal course of business. And I don't

think we need a motion for it.

The Chair: — No, fair enough, fair enough, Mr. Cox. I think an order of the committee strengthens that ability though for the GTH and Highways to respond. And it is really simply a follow-up. From looking at the motion here, it's just a simple follow-up: when can we expect to see answers from the GTH and Highways? I think it's a pretty simple request. But I am happy if . . . We have a motion on the floor here, and you can vote accordingly. So is the committee ready for the question?

Some Hon. Members: — Question.

The Chair: — So all in favour? Aye?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — All those opposed?

An Hon. Member: — Recorded division.

The Chair: — Okay, recorded division. Sorry. Yes, I'm doing . . . The fallback will be the recorded division here. All those in favour, please raise your hands. All those opposed, please raise your hands. That is defeated six to one. All right, thank you for that.

Now moving on to the agenda. Ms. Ferguson.

Social Services

Ms. Ferguson: — Good morning, Madam Chair, Deputy Chair, members, and officials. With me this morning, I've got Ms. Tara Clemett. Tara's the deputy that's responsible for the portfolio of Social Services. And behind her is Ms. Kim Lowe. Kim is actually double duty this morning. She's not only our committee liaison, but Kim has also actively worked on a number of the audits that are before us this morning here.

So there's five chapters on the agenda. We're going to present the first two chapters together in one presentation — I'll do that — and then we'll present the remaining four chapters, individually pausing after each chapter.

Before we launch into our presentations, I just want to take a moment and extend a thank you to the deputy minister of Social Services and his staff for the co-operation extended to us during the course of our work.

So just moving on to the very first two chapters, so chapter 28 of our 2015 report, volume 2 and chapter 20 of our 2016 report, volume 2 each reports the results of our annual integrated audits of the Ministry of Social Services for the years ended March 31st, 2015 and March 31st of 2016, respectively.

In chapter 28 of our 2015 report, and if you go on to page . . . You'll find it on page 137. We recommend that the ministry follow its established processes for removing unneeded user access. In 2015-16 the ministry started to review reports of inactive users, but did so each quarter. We continued to find unneeded user access was not removed promptly; for example, individuals continued to have network access for 11 to 85 days after their date of last employment. Not removing unneeded

user access to its computer systems and data promptly increases the risk of unauthorized access to confidential information; for example, information about children in care, banking information. It also increases the risk of loss of public money.

In our 2016 report, and that's the 2016 year-end, we continued to report two additional matters of concern. First, Social Services continued not to follow its established processes to ensure that only eligible clients receive assistance and that they receive the correct amount of assistance. The ministry had simplified its legislation and updated its policy manual for income assistant payments. It trained front-line staff on the changes. However staff continued not to consistently follow the ministry's policies and procedures. This results in the ministry not having support for all of its payments and putting at risk that the recipients could be receiving the incorrect amount of social assistance.

Second, the ministry was not doing timely reviews of operation and financial reports that it receives from community-based organizations. Not reviewing these reports from CBOs in a timely manner increases the risk that the ministry does not identify and take timely corrected action as needed. This concludes my presentation.

The Chair: — Thanks, Ms. Ferguson. And Mr. Allan, if you'd like to make some comments and introduce any officials you've got . . . Oh, Mr. Miller. Oh my gosh, I'm sorry, Mr. Miller. I'm sorry, Ms. Allan.

Mr. Miller: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Greg Miller, deputy minister. And I'm pleased to introduce this morning Lynn Allan, assistant deputy minister of housing programs and finance. I have with me as well Bob Wihlidal, assistant deputy minister of disability programs. From income assistance programs and corporate planning, I have Assistant Deputy Minister Constance Hourie. I have Leanne Forgie who is our acting executive director in finance; and from child and family programs, Tobie Eberhardt, executive director of community service; and Brenda Kirtzinger, executive director of program service design. And in the back row I have, from income assistance, Marni Williams, director of operational effectiveness.

So I'm pleased to begin my presentation today and would first like to recognize the Provincial Auditor and certainly her officials, and just recognize the collaborative work that we've undertaken to, you know, on a shared interest in our sort of continuous improvement journey in the Ministry of Social Services to deliver effective outcomes for Saskatchewan's most vulnerable citizens. The directions that they provide and the efforts that the ministry gives in response certainly improves the organization and provides that enhanced level of service that folks in Saskatchewan expect.

[08:15]

I'm pleased to provide a brief update on the status of each new or partially implemented recommendation, and won't comment on the recommendations that have been completed. And as 2016 volume 2, 20 and 2015 volume 2, 28 are essentially the same, I'll limit my comments to chapter 20 and the most recent report.

So in terms of 4.1, this recommendation is in progress. This recommendation was new in '15 and carried into the 2016 volume. The ministry has established procedures for removing access. In order to fully implement this procedure, we will continue to remind supervisors, managers of their important responsibility to ensure that departing employees' access to IT [information technology] is removed in a timely fashion.

