



STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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[The committee met at 9:59.]

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, good morning. We'll convene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. I'm Trent Wotherspoon, the Chair of the Public Accounts. I'd like to introduce our committee members here today: Deputy Chair Thorsteinson, MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Chan, MLA Patterson, MLA Harrison, MLA Gordon, MLA Pratchler.

I'd like to welcome and introduce the officials from the Provincial Comptroller's office: Brent Hebert, Provincial Comptroller; Jane Borland, assistant provincial comptroller.

Of course I'd like to welcome and introduce our Provincial Auditor, Tara Clemett, and her officials from the Provincial Auditor's office that are with her in attendance here today.

Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority

Chair Wotherspoon: — Now our first order of business this morning focuses on Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming. I want to welcome President and CEO [chief executive officer] Tuer to the committee along with the officials that have joined him here today. Thanks for your work.

[10:00]

CEO Tuer, would you care to just briefly introduce who you have with us here today. Don't get into the comments on the chapter at that point. I'll come over to the auditor and then come back your way for that part.

Greg Tuer: — Yeah, so thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chair, committee members, and Provincial Auditor and her team. With me this morning are Warren Fry, vice-president of corporate services; Greg Hutchings, vice-president of liquor wholesale and distribution; and Lynnette Skaalrud, acting vice-president of regulatory services. Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay. Thank you, and thanks for being here. Thanks as well for the status update that you provided us and the work that's reflected there. I'll table that at this point in time: PAC 76-30, Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority: Status update, dated January 21st, 2026.

I'll turn it over now to the Provincial Auditor to make a presentation on the chapters.

Tara Clemett: — So thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Mr. Jason Shaw, and he is the deputy provincial auditor that is responsible for the audit at the Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority. Also behind us we're joined by Ms. Michelle Lindenbach, and she's our liaison with this committee.

Jason's going to present each chapter on the agenda separately, and we'll pause to allow for committee's discussion and deliberation after each chapter. There are no new recommendations in these chapters for the committee's consideration because these are all chapters that are following up on recommendations that the committee has already considered

and agreed to.

I would like to thank the president and CEO and his staff for the co-operation that was extended to us during our work. I'll now turn it over to Jason.

Jason Shaw: — Thank you. The Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority is responsible for regulating Saskatchewan's recreational cannabis retail and wholesale businesses. Recreational cannabis refers to cannabis products used for non-medical purposes. At December 2023, the authority regulated 182 cannabis retailers.

Chapter 19 of our 2024 report volume 1, starting on page 205, reports the progress made on the recommendations initially made in our 2020 audit around regulating recreational cannabis. By December 2023 the authority implemented seven of the eight recommendations.

In section 3.1 the authority prepared and followed appropriate guidance to record results from its regulatory activities. In 11 permit applications we tested, we found the authority followed its procedures as expected and entered 10 of the 11 application files into its IT [information technology] regulatory system after approving the application. At the time of testing, the authority was still processing the one remaining application.

We also tested a sample of 19 inspection reports and found staff properly recorded the reports in the authority's regulatory system, consistent with its expected expectations. Recording all key information in one central location enables the authority to effectively supervise that staff complete sufficient due diligence while reviewing permit applications and monitor the frequency of inspections.

In section 3.2 the authority implemented a risk-based inspection policy outlining processes for staff to determine the risk level of retail and wholesale permittees as well as the required inspection frequency based on assessed risk. We tested 19 permittees and found the authority correctly determined the risk level based on the determining factors and associated inspection frequency in all 19 cases. Having a risk-based inspection plan helps the authority allocate its resources to highest priority areas.

The authority improved its monitoring of inspection frequency for retail and wholesale permittees using a tracking spreadsheet. We found it maintained a spreadsheet identifying each permittee, expected inspection frequency, and date of inspections. We found 78 per cent of inspections were completed within the expected time frame. Actively monitoring permittees better enables the authority to detect significant non-compliance issues.

In section 3.3 the authority finalized and approved its cannabis sanctioning guideline, setting guidance to staff for implementing sanctions when it identifies non-compliance. The authority notified permittees it would begin issuing sanctions for non-compliance in April 2021. We sampled five identified infractions and found that in all five cases the authority followed its guidelines and took the regulatory action expected. Having approved and enforced sanctions enables the authority to take consistent actions to address identified non-compliance. This promotes fair treatment of all permittees.

In section 3.4 the authority began issuing sanctions for identified non-compliance. However it did not establish a set time frame for issuing sanctions. This is the one area where the recommendation was not fully addressed. Authority management indicated it used an informal expectation of six months from identifying an infraction to notifying the permittee of the authority's intended enforcement actions. However we found this did not align with its other regulatory expectations, like communicating sanctions within 60 days when regulating commercial liquor permittees. Not issuing formal sanctions for six months makes it more likely permittees do not comply with expected operating requirements and increases the risk to public health and safety.

In section 3.5 we found the authority effectively monitors the status of enforcement actions to address cannabis permittee non-compliance. Staff maintained and updated a list of sanctioned permittees and the rationale for those sanctions on a spreadsheet. We compared non-compliance information from the authority's regulatory IT system to its sanction tracking spreadsheets and found both sources had consistent information. Tracking history of permittee non-compliance enables management to monitor that it consistently and appropriately follows its cannabis sanctioning guideline.

In section 3.6 the authority's cannabis branch provides senior management with written reports on the nature and extent of non-compliance with cannabis retail and wholesale permit conditions. For example, reports included year-over-year trends in permitted cannabis retail locations, registered suppliers, applications received, and inspections completed during the year. By reporting this information to senior management, the authority decreases the risks senior management does not have information necessary to determine whether its regulatory model and approach is working as intended and to identify whether adjustments are necessary.

This concludes my presentation on this chapter. Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, thank you. Thank you very much for the follow-up chapter, the focus here. I'll turn it over to CEO Tuer for brief remarks, and then we'll see if there's questions.

Greg Tuer: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to committee members. First I'd like to just begin by thanking Ms. Clemett and her team for the work they've done with SLGA [Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority]. We absolutely appreciate the work done by the auditor and your team to help us improve our operations, and appreciate the excellent working relationship with the auditor's officials.

SLGA accepts all of the Provincial Auditor's recommendations. As mentioned in relation to 2024 report volume 1, chapter 19 there is one outstanding recommendation related to regulating recreational cannabis. We're pleased to report that steps have been taken to address the outstanding recommendation. As mentioned, the recommendation is that SLGA promptly communicates to cannabis retail and wholesale permittees sanctions about addressing identified non-compliance. We agree with the recommendation, and we have taken steps to ensure communication to permittees about non-compliance are carried out in a timely manner.

SLGA has developed processes to define staff roles and responsibility when reviewing and issuing non-compliance notices, and we've established a standard of communicating sanctions within six months of an incident. Additionally SLGA has recently since implemented additional timeliness standards consistent with other SLGA-regulated sanction activities and notified permittees of outstanding instances of non-compliance identified to that date. Processes have been implemented to effectively monitor and ensure timeliness going forward.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much. Thanks for all those that are involved in the actions that are reflected here to implement these recommendations. I'll open it up to the table to see who may have questions. MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Good morning. Thank you for coming today. I appreciate it. I just wondered again if you could touch on what improvements has SLGA noticed from essentially tracking your regulatory activities for recreational cannabis.

Lynnette Skaalrud: — Improvements in operations? Sorry, Lynnette Skaalrud.

Hugh Gordon: — Since you started essentially tracking, yeah. Inspections I imagine, enforcements, that kind of thing.

Lynnette Skaalrud: — The cannabis industry is still relatively new, so SLGA does spend a lot of time inspecting those premises, trying to get out to the sites at least once every four months for the ones that are of a lower risk level according to our risk matrix. So that's the lowest level ones. Permittees that have had issues in the past, we go out there more often. So I don't have the information right now on the trends that we're seeing, things like that. We can get that for you.

The biggest concern is always sale to minors. We are seeing decent results on our inspections in that regard, but there is room for improvement there.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just touching on some of those risks that were identified in the auditor general's report, three categories in particular: non-compliance, risks with the application assessment, permit type. Can you give us some examples or define what non-compliance for cannabis stores or wholesalers, producers, is for you?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — Lynnette Skaalrud. It would be things like sale to minors; having product in the store that isn't legal to sell; allowing minors into the store because in the situation of cannabis, minors can't be in the store at all; consumption on premises. The regulations are very clear that permittees and their employees cannot consume on premises. So we've had some instances of that, but overall the compliance of the cannabis industry has been quite positive.

Hugh Gordon: — Would it also entail employees that haven't gotten the appropriate courses or online course to participate in the retail sector?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — We do look at that. I have not seen any instances of non-compliance on that matter since I have been in

this role in June of this year.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. I'm just wondering if you can tell us how many retail or wholesale permittees are currently operating in the low-, medium-, and high-risk category levels?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — We don't have that information, but again we can get that and provide it.

Hugh Gordon: — Fair enough. We'll maybe ask the Chair to address that.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Yeah, no, thanks very much for that undertaking. Is a month a reasonable timeline to get that information back to this committee? The Clerk will provide you the contact to supply that and then it's tabled officially here. Thank you.

Hugh Gordon: — And if you could just, if you can, if you could touch on briefly whether those permittees were made aware of their risk levels.

Lynnette Skaalrud: — So we don't disclose to the permittees their specific threat level simply because that is an investigative tool that we use and we keep that confidential. However we do have conversations with the permittees as we're doing inspections. Our inspections are very much education focused, so any time they're out there, they're giving the permittees information on how they can improve their business and their compliance with the Act and regulations. And yeah, I'll leave it at that.

Hugh Gordon: — Okay, thank you. I appreciate that. It helps clarify. Can you provide the committee some of the reasons why some of these inspections were delayed at these facilities?

Greg Tuer: — Inspections themselves or the follow-up?

Hugh Gordon: — Well if you want to touch on both.

Lynnette Skaalrud: — So I don't have the specific reasons. I would expect it must be things like inspections are delayed because the inspectors get a complaint, so that takes their attention away from the schedule to focus on what the complaint was. It might be that they are working with the police on a matter to ensure compliance in a permitted store. So while we do try to follow the matrix and the schedule, there are uncontrollable factors that come into play that sometimes we just need to divert our attention to something else that's a little more pressing.

Greg Tuer: — Just on the follow-up issue, I think one thing I would note is, again agreeing with the Provincial Auditor's recommendation, this is a new industry for us. It's a new branch — or at least was a number of years ago — I think frankly not necessarily having fully implemented processes back at the start and timelines that were reviewed and managed.

So you know, another thank you to the Provincial Auditor. I think that it's a recommendation we fully accept. And I think that's part of actually making sure we have more rigour in terms of following up with these vendors.

Hugh Gordon: — If I may, while we're on that topic . . . I'll

come back to something else, but can you explain why SLGA doesn't have the same timelines regarding enforcement actions as it does like with liquor outlets?

[10:15]

Greg Tuer: — Thanks for the question. Yeah, I think again part of that was, you know, new program; didn't implement processes. The other around, you know, I think it's identified one of the areas where we needed to improve was bringing the cannabis branch to the same level as what our liquor inspectors are.

And that really speaks in large part to we have a minors-as-test-subjects program. And so this is where we have minors who go into stores and attempt to purchase product there. In both liquor and cannabis, we have an established performance measure that we won't identify the non-compliance for 60 days because the commercial permittees are required to keep video. And so we wait until that 60 days has expired so that they can't identify who the minor was who came in and attempted to purchase. So this is largely to help protect the privacy of those minors that we have working for us.

And so again, we had a pretty clear standard in liquor. For whatever reason it wasn't adopted in cannabis to sort of the same extent, and upon receiving the observations from the Provincial Auditor, we've implemented that same standard. There really isn't a reason to go beyond, you know, a day or two beyond 60 days just to make sure that those videos are no longer in existence, and then we can let them know that non-compliance has occurred.

Hugh Gordon: — So do I understand correctly that 60 days is like your formal timeline policy now for enforcement actions?

Greg Tuer: — Yes, for the minors-as-test-subjects piece, absolutely. Yeah.

Hugh Gordon: — And does that apply to other areas of non-compliance?

Greg Tuer: — That's still a piece we're working on, and absolutely the effort is to do it as quickly as possible, yes.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. So you're essentially tracking a lot of this information about infractions or non-compliance and inspections and what have you. And I'm just wondering if you're able to give us an update, if you have at all, about the effectiveness of doing that in terms of the average number of delays that it might have been for inspections or for enforcement actions; if you feel you're meeting your targets and your timelines.

Greg Tuer: — Thanks for the question. We didn't bring that level of detail, but yeah, I mean, absolutely. Establishing standards helps us drive towards it. The tracking systems we have in place provide us with a management tool to assist us to do that. I think, as the Provincial Auditor's observed, there's still work to be done on that front. But we have the mechanisms in place now to assist us to get that into a better place, absolutely.

Hugh Gordon: — The reason I asked that question, obviously

the whole point of this is so that, you know, we can see some appreciable improvement in your enforcement actions for example. And so I just was wondering if you're able to tell us at this stage — I know it hasn't been perhaps that long since you implemented a number of these — but if you could just tell us if you've seen an improvement in the effectiveness of your enforcement actions for non-compliance and how your ability to track this stuff has also assisted retailers or wholesalers to remain compliant.

Lynnette Skaalrud: — So the focus of our enforcement or inspection operations is typically to educate, so to be proactive. So when the inspectors are going out to the permittees, they are looking for infractions, informing the permittee where there might be some, and educating them on how to improve that. So a lot of that is done very informally. We don't track that because it's just part of the everyday job and focus of the inspectors is to focus on that education piece.

Around the data to inform the efficacy of the program, it's always hard to track a negative because we can track the number of infractions that we're seeing, the number of sanctions that we're setting out, but we can't track where those interventions are preventing further infractions, things like that.

We can provide data — we don't have it, again, we don't have it here today — on the number of MATS [minors as test shoppers] sanctions and things like that that we are issuing, because that is a very firm number that, you know . . . The minors go in; they do the shop; the permittee's either compliant or not. It's very, very certain data that we can provide.

Hugh Gordon: — Right. But on that point, too — and again it may be too premature to ask the question — but you know, a key indicator would be a reduction in number of infractions. Are you able to inform the committee any observations about that?

Greg Tuer: — Thanks. Thanks again for the question. No, I think we can't provide that to you today. Appreciate the question, though.

Hugh Gordon: — Okay. Well, perhaps we'll have an opportunity some other time. And I guess on that point . . . and if you can't answer it, that's fine if you can't. That's great. But with respect to permittees that are currently under sanction for non-compliance or ones that were warned, retail/wholesale, are you seeing an improvement in how they react to it, how they become compliant? Are you seeing improvements in those areas yet? Is that information you would have today either? Or is that something else that would have to . . . provide it at another date?

I guess my question generally was, are these recommendation implementations assisting retailers and wholesalers remain compliant too in those areas after they've been given a warning letter in a timely fashion or were notified of non-compliance? And I'm just wondering if you're seeing any improvements there or what the response has been.

Lynnette Skaalrud: — So the Provincial Auditor's recommendations and implementation have very much improved our program. There's no denying that there were some gaps in the program when we first implemented, and through that guidance we've been able to make a number of improvements.

And while we absolutely accept the Provincial Auditor's recommendation and are working to make improvements around how quickly we send out that formal sanction to permittees, permittees know almost immediately if they have not complied with a piece of the Act or regulations.

If we are attending a permittee because of a complaint from the public, the inspector that goes out notifies the permittee at that time that we are there because there was a complaint for some reason or other. At the end of the inspection the inspector will typically let the permittee know the results of the inspection. And if they have seen infractions, they'll let them know where they've seen those infractions and that they will be filing a report for senior management to consider formal sanctions. So even though we have some delays in issuing the formal sanction, the permittee knows very quickly where there are areas for improvement.

Because we have the risk-based matrix and because we have, in cannabis, resources to be out at the permittees every three months, we do have the ability to follow up with them, make sure that they're following up on what we saw the last time, educating them on where they can improve whether there's a formal sanction attached to that or not. It's very education focused as opposed to infraction focused. The sanction is almost a last resort, that our goal is to bring permittees along through education.

Hugh Gordon: — And just so I understand correctly, can you define what or describe what some of those sanctions look like?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — The letter that we send?

Hugh Gordon: — Yeah. What kind of sanctions are you referring to when you sanction a permittee?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — So typically when we sanction a permittee, we do a very formal letter that sets out the circumstances for which we are issuing the sanction — all the relevant facts of the matter — so that the permittee knows, has a good deal of information about what the issue was that we are trying to address. The letter contains the relevant sections that have been not complied with in the Act, regulations, or policy. And they include a proposed fine or suspension. The permittee can choose to opt for the fine; they can do the sanction.

The letter also includes information on how they can apply to have the recommended sanction reviewed by the Liquor and Gaming Licensing Commission. They have 15 days to do that. After that time passes we send another letter saying, further to our sanction letter of this date, you have not made an application for review; we are going to go ahead and issue our sanction. And then they get 30 days to pay that. If they haven't paid it after the 30 days, we then issue a suspension notice to them so they can't operate for a number of days.

So the letters that we send out, the sanction letters, are quite detailed. They provide significant information about why we're issuing the sanction, how they can have the sanction reviewed, and the implications of not complying with the sanction.

Hugh Gordon: — Do you happen to know how many permittees are currently under sanction for non-compliance? Or at least, say, 2025 data?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — You know, how many permittees are not under compliance is hard to tell. We can tell how many permittees have been sanctioned. But unless we are in the premises every day, it's hard to say whether they're under compliance or not.

Hugh Gordon: — For 2025, how many permittees were sanctioned?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — Since I've been in this chair, since June, we've issued two sanction letters to cannabis permittees: one for selling to a minor, and a warning letter about having a minor in the premises.

Hugh Gordon: — So that's what's, going forward, we'll be curious to see. And that is a fairly low number.

Lynnette Skaalrud: — Yes.

Hugh Gordon: — We're talking permittees, wholesalers. Was it like over 370 combined perhaps, and then we're talking about two outlets?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — Mm-hmm.

Hugh Gordon: — So that's good to know. And I maybe could have asked what percentage, but the number's probably not as low as the percentage.

The last couple questions I have for you is that, if we're talking about collecting all those data and information and reporting it to senior management, providing them with compliance reports on a regular basis, I just was curious from the analysis of that. If you could tell us what are some of the trends that you're seeing at SLGA with respect to cannabis outlets.

Lynnette Skaalrud: — Again, it's the sale to minors that is always of concern. And the compliance rates on our MATS program are quite high in cannabis, largely because when cannabis was first introduced the requirement was that every sale had to be subject to an identification. So I think probably permittees and their staff got used to asking for identification in cannabis retailers.

However, we are seeing some decline in the compliance around sale to minors. So that's an area where we're going to want to work going forward. More education is always, always a key. And when that fails, then we have a graduated sanctioning matrix that allows us to increase penalties as the number of infractions increases.

Hugh Gordon: — And to double back a bit on some of your processes to monitor, you're comfortable with the manual process? You looking at upgrading it?

[10:30]

Lynnette Skaalrud: — So any system has its bugs, but Amanda is working for us. It allows us to track the data that we need. We also have some manual processes that allow us to track data, that if Amanda can't fulfill that, we have some manual processes in place as well. Compared to our gaming and liquor mandates, the cannabis industry is fairly small. So we are comfortable that

those manual processes are effective, given the number of permits we're dealing with, as opposed to the number of permits that we deal with in liquor or gaming.

Hugh Gordon: — And my last question, Mr. Chair. Are you seeing a trend in the numbers of retail outlets and producers or wholesale outlets? Are you seeing a trend there at all? Since it came out — it was 2018, it was, you know, legalized — I think there was a flood of people getting into the market. And I just noticed because from 2023 the report notes there was 182 retail outlets, 192 producers. Have you seen that number change? Has it remained stable?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — I don't think we've seen a change significantly. We are seeing some consolidation in the market though, where some independent retailers have been selling to larger corporations. But I believe the number of outlets is staying relatively stable. There might have been a bit of fluctuation over the last couple of years, but it's been relatively stable.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you.

Greg Tuer: — I think what I would say, this is a question I asked soon after I started too. And probably more — like you haven't seen real strong trends, but even almost more anecdotally as Lynnette just indicated — you're starting to see more consolidation in the industry. And I think that's just part of the natural cycle of any business industry. As you mentioned, lots of people came in at the start, and now we're starting to see bigger people starting to either take over or consolidate with the smaller vendors.

Hugh Gordon: — That's all I have, Mr. Chair.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon. Any other questions, members? Not seeing any for this chapter, and of course we've considered these recommendations before. Implementation has occurred, and thank you for that.

I would welcome a motion to conclude consideration of chapter 19. Moved by MLA Chan. All agreed? Okay, that's carried.

We'll move right along, and I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor to focus on chapter 29.

Jason Shaw: — Thank you. The Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority is responsible for regulating and controlling the possession, sale, and delivery of beverage alcohol in Saskatchewan. The Authority regulates commercial permittees — such as restaurants and pubs, on-table sale of liquor to the public — by issuing permits, inspecting permitted establishments, enforcing permit requirements, and educating permittees.

Chapter 29 of our 2024 report volume 2, starting on page 259, reports the progress made on these recommendations initially made in our 2017 audit of regulating commercial permittees on-table sale of liquor. By June 2024 the authority implemented the final two outstanding recommendations.

The authority consistently monitored whether it inspected permitted establishments as planned and maintained rationale for delayed inspections. We found management sufficiently

reviewed monthly reports to monitor completed inspections, including documenting rationale for missed inspections. For example, in 6 of the 12 monthly reports we reviewed, some inspectors did not meet the minimum expectation of 17 monthly inspections. We found management documented why staff missed inspections and ensured inspectors completed missed inspections in subsequent months.

Appropriately monitoring that inspections are carried out as planned minimizes public health and safety risks associated with the service and consumption of liquor at permitted establishments.

Also the authority implemented trend reporting, where staff identify and assess key trends of non-compliance annually. For example, its first report for the 2022-23 fiscal year analyzed four trends identified from its regulatory activities, such as improved compliance rates for its minors-as-test-shoppers program.

Conducting trend analysis of key non-compliance issues from inspections completed annually assists the authority in allocating resources to address non-compliance.

And I thank you. This concludes my presentation of this chapter.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, thanks again. Thanks for the follow-up on this front as well. I'll kick it over to CEO Tuer for brief remarks, and then we'll see if there's questions.

Greg Tuer: — Yes, and thank you. As mentioned, this chapter pertains to the regulation of on-table liquor sales in permitted establishments. And I think all I'll say is I'm pleased to report that we agree with the auditor that we've effectively implemented all of the recommendations.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you. Thanks for the work reflected there in that status update. I'll see if there's questions from committee members. MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. Good morning. Is the minimum number of monthly inspections per inspector still 17?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — The standard is still 17. However, because of changes we've made in process, we've been able to increase efficiency around the program. So the information I received last week from the manager of inspections is that they're actually doing more than 17 on average each month because of some of those process improvements that they've made over the years.

Joan Pratchler: — So were there any inspections that were delayed last year? Or because you have more people, they're more on time? Or timely?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — I can't say that for sure. I expect, practically speaking, there probably was simply because resources may have had to be diverted to a different focus. There might have been police action or something that they requested that we participate in. There might have been complaints that we needed to follow up on that we prioritized higher than following the schedule.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. What trends in non-compliance

have you observed since you started tracking them? And did any of them last a year or go against observed trends or anything? Like what are you noticing?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — So again on the liquor side, the primary concern is sale to minors. And we also have the MATS programs on the liquor side in the retail stores. But we have also seen it, again through our inspections, through complaints, through co-operation with local police and RCMP [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] occurring in establishments with on-table sales as well.

So that is one area where we continue to focus to try to gain some improvement, again educating our permittees on the importance of not selling to minors. And when that fails, we do sanction for that as well. Again since I've been in this chair, I've noticed a few incidents where we are sanctioning for intoxicated people in the premises — over-service, those types of things. So that is a focus as well. We want the people to enjoy these products safely, and serving to minors and over-service are not ways to accomplish that.

Joan Pratchler: — Are you sensing that there's a trend that more minors are accessing alcohol then, in the venues?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — I'm not sure if it's a trend or if we're just being more effective in seeing it when we're out in the community, when we're working with our partners.

Joan Pratchler: — Good. That's all my questions. Thank you.

Greg Tuer: — If I can just make one addition to that, I think, similar to what we mentioned in cannabis, I mean the law is pretty clear around service to minors, that the standard is well understood. I think it's an area where, when I joined the authority in August, I was quite surprised to see how low compliance is or how effective our MATS program is in particular in identifying commercial permittees who are selling to minors.

So maybe not a trend because it's an area where there's been concerns for years. But it definitely is an area of concern. We're talking about, you know, about 65 per cent compliance under MATS in the liquor side. And so there's definitely work to be done on that side.

And as Lynnette mentioned earlier, we try to take an education-based approach wherever we can. This sale to minors is an area where we quickly go to sanctions. And I think that's an area we're going to need to look at, is are those sanctions actually effective to drive compliance.