It's important that we maintain monitoring of this as it's an ongoing process. We're a large ministry, and so we're working with our managers to come up with some programs to ensure that they're continually monitoring stale accounts on the Government of Saskatchewan network with regard to user access within the ministry and to provide education with them about the importance of this work, that it's a continual requirement of their work. So this work will be ongoing.

In terms of 4.2, this recommendation is partially implemented. In March of 2015, the ministry simplified and modernized *The Saskatchewan Assistance Regulations* clarifying the intent and increasing consistency with the Saskatchewan assistance program and Saskatchewan assured income for disability, the SAID program.

Updated training manuals and educations for staff have certainly led to fewer errors. We have to also work on improved information flow to our clients. So SAP [Saskatchewan assistance plan] and SAID handbooks have been revised and included for clients during their service application and review process.

As well, the ministry has focused the work of income assistance eligibility review unit on high-risk transactions. So these would be transactions such as excess shelter, client moves, medical travel, and new clients that are rather more complex and require some additional attention. The ministry recognizes, certainly recognizes that IA [independent assessment] programs are at times outdated and overly complex. So in the coming year, the ministry will focus its efforts on renewing income assistance programs, making them simpler, and simpler for our clients to navigate and for workers to assess client needs and work with clients.

The changes we intend to make will help us to meet the basic needs of a growing number of people in Saskatchewan while focusing on transforming income assistance to certainly better serve those in the greatest need. The work on this recommendation will be ongoing

4.3 has been partially implemented. Discussions with CBOs to increase the understandings, the ministry's understandings, of their challenges and their understanding of our requirements within the ministry have occurred. The engagement with CBOs along with a review of our annual reporting deadline has been concluded.

Through this work we've come to a place where beginning in '17-18 our reporting deadline will increase from 90 to 120 days for CBOs. This makes the ministry's policies consistent with the requirements of other government organizations and provides additional time for CBOs to comply with this requirement.

In response to some of the challenges we heard from CBOs, we have also updated and simplified our sign-off policies for the CBOs where needed. We certainly anticipate that this will reduce the time it takes for CBOs to provide their information back to the ministry.

In the coming year we will continue to review and update the formal escalation process with non-compliant CBOs. The ministry has a number of CBOs, so there is a number of conversations that have to be facilitated.

We will also continue on work for a multi-year plan to support CBO sustainability and outcomes-based funding. This is expected to result in recommendation to further improve the reporting process and training around our interactions with CBOs. And so, Madam Chair, that concludes my comments on this.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Miller. Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. And thank you, Mr. Miller, for your comments on the chapters we're discussing right now. I just have a few questions.

First, a question about the recommendation regarding timely removal of user access. You had mentioned in your comments that you have been working with managers to explain the importance of ensuring that these accounts get shut down, and then also working with managers to then audit that progress as well. I could be wrong, that the auditing function, the internal auditing function, could be at a different level. I'm curious about your internal auditing function, number one to ensure that that is actually being followed through. And then I'm also curious, and I'm wondering if you can elaborate more, on what sort of buy-in you're getting from management with respect to these concerns.

Mr. Miller: — Well let me begin with the buy-in process. I think it's an ongoing dialogue with the managers who have regular day-to-day work. So in the cases where folks are leaving, it's just sort of that constant gardening of, this is another part of practice that has been identified as an area of risk for us.

In terms of the internal audit process, I'll probably get one of my ADMs [assistant deputy minister] to comment more specifically on the audit process and our internal process and those dialogues to make sure that we have some sort of countermeasures in place to ensure that as employees leave the ministry, we get updated information. Part of that is our work also involving central agencies, ITD [information technology division], and access to our various data systems across that ministry. So I'll call on the ADM, Constance Hourie, to fill in some of the gaps there.

Ms. Hourie: — Hi. Thank you. Constance Hourie. So just a little bit about our process. So we do have a quality assurance unit in income assistance and in the ministry, and those folks are a team that go in and they do it on a schedule. I don't know offhand what that schedule is, but on a schedule they go and they review files and they ensure that we are taking user access away.

And just, I'll take you through here. So managers and supervisors are to let ITD know — which is the central service agency — via a service request five days prior to the employee's last day to remove access on their departure date. They also have . . . We've developed a checklist for our staff so that they go through that. And I'll just give you a little information on that checklist. So it includes the reminder to remove computer access, including access to specific applications: MIDAS [multi-informational database application system] financials, MIDAS HR [human resources] payroll, MIDAS timekeeper administration. So we do have a process that we remind our supervisors and managers that it is their responsibility to remove access for their staff. We do internal monthly monitoring of user accesses to assist in detecting unneeded user access which were not removed appropriately or were . . . Further education and communication for staff, it's ongoing.

The Chair: — Thank you so much. Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you so much for that follow-up. And then I do have a few questions about 4.3, your discussions with CBOs. I'm happy to hear there's been some discussion and some movement to make sure that your reporting timelines are a little bit more forgiving, I would say, for CBOs, are a little bit more reflective of the challenges that CBOs face. I come from the world of CBOs so I know that it can be challenging meeting different deadline requirements for funders for reporting, especially when you have funding streams coming from different ministries, for example. So I'm happy to hear that that dialogue is ongoing.