Joan Pratchler: — Well thank you for your work.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just with respect to the recommendation for monitoring when staff complete inspections. I'm just wondering, because this is an old recommendation, some eight years now . . . Not quite. Nine perhaps. But I'm just wondering if you have noticed an improvement in ensuring that establishments remain compliant, help to improve public safety, because you are monitoring more formally and better whether or not these inspections are happening.

Greg Tuer: — Thanks for the question. Yeah, I think with sort of that risk-based approach where we definitely do go back where there's been incidents of non-compliance . . . Don't have the number in front of me right now but what I can say is, again anecdotally, we're seeing that, you know, the work that we're doing with those particular permittees is improving. There's still, like I mentioned just previously, there's still lots of work to be done.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Any further questions, members? Not seeing any. Thanks for the actions again to implement those recommendations. I'd welcome a motion to conclude consideration of chapter 29. Moved by MLA Patterson. All agreed? That's carried.

Okay, we'll move right along and turn our attention to chapter 16. And I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor.

Jason Shaw: — Thank you. The Saskatchewan Liquor and Gaming Authority is responsible for regulating locally manufactured craft alcohol in Saskatchewan. In February 2025 the province had 60 locally manufactured craft alcohol producers that held a total of 91 permits.

Chapter 16 of our 2025 report volume 1 starting on page 175 reports the results of our first follow-up of the authority's processes to regulate the production and sale of locally manufactured craft alcohol in Saskatchewan. By February 2025 the authority implemented three out of the five recommendations we first made in 2022.

In section 3.1 the authority renewed permits for locally manufactured craft alcohol producers prior to expiry as required by legislation. Permits expire every three years. We tested 11 permit renewal applications and found the authority sent timely reminders for all permits. They renewed permits timely or we found appropriate rationale for the couple we tested that were not renewed timely. By sending out timely renewal letters, the authority reminds craft alcohol producers to renew permits prior to expiration as required by legislation and reduces the risk of producers operating for an extended period without a permit.

In section 3.3 the authority updated its craft alcohol inspection checklist in September 2023 with all key risks related to craft alcohol manufacturing. We tested inspections for 10 craft alcohol producers and found the authority appropriately used the updated checklist for all 10 inspections. Having inspection checklists that address all key areas associated with manufacturing alcohol and the authority's policy requirements helps inspectors check whether craft alcohol producers comply with our permit operating requirements.

In section 3.5 the authority performs reasonability assessments of locally manufactured craft alcohol production and sales which it uses to determine whether it collected appropriate amount of production levies. Craft alcohol producers paid the authority 5.5 million in production levies in 2023-24 on craft alcohol sold directly to consumers or retailers.

We tested 31 monthly reports from producers and found the authority assessed the reports as expected and received all reports timely. Having effective processes to assess producer-prepared production and sales information helps the authority receive

accurate production levies and treats craft alcohol producers fairly.

In section 3.2 we found the authority had not yet developed a risk-informed plan for inspecting locally manufactured craft alcohol producers. As of October 2024 the authority had not inspected 28 producers since 2022. Having an inspection plan that states the required inspection frequency of craft alcohol producers will help reduce the risk of non-compliance going unnoticed for an extended period.

In section 3.4 we found the authority improved its process to obtain laboratory reports from producers in a timely manner. Lab reports verify alcohol products are safe for consumption. The authority's quality assurance policy requires producers to submit these reports for a minimum of one product from each type of alcohol product line every two years. We tested 11 craft alcohol producers and found the authority obtained laboratory reports for all of them within two years of the previous certificate as expected.

However we found the authority did not follow up with two craft alcohol producers who provided certificates of analysis that found one product had more alcohol content than expected and one had less alcohol content than expected. By not following up on non-compliant certificates of analyses, there's an increased risk of craft alcohol producers selling alcohol that does not meet quality assurance standards and that may not be safe.

Thank you. This concludes my presentation on this chapter.

[10:45]

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, thanks. Thanks for the follow-up here. Focus on a really impressive industry that's been built out in the province. I'll turn it over to CEO Tuer for some brief remarks, and I'll see if there's questions.

Greg Tuer: — Thank you. So agreed, chapter 16 has two outstanding recommendations related to regulating locally manufactured craft alcohol. The first outstanding recommendation, no. 3.2, that we implement a risk-informed plan for inspecting locally manufactured craft alcohol producers, SLGA agrees with the recommendation to use a risk-informed inspection plan. We are in the process of developing and operationalizing a risk-informed inspection plan. We have been inspecting craft alcohol producers to obtain baseline data to develop the plan.

The second recommendation, no. 3.4, regarding SLGA obtaining certificates of analysis from locally manufactured craft alcohol producers every two years as required by our quality assurance program, we agree with the recommendation. We have implemented processes to ensure certificates of analysis are submitted when required.

In the event a certificate of analysis shows alcohol by volume is outside the acceptable variance, the producer is notified and given 30 days to correct the situation and submit a new acceptable certificate of analysis. Ultimately a product recall may be required if the new deadline is not met. SLGA follows a standard process of discipline which starts with warning letters and escalates all the way up to and including suspension or

termination of the manufacturing permit. Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you. I'll open it up to the table for questions. MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. So I'm going to talk a little bit about the permits and three categories: ones that are renewed, ones that may have been late, and ones that have lapsed. And this is just water. So how many permits were renewed on time last year? How many would have been late in renewal? How many have lapsed? And if they lapsed, what would be your sense of the reasons why? Did they go out of business or, you know, what would those be? So renewals, lates, lapsed.

Greg Tuer: — Thanks for the question. To the best of our knowledge they've all been renewed on time.

Joan Pratchler: — Second question, totally unrelated to that, but how long was the director of the liquor licensing role vacant? And what impact did that have on the timeline for, you know, your inspection plan implementations?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — It was vacant until Monday. We've hired a very, very promising young man to come and help us out. Unfortunately there was just a series of events within SLGA with people moving around and retirements and things like that. And we wanted to make sure that we got the right person, not any person, so hopeful that we have accomplished that. And the individual started on Monday and he is very eager and I think will help us out a lot.

Joan Pratchler: — And so how long was that open until he was hired approximately?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — The prior director left in latish June of this year, of 2025.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay, and did that impact your inspection plan? Or you had, you know, some succession planning to make sure that that was continuous?

Greg Tuer: — Yeah, I don't know that it would impact our inspection plan so much. I think some of the recommendations that the Provincial Auditor's made here I think requires that we have a director in place. So you know, where we speak to "we're working through; we're operationalizing," I think there definitely was an impact there. Sort of some of the process changes that we need to make have been delayed as a result.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay, thank you. So my next question: where are you now? On track.

Greg Tuer: — Effective Monday, we're very happy.

Joan Pratchler: — That's right. Over to you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — I'm just wondering if you can touch on some of the difficulties that you've had in implementing the AG's [auditor general] recommendation to develop this risk-informed plan. Like what have been some of the challenges in crafting that?

Lynnette Skaalrud: — The primary delay has been gathering that baseline data. In order to create a risk-based matrix, we need to know enough information about each of the producers to be able to assign them a score to determine whether they're red, yellow, green, how often we should be going out there. So we've started collecting a lot of that data, but we do need a little bit more in order to finish that process.

When we implemented a risk-based matrix on the liquor licensing side, we had all of that information so we were able to go in and look at what we had on each tavern, restaurant, those types of things. But on the craft alcohol side, we're still gathering that data.

Hugh Gordon: — Just wondering if you could also provide some details about how your updated inspection checklist has helped improve your inspection process.

Lynnette Skaalrud: — Checklists are always helpful. It helps focus our work when we're in the premises. It also helps make our reporting a lot more efficient. Prior to the checklists, the inspectors would go back to the office or their vehicle and they would type out a long report about what they observed, what they didn't observe. So a checklist just very much improves their efficiency and allows them to get out to more premises.

Hugh Gordon: — Right. And this kind of extends to, you know, capturing or making sure every item that needs to be inspected is properly inspected, and that when the inspection took place, what they observed, right. It helps to inform you with the quality of the data that you're getting and also what corrective actions may or may not be required, right.

Now that you're following up on producers who submitted certificates of analysis that fell outside approved thresholds, I'm wondering if you could tell us how many have been disciplined for that or if you've sent I guess a notice for them to submit another certificate of analysis. If you could provide some insight into that.

Greg Hutchings: — Sure, I'd be pleased to. Greg Hutchings. So in the last year, our local producers have submitted 45 certificates of analysis, and I'm pleased to say that they were all within the accepted thresholds. So there's been no discipline communicated to our local producers within the last year.

Hugh Gordon: — And sorry, getting onto reporting variances, you know, I'm just wondering if you could tell us how your reasonability assessments of craft alcohol production volumes have impacted the amount of levies collected by SLGA.

Greg Hutchings: — Yeah, I think the process that has been implemented is quite effective in terms of collecting those levies. And I think, you know, it's grounded in partnership and proactive communication. So we've resourced a craft manager and then an admin to manage our local producers, and that's been quite effective in terms of collecting that levy and making sure that we're on top of it.

Hugh Gordon: — Are you confident that information you're obtaining is accurate? Or are there any concerns that some producers are under-reporting?

Greg Hutchings: — Confident it's accurate, yes.

Hugh Gordon: — Okay, fair enough. So if I asked you if any producers were found to have a variance of what you estimated perhaps they should have, you're not finding that.

Greg Hutchings: — No.

Hugh Gordon: — You're finding that what you're getting is close to what you're expecting.

Greg Hutchings: — Yeah. That's right. And the team has created a process that they review the production levels as a team. So it would be the liquor wholesale and distribution team, the regulatory team, and our finance team. So they're comparing the previous month to the current month. And we also have, you know, the data from previous years. So we have a pretty good indication if there's any extremes on either end in terms of what's going on. So lots of confidence that the data's accurate. And then a couple of times a year we also audit through our auditing department. They get in and audit a couple of local producers as well. Yeah.

Hugh Gordon: — And maybe one last question associated to that. So where you're getting a production variance less than expected — and I don't know if this has happened with you or not — you're getting an explanation or a rationale for that production level that, you know, rationalizes that level?

Greg Hutchings: — Sure.

Hugh Gordon: — So in other words, you're getting a fair explanation for those levels if they don't meet the expectations.

Greg Hutchings: — Yeah, absolutely. And to give you an example, you know, there's been incredible growth locally in hard iced teas within the refreshment beverage category. So we also understand the trends that are happening in the market and understand that, you know, beer for example had a tough couple of previous years. So we understand the trends, and if there's something outside of that, the team will certainly inquire.

Hugh Gordon: — Now you've piqued my curiosity. Are you seeing some trends in certain types of alcohol sold right now and what they might be? If you could.

Greg Hutchings: — Locally?

Hugh Gordon: — Yeah.

Greg Hutchings: — Yeah. Okay. Yes. So in Saskatchewan — and it's really quite interesting — hard iced teas are a rocket ship. So a great success story is an organization called Radouga. You might have seen Crush-It, a hard iced tea. They've moved into our warehouse, and they're well over their production limits and are considered now a national producer. They're shipping hard iced tea into Alberta. So we're seeing hard iced tea's growth.

And you know, in terms of the local folks, all categories in 2025 were showing growth, which is terrific news, just, you know, based on a lot of the media you're seeing out there is that some of the local producers in other provinces are consolidating or closing. So our folks have had a real solid year in 2025, which

has been wonderful to see. And we really focus on, you know, partnership, and we've resourced that to ensure that we're working closely with them.

Greg Tuer: — Okay. If I may add. You know, you've asked a number of times about trends, and I would say generally liquor consumption is going down, you know, across all categories. As Greg just mentioned, there's a significant anomaly here in Saskatchewan where the local producers are actually — I'll steal his language — a rocket ship there. You know, they are increasing production, increasing sales. And so I think that that's good for Saskatchewan economy, Saskatchewan producers, and it's an interesting tweak here about the tastes of the people of Saskatchewan.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you for that.

Joan Pratchler: — You win one Grey Cup and look what happens.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Any further questions? Yeah, what an awesome industry, right, that's been growing on this front as well. And I appreciated the comments just about, you know, how important these local businesses are as well to their respective communities. And you know, I saw the auditor's focus so I went out and did a little testing myself, and I found all the product to be excellent, you know, corner to corner to corner in the province.

And we know that these distillers and brewers, that they're utilizing a lot of Saskatchewan product, right. And many of them are telling a lot of the Saskatchewan story as well or that of their community as well, their places to gather and really points of pride for many, many, many communities as well, whether you're Maple Creek or Blaine Lake or Nokomis or all of our communities right across this province.

So I think just through this committee, a shout-out to all those that have put together businesses, taken risks, made that investment, created jobs, and brought brewing and distilling and winemaking back into the province.