I do have one question though. You had mentioned — and correct me if I'm wrong — in your comments something about outcomes-based funding, that you're working towards that step. Can you elaborate on that a little bit more please?

Mr. Miller: — Yes. So certainly the ministry has engaged in a CBO sustainability review with some CBOs. And the notion of outcomes-based funding is the desire to more closely align the ministry's core intent, the programs and services that we mean to secure for the population that we serve, and that alignment piece. So to have better alignment and understanding of, sort of the requirements of the ministry and the nature of the contracts that we establish with our community-based organizations.

I think that's inherently good on both sides of that equation for the alignment piece and I think it helps us and supports us in terms of our desire to accurately expend and then report back on the results.

And I'll get Bob Wihlidal to give more specifics on the nature of that interaction. But just to comment on the . . . It's a work in progress with our CBOs, and I think it's helping us to improve the service that we provide.

Mr. Wihlidal: — Sure. Just a few comments to clarify or add to Greg's comments around CBO sustainability. Back in 2015 we engaged MNP organization to assist us with some collaborative work with CBOs and the SARC organization, Saskatchewan Association of Rehabilitation Centres — formerly known as — to examine sustainability of the operations as they relate to group homes and day programs and

other services that these operations provide.

What the work showed us is that we needed to do work in five core areas around attraction, recruitment, and compensation. A core area around, what's the capacity of those various CBOs to deliver the services we need to have delivered? What kind of training needs do they have, and are we meeting those needs? And some detail about market analysis — what kind of roles are they trying to fill, and what's the competition look like? And what's the salary base required to meet that competition, and how does that relate to our funding status? That was one area.

And so we've, in each of these areas, have task teams assigned that involves Social Services staff in child and family services and community living as well as officials from each of the CBOs, or some of the CBOs I should say. So that was one task team.

The second is around shared services, looking at opportunities there may be to reduce overhead and create opportunities for better efficiencies among CBOs. And some of these are fairly broad opportunities around insurance policies or pensions and benefits and those kinds of things that a task team is looking at right now.

A third is around governance. And so what's the best practice around governance for CBOs? How do we make sure they have the training and competencies at the board level to do a good job of governance?

A fourth area is around standards. So what is it that they're governing? What's the policy governance that is standardized across these organizations, and how do we make sure that they're meeting minimum service standards and governance standards?

And the fifth area is outcomes measurement. Preliminarily it was called outcomes funding. MNP gave us some good advice about collaboration that, particularly in outcomes analysis and outcomes funding work, their analysis inter-jurisdictionally in North America was, through their review, is that where it was done well, it was done collaboratively with the organizations that were going to be affected. So some careful work was needed or is needed to that end.

And so what we've really done is stepped back a little bit and said, well first thing we need to do well is understand and identify what outcomes we're trying to achieve and how we might measure those. The next step after that would be, what would be the funding mechanism that would generate those kinds of outcomes? So we're stepping through that right now with a task team.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. So just to clarify, you're still sort of working around step one then? You haven't moved on to . . .

Mr. Wihlidal: — Correct. That's correct.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay. Thank you so much.

The Chair: — Are there any further questions on these two chapters? Seeing none, for the 2015 report volume 1, chapter 28, we have one new recommendation. I need a motion with

respect . . . Mr. Doke.

Mr. Doke: — Thank you, Madam Chair. In regards to the 2015 report volume 2, chapter 28, recommendation no. 1, we would concur with the recommendation and note progress towards compliance.

The Chair: — Thank you. Mr. Doke has moved that for the 2015 report volume 2, chapter 28, the one recommendation, that this committee concur with the recommendation and note progress to compliance. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. For the 2016 report volume 2, chapter 20, there are no new recommendations. Those are all outstanding. So we can conclude considerations. Could I have a motion to that effect?

Mr. Doke: — So moved, Madam Chair.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Doke. Mr. Doke has moved for the 2016 report volume 2, chapter 20, that this committee conclude consideration. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. All right, thank you. Moving on to the 2015 report volume 2, chapter 39. I'll pass that along.

Ms. Clemett: — Saskatchewan government ministries have a target of nine days of sick leave per full-time equivalent employee for the 2015-16 fiscal year, and a lower target of seven days of sick leave per FTE [full-time equivalent] for the fiscal years after 2017-18. In fiscal 2014-15, Social Services had sick leave usage of 10.7 days per FTE. For that year, the Ministry of Social Services had the second-highest sick leave usage among ministries equating to paid sick leave of $5.6 million. Employee absenteeism can impact Social Services' ability to deliver services to vulnerable citizens, pose a safety issue, reduce morale, and increase the direct and indirect costs of delivering programs.

[08:30]

Chapter 39 of our 2015 report volume 2, pages 267 to 277, contains the results of our audit of the ministry's processes to minimize its employee absenteeism. We found the ministry did not have effective processes to minimize employee absenteeism. The chapter identifies four areas where the ministry needs to improve as reflected in our four recommendations. I will state each recommendation and explain why we made each.

First, on page 273, we recommend Social Services actively encourage supervisors to take available management training and monitor participation. We found very few of the ministry employees were aware of and accessed the employee attendance training that was available. Training promotes an understanding of expectations, provides guidance on how to deal with absenteeism issues, and can increase awareness of programs and supports available.

Second, on page 274, we recommend that Social Services give all supervisors quarterly reports that identify employees with higher-than-average sick leave to help them determine the reasons for absences. In 2014-15, the Public Service Commission developed a report that identified employees with more than 10 days of sick leave. The report outlined which days of the week that employees were absent and then total number of days they were absent. However not all ministry supervisors had seen this report. Receiving a report identifying absenteeism will help supervisors determine the causes of absences. Determining causes of absences is key to developing actions to reduce absenteeism.

This leads to our third recommendation on page 274. We recommend Social Services, working with the Public Service Commission, develop targeted strategies to manage employee absenteeism based on the analysis of the causes for absenteeism.

Finally, on page 276, we recommend that Social Services give senior management periodic reports on the effectiveness of its attendance management strategies, including detailed analysis of the results. The quarterly reports that senior management received during our audit period documented sick leave taken as compared to targets, but did not explain why usage sick leave targets were not met. Without documented analysis of results, management cannot properly determine if the actions are effectively reducing employee absenteeism in the ministry. This concludes my presentation.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Clemett. Mr. Miller, if you'd like to make some comments.

Mr. Miller: — Thank you, Madam Chair. So with respect to 4.1, this is not implemented, a new recommendation. A key area of focus for the ministry in the coming year will be to reduce employee sick leave usage to an average of seven days per FTE by 2018 in alignment with other areas in government. We will do this through continued awareness building, capacity support, and accountability.

I'm going to go through a little bit of a stage plan in terms of some of our actions here for the committee. The first phase is that the work is about certainly building awareness among senior leaders, managers, and supervisors, as well as employees. This will require us to, as has been recommended, ensure that there are tools available to these personnel, that training is made available, and that data is available, and the capacity to analyze it, support it.

The second phase is about building leadership capacity through the development of targeted plans. These plans need to address above-average sick leave usage where required, with the support from the PSC's [Public Service Commission] human resource business partner team where required.

The third phase in the ministry will involve ensuring accountability and includes setting goals, targets in tracking progress by individuals within their work plan and sharing success stories. The work on this particular recommendation will continue throughout twenty-seven eighteen.

Moving on to 4.2(2), this is partially implemented. As well a

new recommendation. Beginning in August of 2015, the PSC human service resource team prepared reports for attendance and distributed a manager's tool kit. That tool kit included sample reports for managers to support their role. We recently met with the PSC human business partner team, and they are preparing a new set of reports for us to use.

The 2016-17 quarter 2, Ministry of Social Services average sick leave rate was 9.42 days per FTE. That represents a decrease from 2015-16 where we were at 10.4 days per FTE. So building in the right direction; more work required. We will continue to build on this initiative and develop further components as we have that interaction with the staff, sort of flexing the response to what's discovered through the examination and back and forth with the managers. This work will certainly continue throughout 2017-18.

4.2 sub (3) is not implemented; a new recommendation. The PSC human resource team has met with our managers to go through attendance data and to develop targeted plans where required. We anticipate an updated report soon that we can analyze. To formalize this expectation, we expect that our managers will, in their annual work plans, include specific objectives to monitor and to manage employee attendance to reduce absenteeism and to focus on creating a safe, healthy, productive, inclusive workplace within the Ministry of Social Services.

In late 2015, the ministry hired a disability management consultant to focus on early intervention, work-related and integrated case management where employees were presently away from the workplace, either due to illness or injury, and to work to see those employees back at work as soon as possible. The consultant works closely with PSC's human resources team. And this work will continue in 2017-18 as well.

4.4 sub (4) is not implemented. This is a new recommendation. We will continue to analyze and review the effectiveness of our strategies throughout the third phase of this work time that I had mentioned earlier, which is about a few different things including accountability, goal setting, targets, and tracking progress and getting into that conversation and recognizing success stories to, you know . . . Sometimes improvement is just sharing and understanding what's working and what's being successful.

We've recently met with PSC and, as I mentioned earlier, getting updates on these reports so that we can continue to analyze and respond to them. The PSC provides quarterly metrics to senior management, including sick leave usage. This work will be ongoing throughout the year.

And I think . . . Where am I? Yes, so that concludes my comments on this section.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Miller. Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Miller. I just want to clarify. I think you had mentioned this, but I can't quite recall so just to make sure that I understand. I heard that there's some either talk or it has been implemented that the ministry will be conducting exit surveys whenever an employee is leaving. Is that a thing that the ministry is considering doing?

Mr. Miller: — I know that we do conduct exit surveys when employees leave the ministry as a matter of course. I don't have . . . I'll just have to get an update on where the specifics of that is.

Ms. Sarauer: — Sure. I'm curious to know how long that's been going and if there's been any results that have flowed out of that, if there's been any common lessons learned, I suppose.