Any further questions from committee members? Not seeing any, I would welcome a motion to conclude consideration of this chapter. Moved by MLA Harrison. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, that's carried. That concludes our chapters here with SLGA here this morning. Thanks to CEO Tuer and the officials that have joined us. Thanks as well to all those officials and those involved, all the audit entities that are involved in the work that we talked about here today. Any final words for us, CEO Tuer, before we kick you guys out of here and bring Trade and Export in?

Greg Tuer: — Well I never say no to an opportunity to hear my own voice. I'll just again reiterate, thank you to the Provincial Auditor and your staff. I firmly believe that, you know, these reviews and the recommendations you make are helping us become a more effective organization. And there's still work to do on a couple of these fronts.

And just to the committee, I appreciate the questions and the rigour here today. I think it's necessary, so thank you.

[11:00]

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay. Right on. Thanks so much. We'll have a very brief recess until Trade and Export is in those seats.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Trade and Export Development

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay. Good morning. We'll reconvene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. We'll turn our attention to the Ministry of Trade and Export Development and the new chapter that's focused on the ministry from the 2025 report volume 1, chapter 7. A few new recommendations that are there.

I want to welcome the leadership and officials of the Ministry of Trade and Export Development for joining us here. Deputy Minister Banks, would you briefly care to introduce the officials that have joined you here today? You can refrain from getting into comments on the chapter at this time. We'll turn it back over to the auditor and come back your way. Go ahead.

Jodi Banks: — Great. Thank you so much for having us here today. Joining me today is Ryan Cossitt, the assistant deputy minister of international engagement; I've got Blair Hudyma, the executive director of international offices; and Aaron Wirth behind us here, the ADM [assistant deputy minister] of strategic policy and competitiveness.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Yeah, that's great. Well thank you all for joining us. Thanks as well for providing us the status update that you did, and all those that were involved in the actions reflected there. I'll table it now: PAC 77-30, Ministry of Trade and Export Development: Status update, dated January 21, 2026.

I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor to make presentation, and then we'll come back your way.

Tara Clemett: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Mr. Jason Shaw, and he's the deputy provincial auditor that is responsible for the audit at the Ministry of Trade and Export Development. Along with Jason, behind me and to my far left is Ms. Lesia Lazurko, and she was involved in the audit that we did around international trade offices. And then beside her, Ms. Michelle Lindenbach, who is our liaison with this committee.

The chapter on the agenda does relate to international trade offices and contains four new recommendations for the committee's consideration. I would like to thank the deputy minister and her staff for the co-operation that was extended to us during our work.

Since 2020, the Ministry of Trade and Export Development established nine international trade and investment offices to attract foreign direct investment and promote trade efforts to grow Saskatchewan's exports and economy.

In 2024-25, the ministry employed 31 individuals directly

involved in trade offices' operations, including staffing three to four people at each of its trade offices. The ministry expected to spend \$9.4 million directly related to trade office operations in 2024-25. Each trade office has a budget of approximately a million dollars.

For the five-year period from 2018 to 2023, regions where ministry trade offices operate generally showed significant increases in the value of Saskatchewan's trade exports. For example, exports to the European Union region increased by 261 per cent. Effective processes to monitor trade offices promote accountability and transparency of foreign operations to help ensure Saskatchewan obtains the expected value from its spending on trade offices.

Chapter 7 of our 2025 report volume 1, starting on page 93, reports the results of our audit of whether the Ministry of Trade and Export Development had effective processes to monitor its trade offices. We concluded the ministry had effective processes except for the four recommendations made in our report.

On page 100, we recommended the Ministry of Trade and Export Development obtain and evaluate formal feedback — for example, using surveys — from parties that worked with its international trade and investment offices.

The ministry established 18 key performance indicators to assist in measuring whether it is achieving the objectives of its trade offices. We found the ministry's performance indicators consistent with good practice, except it didn't have an indicator for assessing feedback such as survey results from parties that work with trade offices, such as foreign companies and other governments. Without adequate procedures to obtain and evaluate feedback from external parties, the ministry is unable to determine whether it needs to adjust its trade office activities.

On page 101 we recommended the Ministry of Trade and Export Development establish targets for its key performance indicators, used to monitor the success of its international trade and investment offices. The ministry hasn't established targets for its key performance indicators.

We found Global Affairs Canada, for its international trade investment activities, sets specific targets for each of its key performance indicators, such as achieve at least 130 new foreign investments in Canada facilitated by its trade services in the 2024-25 fiscal year. Sources of good practice indicate using review of historical data and trends to set targets. Targets clarify accountability and focus for trade office staff and provide transparency on how senior management can assess trade office performance. Not having performance targets reduces the ministry's ability to effectively monitor the success of its trade offices.

On page 102 we recommended the Ministry of Trade and Export Development formally document its methodology for measuring the key performance indicators of its trade and investment offices. The ministry hadn't formalized its performance indicator measurement methodology.

We reviewed other jurisdictions' methods for measuring performance and considered Global Affairs Canada as a source of good practice. It had robust documentation for each of its

indicators such as targets, the date expected to achieve the target, its rationale for the indicator, and how to measure the indicator. In contrast, we found the ministry had only documented some definitions for its indicators. For example, it defined a trade win as a deal, contract, sale, or commercial agreement for clients, resulting from support provided by a trade office.

Also when measuring its indicators, we expected the ministry to track the staff that contracted parties to obtain dollar amounts of investment and trade wins. We found the ministry didn't formally expect the trade office staff to contact companies to try and gather this information. We did observe the ministry had internal quarterly reports that did report some dollar amounts for its successful investment and trade deals. Lack of formal performance indicator methodology increases the risk that the ministry inconsistently or inaccurately measures and reports on its key performance indicators.

On page 105, and the final recommendation, we recommended that the Ministry of Trade and Export Development report key information — for example, key performance indicator results — publicly on the performance of its international trade and investment offices. The ministry reports limited information about its trade offices' performances to the public.

The ministry doesn't have established guidance on what trade office performance information to communicate publicly. We expected that the ministry would determine rationale for which performance indicator information would be of most value to the public to show trade office performance, what level of information should be reported, and the extent of detail to provide.

We evaluated the reasonableness of the ministry's public reporting by reviewing reporting used by other jurisdictions. Again we determined that Global Affairs Canada's public reporting was good practice as it reported detailed information about each of its performance indicators on its website and its annual report.

We found the ministry reports some trade office results information to the public mainly through ad hoc quarterly trade office outcome reports, such as specific examples of new trade wins. However it didn't report consistent or complete performance indicator results. Without sufficient reporting, Saskatchewan residents may not understand what do trade offices do, why additional costs for operating trade offices are beneficial to Saskatchewan's economy, and whether trade offices are achieving their expected results or not.

That concludes my presentation. Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you for the presentation, the focus of the work. I'll turn it over to DM [Deputy Minister] Banks for brief remarks, and then we'll open it up to see if there's questions.

Jodi Banks: — Perfect. Thank you so much. We're really pleased to be here today to discuss the Provincial Auditor's 2025 report on the ministry's monitoring of international trade offices. I'd like to acknowledge the Provincial Auditor and her team and thank them for the advice and recommendations provided last year. And our ministry is continuing to work on their

recommendations delivered in June of last year.

As mentioned, beginning in 2020 the ministry established a focused network of nine international offices in New Delhi, Singapore, Tokyo, Shanghai, Dubai, Ho Chi Minh City, London, Mexico City, and Berlin to diversify markets, attract investment, and provide Saskatchewan exporters with on-the-ground support in key trade markets.

Each office is led by a Saskatchewan managing director with a small team of locally engaged staff and supported by our international offices branch here in Saskatchewan. All are co-located in Canadian embassies or consulates under an MOU [memorandum of understanding] with Global Affairs Canada which provides secure facilities and common cost-efficient HR [human resources] and IT services.

[11:15]

Our offices opened between late 2020 — with a small pandemic in the middle — and early 2023. So the network is still young and evolving, but we have worked hard to design it to be efficient, effective, and able to mature as markets evolve.

Each office is guided by very specific market priorities, from pulses, potash, and plant protein in South Asia to critical minerals and energy in Europe and the Middle East and to value-added agriculture and manufacturing linkages across the Americas. So teams focus on the full range of sectors that matter most to Saskatchewan's economy. And all of these offices are of course guided by Saskatchewan's 2030 growth plan and serves as a road map for the office mandates and priorities. As the office network ... and with the understanding that as the office network matured, we would refine goals, metrics, and services over time.

Saskatchewan has already surpassed the growth plan goal of increasing the volume of exports by 50 per cent, reaching 49.3 billion in 2023 after a record 52.6 billion in 2022. But just as importantly, the composition and number of our trading partners has grown. Saskatchewan now exports over \$1 billion to nine markets and regions — including the US [United States]; China; Brazil; India; Japan; the ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations], the association of Southeast Asian networks; MENA, the Middle East and North Africa region; and the EU, of course the European Union; and the Andean region — up from five in 2019.

The Provincial Auditor's report confirms what we've observed across our network. In the places where we've opened offices, Saskatchewan's exports have grown significantly over the last five years. Two standout examples that was mentioned are the United Kingdom and Germany, where our sales have surged, especially in targeted sectors such as energy, mining, and agri-tech. Taken together, the markets where we have an on-the-ground presence are buying much more from Saskatchewan than they did a few years ago, clear proof that a targeted in-market approach is working.

And the great news is that the Provincial Auditor has confirmed that we're running the network well with the right locations, tight spending controls, clear oversight, and secure, cost-effective operations, giving us a strong base to now focus on the auditor's four recommendations. These recommendations are important

assurances of value for money and good governance across our international office network.

We're proud of our progress to date, but we also know there's room to improve, especially with a network that's still young and has only been fully operational in its current form for roughly two years. This is why we continue a review of our office goals and performance metrics, informed in part by recent work with KPMG, and we welcome the Provincial Auditor's performance audit as a valuable independent check on our approach.

As mentioned, the auditor identified four improvements that aim to make our good system even stronger. So obtain and evaluate client feedback, set clear annual KPI [key performance indicator] targets, document KPI measurement methodologies, and enhance public reporting on performance. We accept all four and we are acting on them.

So recommendation one, we have started this work on performance feedback. We informally receive feedback from our partners on a very regular basis, but we are working very hard to map out feedback as captured, identify the gaps, and review best practice models to ensure a simple and consistent approach. And with this information we will continue to look at options to more formalize this feedback approach. And we anticipate implementation of this recommendation in Q4 [fourth quarter] of '26-27 fiscal year.

The second recommendation around establishing targets . . . As is well good practice, it is critical to evaluating success to have specific and measurable targets. Work continues to ensure targets will be realistic, comparable, and drive the right behaviours. We anticipate these targets will be finalized in Q3 of the '26-27 fiscal year.

Recommendation three, the recommendation to have the Ministry of Trade and Export Development formally document its methodology for measuring the key performance indicators of its international trade investment offices. So formal documentation for the methodologies used to measure KPIs is being drafted. It is important that this work is co-designed with our office staff and aligned with good practices identified by the auditor to ensure consistency, auditability, and efficient use of resources. We anticipate finalizing the documentation in Q2 of the '26-27 fiscal year.

And finally recommendation four, the Ministry of Trade and Export Development report key information publicly on the performance of its international trade and investment offices. To fully understand best practices and public reporting, we are undertaking a jurisdictional scan of similar agencies engaged in international trade and investment activities. Once that jurisdictional scan is complete, options will be reviewed and refined with an aim towards more public reporting. This approach builds directly on the auditor's advice and our internal implementation plan to consider this work after the KPI methodology and targets are finalized, so those can be built into that reporting. We anticipate completing this by the end of the '26-27 fiscal year.

In closing, the international offices are an evolving network that is already producing significant, sector-specific results for Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan has what the world needs:

sustainable food, energy, and minerals. And our international offices help connect that advantage to customers, partners, investors every day. We have surpassed growth plan export goals, expanded the roster of billion-dollar markets, and helped grow agriculture, energy, and critical mineral sectors by supporting investors and connecting to new markets with many new trading partners.

Where our offices operate, exports have risen sharply and we are seeing Saskatchewan play an increasingly important role in supporting global energy and food security in more and more countries around the world. These achievements show that the network is on the right track and that Saskatchewan's presence in key markets is more important than ever.

And the auditor has confirmed that we are already doing many of those activities well. But we remain committed to continuous improvement and strengthening our international network, starting with our planned work to address these four recommendations. So once again I'd like to thank the Provincial Auditor of Saskatchewan for helping to make improvements to our ministry.

With that, we welcome any questions the committee may have for us.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Well thank you very much for coming before us here today, and thank you for the aims of all your work at such a critical time to continue to build out market access and trade for this province and country. I'll open it up to the committee now that may have questions. MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Good day. Thank you for coming. I appreciate your attendance here before the committee.

I'm just wondering if you could share what efforts your ministry is making to solicit and obtain feedback from the partners working at the trade offices.