Mr. Miller: — So the work within the ministry on exit surveys follows government's overall plan and uses the PSC within the ministry. We don't have a plan in place yet for that to be spread across the ministry.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay, so just to clarify, the exit surveys aren't being conducted yet, but you plan on conducting them in the future?

Mr. Miller: — So for clarity, the exit surveys that are completed right now are completed at the PSC as opposed to within the ministry.

Ms. Sarauer: — Is there a plan to be doing that within the ministry in the near future or no?

Mr. Miller: — There is not a specific plan today to spread that within the ministry.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay. I guess why I'm asking that is that the auditor mentions in their report several different reasons for why this could be occurring, why these large absenteeisms are occurring within the ministry. And I thought that perhaps going to the individuals that are leaving might help get a better underpinning of what's actually going on within the ministry. If, for example, work dissatisfaction has something to do with it, you could get that information through surveying individuals who are leaving the ministry for other opportunities.

So maybe my question is more along the lines of what are you doing within the ministry to ensure that you're addressing the underlying reasons for these absenteeisms? Because as you well know, you can come up with different solutions, but if you don't know what the underlying symptom is, it might be difficult to ultimately address the target that you have set for yourself.

Mr. Miller: — So the specific work I described, that sort of three phase process that we're involved in right now, and I guess in there lies the answer to what the ministry is doing. So it's that ongoing dialogue within the ministry in terms of the managers and the front-line employees and then certainly even to speak to the notion of exit interviews. So we're in that work right now. We anticipate it will be completed over the course of this year, and I would expect that logically that the notion of exit interviews will probably come up in that discussion as well.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay, great. Thank you.

Ms. Allan: — I'll maybe add to that. It's Lynn Allan. So Greg talked about our process in terms of addressing attendance, and like he said, we're very involved with the HR business partners and working with them and getting some data. And one of the areas when we talk about some of the tools that are available to

us are, there's a manager's guide to accommodation in terms of bringing people back and what accommodations they may need in the workplace. There's also a tool that is supporting managers and employees to enhance regular attendance. So that is part of this process. And part of attendance management is communication and making sure that our managers and supervisors understand attendance management. So some of the things that you're talking about are talked about in those conversations.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Any further questions on this chapter? Seeing none . . . With respect to this chapter, although Mr. Miller, you've noted that three of the recommendations are not implemented, in your comments you've also talked about the foundational work that's laid to get there. So I'd argue that they're in progress. So with that, could I have a motion?

Mr. Doke: — Thank you, Madam Chair. In regards to the 2015 report volume 2, chapter 39, recommendations 1 through 4 would be . . . we would concur with the recommendations and note progress towards compliance.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Doke. Mr. Doke has moved that for the 2015 *Report of the Provincial Auditor* volume 2, chapter 39 that this committee concur with recommendations 1 through 4 and note progress to compliance. Any further comments? Seeing none, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Thank you for that. Moving on to the next chapter. Ms. Clemett.

[08:45]

Ms. Clemett: — Social Services, through its child and family programs division, is responsible for effective programs and services for children in need of protection, including children in care. The ministry uses an electronic case management system called Linkin to support the delivery of its program and services for children in care. Linkin stores sensitive information on the children in care and the related care plans, and generates and tracks payments made to foster families.

In chapter 17 of our 2016 report volume 1, pages 219 to 228 contains the results of our audit of Social Services processes to protect information about children in care in the Linkin system. In this chapter we found the ministry had effective processes other than four areas that need improvement. We made four recommendations for the committee's consideration.

First, on page 224, we recommend Social Services establish a written plan for updating its Linkin system to protect it from known security vulnerabilities. System patches address security vulnerabilities. Even though patches were released quarterly, the ministry applied them on an annual basis. Also since August 2015, the vendor of a part of the Linkin system stopped supporting that part. Being aware of end-of-support dates and updating systems on a timely basis makes systems less susceptible to compromise and failure because vulnerabilities are addressed in a timely manner.

Second, on page 226, we recommend Social Services set out expected timeframes for removing Linkin user access within a policy. For 16 out of the 30 users with unneeded access we tested, it took over 10 working days after their last day of work to have their system access removed. Linkin users must have a password and a token to access Linkin. The ministry didn't have evidence that individuals no longer in its employ returned tokens upon departure. Also at March 2016, the last time the ministry reviewed Linkin user access was over two years previously; that is December 2013. Failure to remove unneeded user access promptly increases the risk that case files aren't being managed timely, unauthorized individuals access confidential data, and unauthorized changes are made to data.

Third recommendation, on page 226, we recommend Social Services follow its processes to verify completeness of Linkin case management information entered about care providers. Linkin tracks information on care providers including names of other individuals living within the foster family household. For 2 out of the 10 new providers we tested, the ministry had not completely entered information related to other members in the household. Not having complete information about care providers in which the ministry has placed children in care could impact the safety of those children.