Ryan Cossitt: — Good morning. Ryan Cossitt, ADM of international engagement. So our managing directors and our staff and offices have daily touchpoints, typically, with their clients and they're always sort of working actively with prospective clients, opportunities, industries, government partners. So they are in regular touch.

They get feedback on the ground as they run through meetings. They get feedback on the ground as a result of any engagements they may be involved in, so it's not unusual for managing directors to be, as you would appreciate, out there talking about the Saskatchewan brand and opportunities. So they attend conferences, they often will give speeches, they will often host all kinds of events and presentations in terms of what the opportunity is.

So they're in constant contact, and so I would say . . . And we have some testimonials we're certainly happy to share where we do often get some unsolicited feedback from industry in Saskatchewan and globally that talk about the advantages that the offices have provided to them.

So I would say that, you know, it's one of the reasons that we're taking this very seriously. And we appreciate the auditor's

comments about a little bit more consistency perhaps around the approach and frequency. But we have felt pretty good, at least in the early stages of the network, that we've been getting enough sort of on-the-ground — what the auditor has said — ad hoc sort of feedback from our clients and feeling pretty good about, you know, where they're spending their time and effort.

Hugh Gordon: — And in view of all the recommendations before us here today for our trade offices, just wondering if you could tell us then, is that feedback or has that feedback been documented in some fashion? Or is it now being documented in a different way in view of these recommendations? How are you collecting and analyzing that information?

Ryan Cossitt: — So I guess I would start by saying, I mean certainly in light of the auditor's recommendations, we've begun to look at this in a much more structured, deliberate fashion. So I would say that we're still in the early stages but are finally starting to sort of appreciate and get a bit more rigour around what the options might be going forward.

So we've certainly had conversations, for instance, internally with our staff and with our international offices to talk about the value. We've started to have some conversations about what this might look like in a more rigorous, concise fashion to drive consistency across the network. So I would say it's an active topic of conversation for sure.

I think, thanks to the auditor's report, it shed some light and gave us a little bit of focus in terms of making sure that this moved up the priority chain in terms of things we want to discuss and tackle. We haven't been at the stage right now where I can give you a definitive sort of sense that we've completely pivoted or changed exactly what we're doing, but it's certainly top of mind.

Hugh Gordon: — The reason I asked that is, like you said, there's certain activities our trade offices are engaging with. They're having conversations, making presentations, perhaps holding an event in a host country or with a partner, with what. I'm just wondering, like is there a reporting mechanism that engages at these trade offices so that . . . You know, we've done a presentation to a number of clients — could be government, could be business, representatives of industry — on a particular topic related to trade with Saskatchewan and the opportunities that we have to provide. Is that like being documented in some fashion? Are you keeping track of that?

That's kind of where I'm getting at with that question, is you're already engaged in these activities. That's great, but how are we documenting that and then reporting that up the chain so that you've got some information to begin to formalize this process?

Jodi Banks: — Maybe I'll start and then have Ryan continue. I think, you know, since we've received the recommendation, I think we've been more cognizant for sure about making sure we're following up with clients. For example, last week we had a trade booth at the Future Minerals Forum in Saudi Arabia. We had a number of Saskatchewan companies with us. And so you know, we were getting feedback around that opportunity to be part of a Saskatchewan presence at this very significant trade show.

And so what we've also now instituted is a follow-up with each

of those companies that were there to understand what opportunities they've had — it does take a little bit of time; these things don't happen overnight — but what contracts they may have signed, what sort of value they will be getting out of some of that, when they're willing to share that piece of information.

And so we have instituted some specific practices I guess that are happening every time that we're doing those types of activities. That follow-up will happen, and then it will be documented and try to be captured. So we're starting for sure on some of those things based on the recommendation. And I don't know if you've got more to add on that.

Ryan Cossitt: — Yeah, I'll just add one thing to that perhaps, because I appreciate the clarity. So what I would say is that, you know, in terms of incorporating it in, each of our staff, which is the same across the service, has an individual work plan. So you know, as part of ongoing conversations, we're using what's being collected for information from the offices and from staff in doing what we do with all our staff in terms of making sure that we're aware of what's happening, pivoting, making sure work planning and prioritization, quite frankly, is up to date and nimble. So I would just say those are active ongoing conversations.

Now that happens in a number of ways. Obviously one-on-one individually with supervisors for sure. Teams meet on a regular basis, both with headquarters and within the office staff themselves to be continuously, what I would say, doing work planning and making sure that priorities and resourcing is targeting, you know, the highest priorities based on what's happening, whether it's around us geopolitically or more on the ground in terms of what the actual directors and staff are actually doing in terms of their day-to-day.

Hugh Gordon: — With respect to recommendation no. 1 about obtaining formal feedback and evaluating it, you mentioned that there's an internal review with international staff as being initiated. I'm just wondering, like can you touch on the frequency of those internal reviews and how they are conducted?

Ryan Cossitt: — Yeah, certainly. And you know, what I would say is that you should think about that internal review language as being an ongoing, weekly, daily touchpoint. I don't want it to imply that there's a formality here that it doesn't need.

[11:30]

And so what that really means is that, you know, we're cognizant of the fact that as we consider options for improvements, we need to make sure it's practical and realistic and balances the resources of the office staff. We need to make sure they're part of the design. These are system-level changes across the network. These aren't quick fixes. And so we want to make sure we're being really thoughtful and detailed about what it's going to take.

Quite frankly, I don't want to get into a situation where we perhaps create the ideal set of options, which is a big draw on resources or is a burden on resources or it starts to draw and take away from time that they need to spend on other tasks. So it's a long way of saying that they need to be part of the design and solution.

Hugh Gordon: — Right. And I was just wondering if you can

give us an indication whether staff have given you any feedback on the reviews and what that might have entailed.

Ryan Cossitt: — Sure.

Jodi Banks: — One other way that we are documenting, I will say, is that we've got a client relationship management system. And so as our teams are working with companies that are utilizing the services of the offices, if there is a touchpoint that results in activity, it is documented in our CRM [customer relations management] system. That also is documented through our folks at head office as well, but it is a way where we can track progress with clients.

And so it is not always feedback related, but it is documenting those touchpoints. And so we have tracking as to when we're actually engaging with our clients. Sometimes it very much includes, you know, some feedback around what next steps might be or how we could do things differently, but we are documenting those touchpoints with our clients.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. What are some of the key performance indicators that you're proposing to gauge the performance of the trade offices? I see on page 100, you know, there's outcome KPIs and output-oriented KPIs. Do you have a sense of what some of those examples might be to share with us?

Ryan Cossitt: — So yes, happy to share a few examples. And I would just start by saying that there's a set of, as the auditor pointed out, 18 key performance indicators that we currently use. I think, based on the feedback and the results of the auditors, we're starting back to make sure that we're reassessing those too so that we've got the right mix. And so that might be more, that might fewer as we complete our work.

But just to answer your question, you know, a couple of common ones — and this is based on similar types of KPIs that other organizations in our area of work also follow — but things like investment wins or anticipated dollar value investment wins. It's a mix of activity-based and outcome-based KPIs, so it's a bit of a mix of sort of number of activities and then actual outcomes.

And a good example of outcome would be value when we're trying to actually quantify. You know, activity-based is like the number of clients perhaps that we've worked with directly, the number of missions, educational promotional events. We start to sort of split out by sector. You know, are we working on innovation-related events? Are we working on education promotion, perhaps labour recruitment, as well as of course training investment?

You know, a big part of the work the offices do is to help try to do some path finding and navigating through market barriers and through different regulatory requirements, particularly in foreign countries. So they do a lot of that path finding for potential buyers and exporters and investors.

So you know, being on the ground obviously is a big advantage, and they can help in terms of clients understanding what are the requirements when they're working abroad. So we do capture that in terms of what are the barriers to market entry that we've

helped to navigate through, any other kind of regulatory or economic market issues that might be sort of country or region specific, different types of client interactions, different types of partnerships. And that can include some of our primary stakeholders.

So I know one of the things that we talk a lot about historically has been our engagement with partners like the Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership. And then of course we work with others like that.

So I can stop there but just to give you a bit of a flavour, so there's some — again I would just repeat — some discrete activity-based measures in terms of the number and quantity, and then some outcomes which obviously are a little bit higher value that we like to, you know, try to find more of those. But they're sometimes a little bit longer until we can actually get some definitive outcomes.

Joan Pratchler: — How do those compare with KPIs set out by other jurisdictions?

Ryan Cossitt: — Yeah. So you know, in short, really well. I mean I think to be quite honest, those KPIs were based very much at the outset of the offices being stood up on the basis of what other organizations were already doing. So the auditor talked about Global Affairs Canada. That was certainly first and at the forefront of where we sort of went initially to look at that. You know, frankly there's some good common best practices, and I know we've looked at other provinces as well that have had offices and had networks for a bit longer than we have. And so we based where we started on best practices used elsewhere.

Joan Pratchler: — And so are you sensing that you're on the upper end of being able to compare with other jurisdictions, like even though that you've only been in it for a short amount of time?

Ryan Cossitt: — Perhaps. That's a bit tricky. And I think perhaps we'll get there when we start talking about public reporting or lack thereof. I mean I would just say that not all jurisdictions . . . And again we're in early days of doing our interjurisdictional scans, so just appreciate that. But not many jurisdictions, from what we've gathered so far, publish a lot of this information. And even when it is published, it's typically aggregated.

So apples-to-apples comparison, which I think is what you're probably getting at, can be a bit challenging. I think we haven't really got there yet to be able to say if we can directly compare or not. I think we're in the same space, but whether or not we're actually doing, you know, the exact same type of measurement, I think that's part of what the methodology will help to clarify in terms of making sure that we're being very deliberate about how we're doing our measurements.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay.

Jodi Banks: — And if I may just add to that, I think while other provinces, you know, have trade investment offices, they may have very different priorities. They may have a different mix of how they're going about their work. And while it may look like the KPI is the same, you know, doing direct comparison from

province to province I'm not sure will always be, as the ADM said, an apples-to-apples comparison. So we're cognizant of that.

Joan Pratchler: — So most of the KPI comparisons are provincial? Or do you, you know, try and compare them with what other countries might? Or do you even have that as an option?

Ryan Cossitt: — Yeah. I think our measuring stick would be against our own targets. I think those are the most meaningful in terms of, you know, making sure that they're tailored to Saskatchewan interests and priorities.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Is the ministry still looking at using a new IT system to track all your trade office KPI information?

Jodi Banks: — In our budget last year we have some dollars that are being put towards a new and updated client relationship management system. And so I think, certainly as we work to build that and get that up and going, you know, when our previous CRM system was put in place, we didn't have trade offices. It's very old. And so we definitely designed or utilized the fact that we have these trade offices in the upcoming design of our new system.

And so I will say it is not an IT system specifically to track office outcomes. It is a broader CRM system that would include the work of head office staff engaging with Saskatchewan companies as well. Like it is all companies that we engage with.

However, I would say, when we started the design work on it, we did have offices. And so I think there will be an ability to capture more of that work in a way that fits more nicely with the new system. I don't know if either of you have anything to add.

Ryan Cossitt: — No, I don't think so.

Hugh Gordon: — Yeah, so like on that point, that's another interesting observation, is we've got all these trade offices in different parts of the world performing activities in the region, whether it's events, presentations, engagement with clients of different kinds.

And I'm just wondering if there's like a communication generally between trade office to trade office, perhaps centrally through the ministry itself, where a trade office in Hong Kong can get a little bit of a window into what's going on in the US or in Europe or in Mexico City.

Is it like that? Is that information getting shared? Is it something you guys are communicating adequately enough between trade offices to maybe identify opportunities, whether they're global economic trends or industrial trends in different parts of the world?

Jodi Banks: — Yeah, I mean the geopolitical situation in the world is changing rapidly, I would say. And so it's critical that our teams are up to speed and well aware of what's going on around the world. So you know, I think we have a number of

different ways where we try our best to ensure that our teams are getting the information that they need, including our teams at headquarters.

So you know, I'll talk a little more generally, and then maybe they can talk a little bit about some of the specific meetings, etc. But we structured ourselves in a way where because there's nine, it works nicely. We have sort of groupings of three each that are maybe more relevant to each other. For example, we've got Mexico City, London, and Berlin sort of grouped. And so to start with, they would have a lot more interaction amongst, you know, those three groupings. But we also have significant opportunities to share more broadly across the branch and then across the ministry really.

We ensure that, you know, we've got whole groups of staff that are involved in the investment attraction work, that are involved in supporting our international relations. So that's relationships with ambassadors, incoming visits including both companies and diplomatic visits. And so it's critical that everybody in the ministry know and understand and are having those discussions about what's happening in the world.