Finally our last recommendation, on page 227, we recommend Social Services consistently document review of Linkin reports designed to identify unusual payments. The ministry considers all payments over $10,000 or overrides to service rates greater than $1,000 as unusual payments. It requires staff to review reports of payments not following usual payment processes and to document the review. We found staff did not document the review of unusual payment reports. Not documenting review increases the risks that tasks are not completed how and when they're expected, and inappropriate payments are made. Documentation also enables supervisors to monitor completion of assigned procedures. This concludes my presentation.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Clemett. Mr. Miller.

Mr. Miller: — Thank you, Madam Chair. So with respect to 4.1, this is a new recommendation and it's not implemented. And I'll go through some of the steps that we are working on currently, and I anticipate that this will be completed by the first quarter of 2017-18.

So the ministry has identified certainly the need to keep the Linkin system current, and to address security vulnerabilities as well as new functionality. We are developing a release management strategy, and the intention of that strategy is to support the work that we are working on with ITD to ensure sort of an alignment between ITD's work — they call it a technology road map — and its support of our Linkin system.

The business technology road map is a four-year plan that is reviewed annually and is used for things like to budget and to plan annual IT work and support, including upgrades and patches to Linkin that will be a part of that ongoing plan moving forward. So as I said, we anticipate that this will be completed in the first quarter of '17-18.

4.2 is partially implemented. This recommendation is new. We recognize . . . and has a similar theme to earlier discussions. We

recognize the risk that there is unauthorized access to Linkin and certainly recognize the need to ensure that there is no access from outside the ministry. There are existing processes and procedures to manage the removal of employee access to Linkin, and resources have been allocated to accomplish this specific activity. In 2017-18 we will certainly formalize this process by writing and communicating it as policy within the ministry.

In 2017-18, timelines for requests to have user accounts locked will be added to the Linkin user request form, so some process is put in place to specifically deal with this notion of having the timely removal of unauthorized access to Linkin. This work will be completed in the first quarter of 2017-18 as well.

With respect to 4.3, partially implemented. The accuracy of client data is certainly of paramount importance to the ministry, and additional steps will be taken to ensure that the complete information is entered into the system as it regards these individuals living in specific homes which we're intervening.

In 2017-18 we intend to make policy revisions to the children's service manual to further clarify just what specific information is intended to be entered into Linkin. We will ensure that our resource workers are trained in this new policy and emphasize the importance of entering information on all household members within the Linkin system. To ensure compliance with our specific policy, our quality assurance unit will include in their review any new foster home member information that is entered into Linkin. So you can imagine it's a dynamic process, and we want to make sure that the process that we have to support our workers to ensure its accuracy represents that sort of dynamic nature of the changing file in these cases. This additional review will be in effect from April 1st, 2017 to March 31st of 2019.

With respect to 4.3, this is implemented. The recommendation has been fully implemented. We have a process in place for payments which exceed $10,000, that threshold that's been established. These payments are held until they are validated and authorized by a supervisor. Additional training has been implemented to ensure staff are aware of the expectation to review these payments exceeding $10,000. Financial services staff also initial the invoice batch payment to verify the process that has been followed in these specific instances. That's the end of my comments.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Miller. Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Miller. I just have a few questions with respect to 4.3, recommendation no. 3, and I'm happy to hear . . . and thank you for explaining all the work that's been done to ensure that adequate and complete information gets placed into the Linkin case management system. As you indicated, it's very important that that is done in an accurate way.

I'm curious to know if, while doing this audit and determining steps to improve your processes, if you were able to uncover why these errors were occurring in the first place.

Mr. Miller: — So I think part of the challenge is just the complexity that the work represents, capturing that real-life

complexity of what does that involve, and then frankly capturing that in a data system and sort of the interplay between those two things. So it's a relatively new system to the ministry, so a new type of work for the individuals involved. So sort of, it's that notion of continually trying to match the technology to the biology and the sociology.

Ms. Sarauer: — So as you had indicated in your earlier remarks, that's an ongoing process in terms of making sure that the software, the system matches the complex and dynamic work that your ministry does?

Mr. Miller: — Yes, I think that's fair to say, absolutely.

Ms. Sarauer: — Is that resulting at all in challenges within the software that your ministry has not been able to resolve?

Mr. Miller: — Not that I'm aware of, no.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thanks.

The Chair: — Any further questions on this chapter? Seeing none, could I have a motion . . . What's this committee's will about this chapter?

Mr. Doke: — Thank you, Madam Chair. In regards to the 2016 report volume 1, chapter 17, recommendations 1, 2, and 3, we would concur with the recommendations and note progress towards compliance.

The Chair: — Thank you. Mr. Doke has moved that for chapter 17 of the 2016 report volume 1 for recommendations 1, 2, and 3, that this committee concur with the recommendations and note progress to compliance. Any further questions, discussion? Seeing none, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. Mr. Doke.

Mr. Doke: — Madam Chair, in regards to the 2016 report volume 1, chapter 17, recommendation no. 4, we would concur with the recommendation and note compliance.

The Chair: — Thank you. Mr. Doke has moved for the 2016 report volume 1, chapter 17, recommendation no. 4, that this committee concur with the recommendation and note compliance. Any further discussion? Seeing none, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. All right. We shall move on to the last chapter, chapter 33 of the 2016 report volume 1. Ms. Clemett.