We also have all of our managing directors — so those are the nine key directors that are in each of the offices — come back to Saskatchewan as a group once a year. They spend a number of days here. We usually bring them home in the spring because we're nice to them. And they come, they spend about a week in Saskatchewan. They spend a lot of time with the ministry. They spend a lot of time with each other. They spend a lot of time with some of the key Saskatchewan partners.

And so again we've got, you know, opportunities there where we can share. So yeah, having those folks on the ground, being able to hear first-hand — particularly because they're co-located in those embassies — what is happening is a key asset for us. And so the ability for them to be able to share that information and that data is critical to the success of our ministry. I don't know if you want to talk a little bit more specifically about some of the touchpoints.

Ryan Cossitt: — Yeah, I certainly can. And I think I would just emphasize what was just said in terms of it's very much a delivered two-way continuous conversation and feedback loop if you will. So you know, right through the individual work planning that we talked about, through the director-level touchpoints that would be weekly, through the monthly branch meetings, through the annual all-staff — all really important engagement opportunities to make sure that, to your initial question, those managing directors and offices are staying connected to what's happening, perhaps outside the region, and making sure that they're aligned and understand some synergies.

The other thing I would just sort of point to is that at certain key international events — so if you can appreciate, like five of our nine offices are basically in Southeast Asia in the ASEAN region — so as you can appreciate there are some fairly key international events where there'd be an intersection point between more than one office. And so our offices and staff do a tremendous job of making sure that they're aligning and collaborating to make sure that there can be multiple offices bringing multiple different types of sectors and delegations at the same time.

[11:45]

That's all predicated on them doing a lot of sharing and preplanning at various things as I just outlined.

Maybe the last thing I'll just touch on that I think is a good example is that in terms of the two-way feedback loop, we at least annually — but you know, as much as is required given sort of shifting geopolitical updates and issues and challenges — is that we go through a regional assessment of opportunities. And managing directors and office staff as well as HQ [headquarters] staff are continuously monitoring and evaluating what is happening around us and what are the opportunities that we need to seize, and being very deliberate about what's the short-term, medium-term, and long-term opportunities.

So you know, to your question, managing directors and office staff are very much in the mix in terms of not just consuming but actively sharing new information in terms of what as a ministry — not just offices, but as a ministry as a whole and into the sectors specifically — what should we be sort of evaluating on top of, you know, capturing and sort of actively pursuing. So all of which to say, they're just very much involved in a two-way information sharing at all times.

Hugh Gordon: — Exactly. And you know, so presumably like we're seeing instances where market access is being restricted or cut off in some part of the world that might open up another opportunity in another part of the world. And having that effective chains of communication and having a global strategy — or being able to formulate a strategy when those instances occur; being able to pivot nimbly, right, and adjust to that — it seems it's going to become all the more important given our current world economic situation, climate.

I think it's also really important, as it touches on these recommendations, that we're measuring these key performance indicators appropriately so that we can identify how well those adjustments or how the activities are working in, you know, the new global situation. And how well we're doing and pivoting, and how successful we are being or how resilient we're becoming — hopefully becoming, given certain circumstances — whether it's market access in the States or China or India or anywhere else, right?

And we also want to make sure that we're . . . You know, correlation doesn't equal causation, right, where oh we put a trade office in, and look at all the trade that's exploded. But what's the heart of that? What's the root of that? And to be able to identify, well maybe there's opportunities in areas or there's activities in certain parts of the world where we could actually, we should actually be focusing more effort and attention on and reallocating resources and/or drawing from other areas or changing strategies, right. So I think that's really important.

My last set of questions with respect to public reporting, I'm just wondering if you can explain why you haven't implemented that recommendation to make performance indicators public and how these trade offices are performing.

Jodi Banks: — Maybe I'll start. I think, you know, as noted by the Provincial Auditor, I think we wanted to be incredibly comfortable with our KPIs before we move them public. And

part of that effort is making sure we've got a clear target and a clear and replicable methodology. And so those two pieces of the recommendations I believe need to come first, and then we will absolutely move into some type of public reporting. But I think we wanted to be very cautious and careful that we didn't have to change course and that we had something that was clearly defined and able to stand the rigours of a public report.

Hugh Gordon: — Could some indicators be reported publicly now, such as trade wins, dollar values, agreements signed?

Ryan Cossitt: — So the short answer would be, you know, we could offer preliminary results. To be quite frank, I think the challenge is that we're . . . I would be concerned that we would put something out prematurely and then have to backtrack. I would be concerned. Like as the deputy said, the auditor has given us a really good road map for how we can make some systemics, you know, systematic changes. It's going to take thoughtful, careful design, and I think that's what we're trying to do.

So I don't want to get ahead. I would be worried that I would rush to put something out and then have to backtrack because I hadn't done the proper consideration of methodology. And I think it's methodology first to make sure that we understand what we're doing and why we're doing it and how we're doing it. Then it's the targets which really set us up to be able to say, you know, where are we headed and how successful are we being in trying to achieve those outcomes.

And then that's a really solid foundation for us to start to talk about, you know, what's feedback and what's public reporting need to look like. So I just think there's a logical sequence. And again just to repeat, I just would hate to sort of jump out ahead of that prematurely and then not put our best foot forward.

Hugh Gordon: — Are there any safety or privacy concerns being contemplated in reporting that information to the public?

Ryan Cossitt: — So yes. I mean I think we'll have to be thoughtful about that. I mean as you could appreciate, there's an evolution to these things in terms of when we start work and when work is actually finalized. And investment's a really good example of that in terms of the time it takes, in terms of the pipeline before we get from inception to some sort of conclusion. So we do need to be thoughtful.

And I think one of the things we've learned is that there's some value in a life cycle stage model in terms of how we look at the work we do in terms of the initial phases right through to conclusion. And quite frankly we're taking a look very carefully about how do we stratify different kinds of KPIs to align with those different phases in a life cycle model.

So obviously you're going to report on the number of leads early on, and those would be higher numbers, versus at the end of the value chain when you start to get the number of wins. And so you're probably going to expect to have lots of leads and a few less wins because . . . you know, for various reasons. But we need to stratify the KPIs to make sure that we're sort of putting it in that context.

Hugh Gordon: — And then I guess, finally, like are there any

particular areas of concern or data or information that you're concerned about sharing with the public, that you wouldn't want to report?

Jodi Banks: — I will say that it's not a concern, but there will be information, particularly around investment, that companies will choose not to share with us. That happens on a regular basis. And so when it comes to things like KPIs, like investment, the value of an investment win, we will never be able to demonstrate a complete picture on that. And we need to be very cautious and respect, you know, there's lots of reasons why businesses don't want some of that data released.

And so sometimes we can go and we can aggregate in a way. If it's a trade show and there's 10 small Saskatchewan companies, we can say in total there was, you know, this many dollars of contracts signed or this many dollars of investment. But on some of them, you know, we will just not ever receive that information.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. That's all the questions I have, Mr. Chair.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. I'm looking at page 109 where it mentions expenses. When I look at those expenses and I look at travel, is that travel just for your offices in those countries, back and forth from Saskatchewan? Does it include ministerial travel, or is it worker? Like can you help me understand what is included in the travel allowance there?

Ryan Cossitt: — Yeah, so it would just be the expenses for the offices in terms of their travel that they do.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. I just saw one person and I thought, well there must be more. Thank you. Okay. That's all.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Any further questions from committee members at this time? MLA Chan?

David Chan: — It's not really a question, just a comment. It sounds like you guys are doing an incredible job and providing tremendous value for our province. So I just want to say thank you for that.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Good comments there. Yeah, critical time obviously. And, you know, trade development and market access is critical to this province every and any year, but certainly critically important in these times. So thanks to your team for their work, their aims, and their efforts. Thanks as well for some of the commitments you made around implementation of the auditor's recommendations.

At this time I'd welcome a motion to concur and note progress with recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4. Moved by MLA Chan. All agreed? Okay, that's carried.

That concludes our considerations here. DM Banks, do you have any final words you want to offer us before we have a brief recess for lunch?

Jodi Banks: — Just thank you very much to the committee members again, to the Provincial Auditor and her team. This has

been a very productive time, and again, thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — All right. Okay, thanks, thanks again. Committee members, we'll take a brief recess for lunch and then we'll reconvene at 1 p.m. with the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training.

[The committee recessed from 11:55 until 12:58.]

Immigration and Career Training

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, folks, we'll reconvene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts here this afternoon. We'll turn our attention to the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training.

I want to thank and welcome Deputy Minister Wilby and his team of officials that have joined us here this afternoon. And I'd invite DM Wilby to briefly introduce the officials that have joined him today, and then we'll turn it over to the auditor for her presentation and come back your way.

Drew Wilby: — Well thank you so much, Mr. Chair. And thank you, committee, for having us here today. I'm Drew Wilby, deputy minister of Immigration and Career Training. I have Christa Ross, assistant deputy minister, as well as Darcy Smycniuk, assistant deputy minister as well.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Right on. Thanks again for your presence here today and for your work. Thanks as well for the status update, and I'll table that at this time: PAC 78-80, Ministry of Immigration and Career Training: Status update, dated January 21, 2026.

I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor for presentation and then we'll come back your way for a brief comment.

Tara Clemett: — So thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Mr. Jason Shaw, and he's the deputy provincial auditor that's responsible for the ministry. And behind him is Ms. Michelle Lindenbach, and she's our office's liaison with this committee.

[13:00]

Today Jason's going to present the one chapter noted on the agenda, which is a follow-up chapter related to English language programs. There are no new recommendations for this committee's consideration, as the committee previously agreed to the recommendations. And this presentation does confirm the recommendations have been fully addressed.

Before Jason proceeds, I do want to thank the deputy minister and his staff for the co-operation that was extended to us during our work. With that, I'll turn it over to Jason.

Jason Shaw: — Thank you. The Ministry of Immigration and Career Training helps individuals prepare for, obtain, and maintain employment. This includes providing effective English language programs to assist newcomers in securing jobs. The ministry spends about \$550,000 per year funding English language programs at regional colleges for temporary residents over the age of 18. In 2022-23 Saskatchewan welcomed more

than 25,000 newcomers.

Chapter 21 in our 2024 report volume 2, starting on page 209, reports the results of the progress made on the remaining recommendations initially made in our 2015 audit. By June 2024 the ministry fully implemented the two outstanding recommendations on coordinating English language programs.

The ministry monitors demand for English language programs through business plans from regional colleges. We found the five regional colleges submitted business plans for 2023, outlining their forecasted English language demand for the year. For example, one college determined it required 32 full-time seats funded by the ministry for '22-23 fiscal year and 49 seats in the '23-24 fiscal year. We observed the ministry making adjustments year to year because of changes in student needs. Consistent analysis of English language program demand assists the ministry in funding English language programs in the right locations.

Next we found the ministry sufficiently assesses where the regional colleges meet its delivery expectations by reviewing each college's reporting. We reviewed all five regional colleges' business plans, and found plans identified learner outcome measures consistent with ministry expectations. For example, the ministry expected that 80 per cent of enrolled English language students would achieve growth in at least one Canadian language benchmark skill level. In two of three regional colleges' '22-23 fiscal year annual reports that we tested, we found the colleges reported that at least 80 per cent of enrolled learners had achieved growth of at least one language benchmark level. Actively monitoring and assessing whether regional colleges' language programs meet its expectations allows the ministry to know whether its funding is achieving expected results.

Thank you. That concludes my presentation.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, thank you. Thank you for that. Just a reminder to anyone observing, this has been considered here before. We've supported these recommendations, and we have a report out from the ministry that they've implemented this recommendation. So I'd invite a brief remark from DM Wilby, and then we'll see if there's a question or two.

Drew Wilby: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. And I'll definitely be brief. Just want to thank the Provincial Auditor for their work on this and the partnership obviously with the ministry. They help us conduct our business and really dig into some of those areas that we need to dig into. So thank you for all of that.

As the Provincial Auditor suggested, these recommendations are implemented. We consider them implemented. That doesn't mean the work stops there. We'll continue to work through those pieces and how we can better improve the work that we're doing, in particular in this area, the work with the regional colleges and the such.

But pertaining to these two, we do see them as implemented. So we would appreciate any questions from the committee members.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you. Looking to committee members that may have questions. MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. Thank you and welcome. How many English language seats did each of the regional colleges request last year? And can you tell us how that would compare to what kind of trends you're seeing — more, less over the last few years — just to get, you know, a ballpark. Could you share that?

Drew Wilby: — I appreciate the question. So for last year, going through the regional colleges that we do have the seats with, at Carlton Trail there were 56. Great Plains College was 160; North West College, 73; Southeast College, 33; and Suncrest was 34, for a total of 356 seats. In terms of year-over-year comparisons, it's been fairly consistent.