Ms. Clemett: — Chapter 33 of our 2016 report volume 1, starting on page 299, reports the results of our follow-up of seven recommendations we previously made regarding the ministry's processes to protect children in care. By March 2016 the ministry had implemented two of the seven outstanding recommendations and made progress towards implementing the other five recommendations.

Key improvements include conducting annual quality-assurance reviews at First Nations who provide services to children in care, which is the same process for the ministry's three service areas, routinely monitoring quality-assurance results and establishing targets for compliance with child protection standards. For example, the ministry has set a longer term target of 85 per cent compliance for each key child protection standard.

The ministry needs to improve in the following areas. Make sure ministry staff and First Nations agencies follow key child protection standards to protect children who are under their care. For example, the ministry needs to make sure criminal record checks are completed for all adults living in a home prior to granting the home approval to provide care. Lack of compliance with key child protection standards increases the risk that children in care may not receive the care they need. Consistently complete and receive timely reports from First Nations agencies related to children in their care to allow the ministry to properly track and oversee care for these children. Work with the Saskatoon Tribal Council to have access to all child care files when the ministry is completing its annual quality assurance review to confirm that all children are properly cared for and protected. This concludes my presentation.

The Chair: — Thank you, Ms. Clemett. Mr. Miller.

Mr. Miller: — Thank you, Madam Chair. With respect to 3.1, this recommendation is partially implemented. Work on this recommendation continues, and the ministry continues to strengthen compliance at a level of compliance with child care standards.

In the past year, we have implemented Linkin financial payment project which included automating the authorization process for payments. We have developed monthly contact standard reports to monitor progress for our workers involved in child care. We have increased the frequency of our file audits that we do with First Nations child and family service agencies from a period of every three years to now occurring annually.

Throughout '17-18, the ministry's quality assurance unit will continue to monitor and to measure compliance with these new policies. The work on this recommendation will certainly be ongoing.

With regard to 3.1, this recommendation has been implemented. This recommendation had been outstanding. The Saskatoon Tribal Council child and family service agency is no longer providing child welfare services. In June of 2016, the ministry assumed responsibility for the delivery of child welfare services in the communities previously served by STC's [Saskatoon Tribal Council] child and family service agency. In July of 2016 we conducted a file audit on all files provided by STC.

In 2016 the ministry implemented the recommended targets, and the one of specific compliance standards targets is being worked on in terms of the annual completion about homeworker reports. Our quality assurance unit continues to audit the current 16 First Nations child and family service agencies annually. We continue to work with the agencies to improve results of their program file reviews.

[09:00]

The ministry also continues to host meetings with the First Nations child and family agencies executive directors three times a year to share that audited information back, to consult on program and policy changes, and to engage them in improving the standards of compliance we have with the agencies. This recommendation will be ongoing. Ongoing monitoring will continue until the compliance rate of 85 per cent for all agencies is met.

With respect to 3.3, this recommendation is implemented. The Linkin case management system enables the tracking of all children in the care of the ministry. This includes children who have been placed with approved caregivers on-reserve. The ministry and 15 of 16 First Nations agencies have signed new standard delegation agreements containing clear accountability, requirements for reporting and monitoring, and including monthly reporting of children receiving care on-reserve.

Yorkton Tribal Council Child and Family Services agency continues to operate under their original agreement, which has no end date. However YTC [Yorkton Tribal Council Child and Family Services] does provide a monthly report which is a requirement contained in the new standard delegation agreements. This recommendation will not be fully implemented until a new agreement has been signed with YTC. And we anticipate that that agreement will be in place within the coming year.

3.3 is partially implemented. Fifteen of the 16 agencies have signed the new standard delegation agreement. Work continues, as I said, with YTC to sign the new delegation agreement. In the interim, they provide monthly reporting to the ministry and access to their files. The Saskatoon Tribal Council is currently not providing child welfare services. In 2016 the ministry assumed responsibility to provide services to the seven First Nations communities previously served by this agency.

The ministry has worked throughout the past year on amendments to the child and family services regulation and the province's child and family services Act which pertain specifically to these agreements. We anticipate both amendments will receive proclamation in April of '17.

The ministry's First Nations and Métis service unit has developed a plan to ensure the timely collection and documentation from the agencies. And we anticipate this recommendation, as I said earlier, will be implemented in 2017 when YTC signs their new delegation agreement.

With regards to 3.4, we consider this implemented. The ministry continues to monitor in-person contact with children in the care through program file reviews to ensure this contact is occurring as per our provincial policies.

In 2014 the ministry increased the frequency of file audits with First Nations family service agencies from every three years, that interval, to one year. As well the introduction of structured decision-making model has resulted in increased contact standards. Two SDM [structured decision making] consultants are now in place and providing training and ongoing support to agencies, and the Children's Research Centre has been contracted to provide additional on-site visits to agencies wanting additional support.

While YTC again has not signed its contract, we anticipate this will be completed within this year. That's the end of my comments.