What we will want to watch going forward is what that looks like with the reduction in numbers coming in in temporary residents, of course, through the federal reduction, the changes they've made, as well as with the reduction to the SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program]. And if you want to get into those numbers I absolutely can in terms of the reductions that are there. But I don't want to belabour that point because I know you have important questions to ask. But specific to your question those would be the seat numbers.

Joan Pratchler: — And so you say they're basically consistent then over the last while?

Drew Wilby: — For the last while they've been consistent. COVID obviously was a unique period of time there which would have changed that dynamic, and we saw that growth back after COVID. But it has been fairly consistent over the period of time.

Joan Pratchler: — Yeah, and just to piggyback on that last part there, have you had discussions about how the federal international student freeze will impact on the demands in upcoming years? Do you have a sense of what kind of adaptations you're going, you know, perhaps have to make or not?

Drew Wilby: — Yeah, with the way the program works, obviously there's the international student component, the temporary resident component where that would be, you know, considered as part of it, as well as the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program. And so we've gone from numbers of 7,250 in the immigrant nominee program in 2024 — that was consistent between '23 and '4 — to 3,625 last year.

By the end of the year we had risen above the 5,000 mark. They had given us additional allocations as the year went on. But to start 2026 we're at 4,761, which of course is below where we ended 2025 at.

With that comes arrivals. And so that is an actual nominee and that's someone that's employed in the province. But of course they can bring folks with them. So to give you a sense of what that means, in 2023, which was the high, we had 25,157 arrivals. In 2024 it was down to 23,164. And here's where the temporary resident restrictions really kick in: in 2025, December not quite accounted for yet, we were forecasting 14,000 arrivals.

And so you can see that reduction in numbers coming through in population, which also might mean an associated reduction in the

need for those training seats. Not something we want to reduce immediately, as our federal partners have in the settlement services areas. We want to wait and see what happens and make sure that we have the appropriate mechanisms in place.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Any further questions on this chapter? MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just wondering if you could speak a little bit more about delivering the program. I'm just wondering if you feel, is the ministry currently meeting the demand for English language learners, newcomers to the province? And if that's the case, how many positions do you foresee future needs going forward?

Drew Wilby: — I think it's safe to say, you know, with the methodology that we've put in place, and again with the hard work that the auditor has recommended, that we're close to meeting that demand. We do know there are some wait-lists across the province in specific sectors and areas. And so it'll be important for us moving forward to look to match the program delivery of course with those wait-lists that are there.

Again we'll want to couple that and look at what those reduction in overall numbers coming into Saskatchewan are and how that looks. Of course we may have people that move jurisdictionally as well from Ontario to Saskatchewan that require that training too. And so obviously we'll put that whole piece together and do a comprehensive look at that. But in terms of some of those wait-lists, I would say there's, you know, on average, maybe 400 people on the stage 1 wait-list and just slightly over that on stage 2.

The one thing we are going to watch closely — and I can't highlight this enough — is the federal government has recently decided to cut settlement funding significantly across Canada. They announced last week that there'd be about \$100 million as part of their efficiency review. The challenge you have, and I don't mean to belabour the point and go on, but the challenge you have is that those arrivals are coming over time. So just because they've reduced the number right now doesn't mean tomorrow people aren't coming.

And so there is still a need for those services and in particular in the economic immigration sphere, which of course Saskatchewan has care and control for the province. And so we're disappointed to see that. We will continue to work with them to see if we can get some of that reinstated.

But obviously, you know, some of those wait-lists are being driven by the numbers and with the reductions that are on the federal government's side as well. They direct-fund agencies. They don't fund the province; they fund the agencies, so just to sort of clarify how that works.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you.

Joan Pratchler: — So to talk about that funding, is that funding so they can . . . New people can come to our province, but they don't all come on day one. So is the funding on day one or does funding accompany as people arrive? I don't understand. Can

you help me understand?

Drew Wilby: — Certainly. So it's a funding envelope from the federal government that they would provide to their funded agencies in the province, so our community-based organization partners. We would provide funding to some of the same agencies for different services and the such.

But what they've announced is that going into this new fiscal year they'll be reducing the amount of funding that they provide to those agencies. So the agencies may be carrying the same number of clientele and the same wait-list, but the federal decision has been arbitrary just to reduce that funding that's going out to those agencies.

Joan Pratchler: — So it will be over time that we're really going to see that impact.

Drew Wilby: — Spot on. Yeah, absolutely.

Joan Pratchler: — Just talking about language benchmarks, what kind of language benchmarks are used? And is it just one type of benchmark assessment or are there a variety of benchmarks used depending on the, you know, maybe the language or the area? How do you assess language achievement?

Drew Wilby: — I'm going to get ADM Christa Ross to answer that question.

Christa Ross: — Sure. Thank you for the question. So we're pretty consistent across the country in using the same framework or the same benchmark, which is referred to as the Canadian Language Benchmarks. So for short we all refer to it as the CLB [Canadian Language Benchmarks]. It's used for immigration purposes across the country and for most kind of needs where there needs to be a formal assessment of language across various levels.

So the funding that the ministry provides covers Canadian Language Benchmarks 1 through to 8. So 1 is like really just basic literacy almost, and then 8 is obviously much more advanced. And federally some of the changes they have made to their funding when it comes to settlement services is they are now only funding . . . Starting as of September 2026 they will only be funding levels 1 to 4. So up until that point they have been funding, similar to us, levels 1 to 8. Quite significantly actually. So that's another area where we're going to see some impacts and some downward pressures probably on the province is those higher levels of language training.

Joan Pratchler: — So does your funding come in based on achievement benchmarks or on seats or a combination?

Christa Ross: — It's really a bit of both, so we would fund according to where the demand is. So we anticipate moving forward once the federal government has stopped funding Canadian Language Benchmarks 5 to 8. There's going to be a greater demand and so we might want to prioritize our funding to that type of programming.

So yeah, it's a combination of both, to answer your question more directly.

Joan Pratchler: — Yeah. So it appears that you have a plan to backfill for that lack of funding to deal with the 5 to 8s.

Drew Wilby: — Maybe I'll take that one. I wouldn't say backfill. It will be stretching the funding envelope that it is right now. Obviously, you know, if the federal government is abdicating what we would argue is their responsibility, we're going to push them to try to reinstate that funding and really show them the math to demonstrate where the need clearly is.

So at this point that'll be the approach, but obviously as we move forward, you know, we'll take a look at those things and where our funding can best be allocated.

Joan Pratchler: — We want everyone to get above level 8 for sure. That's the goal?

Christa Ross: — Eight is the highest.

Joan Pratchler: — Yeah. So we want them to get there. If we only fund to 4 . . .

Christa Ross: — Yeah.

Joan Pratchler: — Question mark.

Christa Ross: — I think though, you know, once you get to 4, 5, certainly 6, you can be successful in the labour market and find good employment with those language levels.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Yes.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just one last question to finish off here. Are you seeing any improvements in English language proficiency for learners?

Christa Ross: — Sorry, the question was, are we seeing . . .

Hugh Gordon: — Are you seeing, has the ministry seen improvements in English language proficiency for learners? Like have you seen a trend develop or is it just a matter of still, like, trying to provide the base level of language proficiency for most people? Do I understand it correctly that way or . . .

Christa Ross: — I think, so maybe just to offer a bit of context that would be helpful to understand my response to your question, about 75 to 80 per cent of newcomers coming to Saskatchewan are coming through the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program. So that makes us a bit distinct from other provinces, say Ontario.

[13:15]

So through that we know what minimum language requirements we have through the provincial program. So anybody coming through that program needs to have a minimum of a CLB 4. Often they will have higher levels because we do require English tests to be provided to assess that language level, so we do know that often they're coming, the majority are coming with a level higher than 4.

And I think too, we know just through the outcomes reporting from the language training that we are funding, whether it's with the regional colleges, there is of course a larger investment we make in language training with community-based organizations as well. And so through that collective reporting we know that, you know, they're achieving outcomes in terms of moving people up in language levels.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — So the last recommendation that is implemented in the comments about the actions taken, it says ICT [Immigration and Career Training] continues to meet with regional colleges' ESL [English as a second language] working group to discuss emerging issues and review reporting requirements. What are some of those emerging issues?

Christa Ross: — Correct. So we continue to meet. It's typically kind of director-level conversations that are happening, and I would say what's kind of dominated those conversations for the last year or so is really around the federal changes to not just immigration programs but also to settlement funding. Because including the regional colleges as well as most, if not all, of the community-based organizations that we work with, they also receive federal funding directly. And so we're going to be quite impacted by some of the changes that the federal government is making to their funding.

So I think with the regional colleges that has probably been the dominant theme or the dominant issue that has been the focus of those conversations. But there's also ongoing conversations around just kind of room for innovation in terms of how they deliver language training, what that programming looks like, how to make it more flexible and accessible to the learner. Those are a few of the, I would say, kind of recurring topics.

Joan Pratchler: — The less funding that you receive is really going to impact a big sphere in some communities with the CBOs [community-based organization] that would be supporting as well, hey?

Christa Ross: — So we know that the federal government is cutting their funding for stage 2 language training, as I mentioned, starting September 2026. So we know how many seats they had been funding, where those seats are. What we don't know is how they are going to apply some of the reductions they've announced more recently.

So it was just last week we learned, as you know, broader Government of Canada expenditure review and a target to achieve, I think, 15 per cent savings. We found out last week that they are going to be reducing, across the country, their settlement funding by \$100 million for '26-27. We don't yet know how they are going to apply those reductions.

Joan Pratchler: — That's all my questions.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Are there any further questions from committee members at this time? Not seeing any. Thanks again for the actions on this front. I'd welcome a motion that we conclude consideration of this chapter. Moved by MLA Harrison. All agreed? Okay, that's carried. Thanks again, DM Wilby, and your team of officials and all those that are involved

in the work that we're discussing here today, and all the work that you're involved in. Would you care to offer any final remark before we kick you out of here?

Drew Wilby: — Just appreciate the questions, appreciate the time today, and thank the committee for the hard work that you're doing.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you very much. A very brief recess as we get the Technical Safety Authority of Saskatchewan in those seats.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Technical Safety Authority of Saskatchewan

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay. Moving right along, we'll reconvene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, turn our attention to the Technical Safety Authority of Saskatchewan and chapter 30, a follow-up chapter for them.

Thank you, CEO Scott, for being here today. And I'd ask you to briefly introduce the officials that have joined you here today, and then we'll get over to the auditor for her presentation and come back at you.

Bill Scott: — Yes, thank you very much, Mr. Chair. My name is Bill Scott. I'm the CEO of TSASK [Technical Safety Authority of Saskatchewan]. And with me today is Chris Selinger, and Chris Selinger is the vice-president of operations at TSASK as well as the chief inspector with responsibility for the elevating devices for the province.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay. Thank you very much. I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor to focus on chapter 30.

Tara Clemett: — So thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Mr. Jason Wandy, and he's the deputy provincial auditor that is responsible for the audits at the Technical Safety Authority of Saskatchewan. This is a follow-up chapter related to inspecting elevating devices, and therefore there are no new recommendations for the committee's consideration.

We are pleased to report all audit recommendations have been fully addressed. And I do want to thank the CEO and his staff for the co-operation that was extended to us during the course of our work. With that, I'll turn it over to Jason.

Jason Wandy: — Thank you, Tara. The Technical Safety Authority of Saskatchewan, or TSASK, administers Saskatchewan's safety programs for boilers, pressure vessels, elevating devices, amusement rides, gas and electrical licensing and inspections, and plumbing inspections on behalf of the Ministry of Government Relations. Specifically it administers and enforces *The Passenger and Freight Elevator Act* and related regulations.

At August 2023, TSASK was responsible for inspecting over 4,300 elevating devices, such as escalators or elevators, in the province. Chapter 30 of our 2023 report volume 2 describes our third follow-up audit of management's actions on recommendations we first made in 2017 about TSASK's

processes to inspect elevating devices. By August 2023, TSASK implemented the two remaining recommendations.

We found TSASK followed its risk-informed strategy for prioritizing inspections and performing escalator inspections within intervals set in the strategy or within reasonable time frames when TSASK encountered delays. For example, the inspection frequency for low- and medium-risk escalators is every 12 months, and every six months for high-risk escalators.

Our testing of 37 escalator inspections from 2022 and 2023 found only a few escalator inspections completed a couple months after the expected inspection dates. We found reasons for delays reasonable, such as consideration of flight schedules when determining the timing of escalator inspections at airports to avoid passenger arrivals.

TSASK has a query built into its IT system that reports outstanding or overdue inspections, allowing management to monitor outstanding inspections. Timely inspections reduce the risk of escalator incidents causing injury.

While TSASK and the Ministry of Government Relations had not yet formalized an expected frequency for inspecting elevating devices, we found TSASK began reporting on overdue inspections in its quarterly safety standards report to the ministry in June 2022. TSASK appropriately defined overdue inspections as those that exceeded its expected inspection dates based on its risk-informed strategy.