The Chair: — Thank you, Mr. Miller. I'd like to open up the floor for questions. Ms. Sarauer.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you, Mr. Miller, for that detailed explanation of this chapter. I'm going to try to move through in chronological order just so that we can, not get lost. I have a few questions. You've answered most of them, but I do still have a few more questions.

With respect to 3.1, you have mentioned that there's been steps in place to better monitor First Nations Child and Family Service agency's compliance rates for some of these key child protection standards that are mentioned in the report. I'm just curious what is being done in addition to just monitoring those but to ensure that those standards are elevated and met more frequently.

Mr. Miller: — So certainly . . . I guess just a general comment on this area. The goal here is 100 per cent, right. This is not something where we're looking for anything less than that. I can certainly say that in terms of supporting the ongoing monitoring, that's conversations between senior leaders as well as at the operational level. And I would describe it, everything from knowledge exchange in terms of best practices in the support of the provision of child care services and regular interaction, really at almost at the case-by-case level, between the ministry and the child and family service agencies. And perhaps I'll get Ms. Eberhardt to comment further.

Ms. Eberhardt: — Yes. So we do the audits with both the ministry and the First Nation with the same standards. And coming out of that, we would present it to the organization and develop a plan of action to address the areas that need attention.

With First Nation agencies, we have seven consultants that work closely with the agencies and they would work with the agency to develop the plan, including if there's training needs or other supports that are required.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. The auditor's report also mentioned that in ". . . 2014-2015, the average compliance rate for criminal record checks ranged from 72-93% for First Nations agencies and service areas." Has this percentage improved?

Mr. Miller: — Sorry. For clarity, the first year you . . .

Ms. Sarauer: — I'm looking at page 301 of the auditor's report and it states that in ". . . 2014-2015, the average compliance rate for criminal record checks ranged from 72-93% for First Nations agencies and service areas."

Mr. Miller: — The range is 69 to 93.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay. So it says 72 to 93 in the auditor's report. Either way, I'm just curious to know if that's improved

since 2014-2015.

Mr. Miller: — Okay. For 2016, the range is 69 to 93 per cent.

Ms. Sarauer: — Got you.

Mr. Miller: — Thank you.

Ms. Sarauer: — Thank you. So the answer is no, it hasn't improved yet.

Mr. Miller: — No.

Ms. Sarauer: — Are there any steps being taken to improve that number?

Ms. Eberhardt: — So that range includes both at time of approval and also on the yearly annual review process. And so part of it is the recommendations we would make and the work with the agency or with the ministry, depending on what the range is. So some of them are doing quite well at 93 per cent. And so we'd be working with the ones that are below the 85 per cent, first regarding targeting it and putting in place either the training or supports they need to raise that rate.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay, thank you so much. Moving on to 3.3, you had mentioned the use of Linkin to better monitor and track children in care. I was curious to know if First Nations agencies are also able to use the Linkin system or if they use a different tracking system.

Mr. Miller: — So currently, First Nations agencies are not on the Linkin system. So they have systems within their organizations that they use.

Ms. Sarauer: — Are there any struggles with making sure that the information in that system, is able to . . . I suppose there's the compliance method of ensuring that First Nations agencies are sharing information with the ministry. I'm just curious to know how well those two . . . Linkin is working with all of the other different computer systems, that I'm assuming there's several different computer systems that all the First Nations agencies are using.

Mr. Miller: — So per se, the computer systems are distinct. So that Linkin is the Saskatchewan system, and then there's disparate systems on the reserves and the child and family service agencies. Where the interchange comes is through this reporting mechanism, so that's where we rely on the reporting on the exchange of information to sort of communicate between the systems.

Ms. Sarauer: — Okay, thank you. Moving on, you had mentioned in your comments about your relationship with the Saskatoon Tribal Council. And right now they do not have any of the children in care files that they had before. And just to clarify, it sounded like, based on what you were saying, that you're working on a new agreement with Saskatoon Tribal Council or a new arrangement with Saskatoon Tribal Council. I'm just curious to know what's going on with that relationship right now and if there is any plans on having that relationship change from what it currently is right now.

Mr. Miller: — So to be sure the Saskatoon Tribal Council child and family agency right now is not providing child welfare services on-reserve, so we are providing those from within the ministry. And the ongoing relationship with Saskatoon Tribal Council is . . . We're working to improve that. That specific matter lies before the courts, and I wouldn't care to comment on that further here today.

Ms. Sarauer: — That's fair. Thank you.

The Chair: — Are there any further questions on this chapter? Seeing none, there's no new recommendations here. These are all outstanding. I'm wondering what the will of the committee is. Mr. Doke, you can conclude consideration.

Mr. Doke: — We would just conclude considerations, yes. Thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Doke has moved that this committee conclude consideration of the 2016 report volume 1, chapter 33. Is there any further discussion? Seeing none, is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Agreed. Carried. That concludes the business on our agenda today. Thank you, Mr. Miller, and to all your officials here for your time. And thank you to everybody else.

Could I have a motion to adjourn? Mr. Merriman. Is that agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. This committee stands adjourned until 8 a.m. on March 21st. Thank you.

[The committee adjourned at 09:11.]