We tested two quarterly reports and found TSASK appropriately reported to the ministry the number of overdue inspections. For example, the March 2023 report showed TSASK had 870 inspections or about 20 per cent overdue for all elevating devices. Reporting on overdue inspections allows the ministry to monitor TSASK's performance.

I'll now pause for the committee's consideration.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay. Thanks so much for the presentation and the follow-up on this front. I'll turn it over to CEO Scott for a brief remark, and then we could see if there's some questions.

Bill Scott: — Okay. Thank you again. You have two items before you, both of which are implemented. Speaking briefly to each in turn, with respect to the risk-informed strategy for escalators, I would just like to point out that in all technologies we have moved to adopt risk mitigation strategies wherever possible. Now this is part of our obligation under the terms of our safety standards agreement with the ministry, and that agreement itself was renewed effective April 1st, 2024.

So we actually pay a great deal of attention to escalators, and we conduct a very detailed inspection that requires two inspectors and takes a significant period of time. We do so because the very nature of escalators is that they're subject to a significant amount of wear and tear. They're in constant motion. We do have incidents regarding escalators, but I can tell you that they're normally not related to wear and tear of the escalator. They're normally related to the use and how people approach and utilize escalators.

With respect to item 3.2, which is again regarding overdue, we have developed risk profiles with respect to equipment which we use to inform our frequencies and priorities. Our priority is a focus on high-risk items. So I can tell you at present we have approximately 35 high-risk overdue inspections that are outstanding. Now that number will change daily because of course we'll inspect something that's high risk at the same time that something else is added onto the list, so it's a rolling number that we're sort of constantly chasing. But I can tell you that high-risk overdue items are less than 1 per cent of the total inventory of the province.

That was the extent of the remarks I intended to make, so I'd be happy to address any questions you might have.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thanks so much for the follow-up and the update and the actions that have been taken on implementation here. Seeing if there's any questions from committee members. MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Hi there. Thank you for coming today. Can you describe what exactly a risk-informed inspection strategy is? Like what does that entail? What does that encompass when you're talking about risk?

Bill Scott: — I think Chris would be the best person to address that. I'm going to let him do that.

Chris Selinger: — Sure. So what we do is, an inspector at the time of inspection, in doing their assessment of the condition of the equipment, and also their knowledge of the maintenance work that is being done or is under contract to be done, will do an assessment on the equipment as to the most likely kind of incident that may occur. And then with that, doing typical risk aspects of what the probability and consequence is. So as we kind of give it an element of a risk rating, we then apply that to the equipment type as well.

So some elevators, like if they're in an industrial location or subject to a harsher environment, they naturally have a more frequent inspection interval. But as they are identified as a high or low risk will also further kind of change the inspection interval. So a lift for a barrier-free access typically are less complex, less of a kind of a lower risk item typically than, say, a passenger elevator in a hotel or something like that. So the nature of the equipment, combined with the assessment by the inspector, will kind of categorize it and then place a time frame for the next inspection.

Hugh Gordon: — I was just wondering if you could just tell us how that risk-informed strategy has assisted in improving the safety in the use of these devices.

Chris Selinger: — So continue with that, like, what we've noticed is . . . Probably if a screen wakes up for me I can give you a specific number here. But since we started doing a risk-informed inspection strategy and kind of applying all that knowledge and everything, we categorized the number of equipment. And percentage-wise, our items that we would have considered a high risk at the inception of our program, we're kind of around the — looking at this — about 15 per cent of all equipment in the province.

Right now it's under 3 per cent of all equipment in the province. So I think our actions, by going there more frequently, and then with some of the orders and deficiencies that we find given to the contractors and the owners, have positively affected safety and the equipment of the elevators in the province.

[13:30]

Hugh Gordon: — I was wondering if you could just also tell me how the last recommendation for defining inspection frequency . . . Like that's been fully implemented, correct? And I just was wondering because the question I had was, the update says it's reporting quarterly on the number of overdue inspections, but you still . . . Or have you defined what the expected inspection frequency should be?

Did I understand you correctly, saying you've defined that as an inspection that's past due? And if it's past due, is there a certain number attached to that, like number of days past due, months past due?

Bill Scott: — The way we deal with it is, one day past its expected date, it's now overdue on our books. That's the way we look at it. But what we've done is we've divided it into various areas, some of which will have much higher levels of surveillance. That's the concept of the risk-managed strategy.

So the way it's set up, it will be overdue the day after, which is a little difficult to define sometimes. Because something is safe one day and suddenly, you know, the perception is that it would be unsafe because it's instantly overdue, which it isn't.

So you know, I think that this approach allows us to get greater value for our people in the field and get them where they need to be to do what they need to look at. And that's especially the case, again going back to the escalator world where we have escalators that are on a six-month rotation. Like that's pretty intensive surveillance of these devices where we feel it's necessary.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Just one more. TSASK is a new acronym to me. I didn't know it was called that. Under what ministry did this fall in the past? Or was this commission here all the while? Like it just doesn't ring a bell for me.

Bill Scott: — There's a history. We're under the government, the Ministry of Government Relations at this point in time. Chris has the history because he was there prior to TSASK's existence, but there are aspects of TSASK that were under various ministries, especially the elevator and amusement ride section.

Joan Pratchler: — Was this under Transportation at one point? I don't even remember.

Bill Scott: — It was under Corrections at one point.

Joan Pratchler: — Like it's really changed a whole . . . Okay, here we are. I didn't even know that.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Yeah, we spent some time at this table back at that time as the entity was formed — that's right — and the legislation. Any final questions, folks? Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just a last one with respect to frequency of inspections for low-, medium-, and high-risk elevating devices. Can you tell us what that expected frequency is for inspection for those? I imagine it's different for each category.

Chris Selinger: — Sure. So some examples are like escalators. And those industrial-use elevators, as an example, have that maximum interval as a low-risk item, so 12 months. Then it will vary to some of your passenger and freight elevators if they're hydraulic. The maximum interval would be 24 months. And your barrier-free access, some of those can go up to 30 months for the longest interval as a low risk.

The high-risk item regardless of . . . Oh, I shouldn't say regardless. The barrier-free access can go up to nine months if it's considered a high-risk item. Every other elevator type is six months. And then the medium is generally something in between, kind of closer to the low-risk number but in between.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. That's all I have, Mr. Chair.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Not seeing any further questions, thanks again for the implementation on these fronts. Good work on the follow-up to the auditor team. I'd welcome a motion to conclude consideration of chapter 30 as it relates to TSASK. Moved by MLA Harrison. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — That's carried. CEO Scott, any final word our way before we shift gears?

Bill Scott: — No, just thank you very much for the opportunity to appear today.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thanks to you and thanks to your team. Okay. Yeah, I'm going to table the status update. I was really testing the Clerk to make sure she was keeping track of the fact that I hadn't done that yet. Good work.

So I'll table at this time PAC 79-30, the Technical Safety Authority of Saskatchewan: Status update, dated January 21, 2026. And thanks to all those that were involved in the work reflected there as well. Have a great day. We'll reconvene briefly with the Public Safety Agency in front of us.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, we'll reconvene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. So we'll turn our attention to the new chapter in the 2024 report that pertains to the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency. I want to welcome President Marlo Pritchard to the committee here today, and I'd invite him to introduce the officials that have joined him here today. Then we'll come to the auditor and come back your way.

Marlo Pritchard: — Thank you, Chair. This is Charlene Luskey, executive director of our communications.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, right on. Thanks. Thank you both for joining us. And I'm going to table PAC 80-30,

Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency: Status update, dated January 21, 2026. And I want to thank you for providing that status update and all the work that's reflected within it. And I'm going to turn it over to the Provincial Auditor to make presentation on chapter 13.

Tara Clemett: — So thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Ms. Carolyn O'Quinn, assistant provincial auditor. There are eight new recommendations for the committee's consideration in this chapter. Before I do begin my presentation, I do want to thank the president and CEO and his staff for the co-operation that was extended to us during the course of our work.

The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency is responsible for providing and coordinating emergency management services for Saskatchewan, including a province-wide emergency call-taking system — or called Sask911 — for police, medical, and fire emergencies. Chapter 13 of our 2024 report volume 2 outlines the results of our audit for the period May 31st, 2024 at the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency around its 911 call-taking and dispatching processes for fire emergencies.

We made eight recommendations. We focused our audit on the Provincial Emergencies Communication Centre, also known as PECC — and I am going to keep using that acronym — in Prince Albert, managed by a service provider, contracted by the agency, which serves as the emergency dispatching centre for fire emergencies for all areas of Saskatchewan except for Regina and Saskatoon. PECC answered over 50 per cent of total 911 calls in 2023-24.

In our first recommendation, on page 126, we recommend the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency expand its IT security requirements and monitoring to safeguard the continued availability of its 911 systems and data. The agency has contracted the Canadian Public Safety Operations Organization, also known as CanOps, to provide 911 call-taking and dispatch services within PECC in Prince Albert.

Our review of the service agreement found certain aspects related to IT security requirements and monitoring missing. The agency relies on an IT dispatch system as an integral part of its Saskatchewan 911 operations. CanOps manages this IT system. We found the agreement with CanOps lacked specific provisions for detailed IT reporting, cybersecurity measures, incident response planning, IT change management, IT access management, and IT access control. Strengthening and implementing IT security requirements will enhance the overall IT security and operational integrity at PECC.

In our second recommendation, on page 127, we recommend the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency establish and periodically test disaster recovery plans related to critical 911 systems. We found the agency and CanOps did not have a formal incident response plan or disaster recovery plans. While each had business continuity plans, those plans did not outline steps to restore data, equipment, or key systems after a disaster.

Organizations that prepare for adverse events like cybersecurity attacks or unavailable critical IT systems are less likely to suffer severe impact. Without tested disaster recovery plans, the agency may be unable to restore its critical 911 systems in a timely

manner in the event of a disaster.

In our third recommendation, on page 128, we recommend the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency formally set a timeliness target for call taking and dispatching 911 fire calls to fire departments, and monitor success in reaching that target. A key performance indicator for emergency communication centres is a targeted time frame for fire call taking and dispatching. The Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency had not formally communicated a targeted time frame for this in its agreement with CanOps.

Good practice would expect that the agency set a combined call-taking and dispatch time for fire emergencies, for example 60 or 90 seconds to take a 911 call about a fire and dispatch the call to fire departments, and then monitor whether call takers and dispatchers meet that expected time frame.

Monitoring the timeliness of 911 call-taking and dispatching services provided by CanOps may identify ways to improve fire response times and make emergency services more efficient. The lack of a fire-call-and-dispatch time target may result in delays in dispatching emergency responders, thereby impacting public safety, as well as affect the agency's ability to make appropriate resource decisions.

In our fourth recommendation, on page 133, we recommend the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency broaden its 911 quality assurance program to include dispatch services. The agency's quality assurance program monitors the quality of 911 calls taken and the timeliness of 911 calls answered, but it does not monitor the quality of 911 calls dispatched or the combined timeliness of the calls taken and dispatched.

The agency has a quality assurance policy for PECC and a quality unit within CanOps that randomly monitors 911 calls taken, including fire emergency calls. However it does not conduct quality assurance assessments on fire dispatch. Broadening the 911 quality assurance program will not only provide insight into the quality of 911 communications for agency senior management but also support service improvements.

[13:45]

In our fifth recommendation, on page 134, we recommend the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency periodically confirm whether 911 staff at the Provincial Emergency Communications Centre have appropriate training certifications.

The agency has a policy requiring training for all 911 call takers and supervisors. CanOps delivers certain training in-house, and staff receive other training online. The agency policy requires certain training and re-certification every two years. We tested the certification of six PECC fire call-taking staff; found three staff didn't have current certifications. We also assessed the staff training tracking sheet maintained by CanOps and found 32 instances where CanOps staff had expired certifications.

While uncertified fire dispatchers may possess some skills and experience, the lack of formal certification poses risk to both their effectiveness in handling emergencies and the overall safety and efficiency of emergency response operations.

In our sixth recommendation, on page 136, we recommend the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency rationalize the necessary level of Provincial Emergency Communications Centre staff to support funding approvals for its service provider.

According to the agency's annual report, it paid CanOps \$13.7 million in 2023-24. This was an increase of approximately \$4 million from 2022-23. The number of PECC staff required according to the '23-24 budget request increased by 21 FTEs [full-time equivalent], or 23 per cent, from the prior year. By comparison, the 2023-24 approved budget funding for CanOps increased by 34 per cent, or 3.3 million.

We assessed the volume of 911 calls received by PECC in '23-24 and found they increased by 9 per cent. The total increases in budgeting funding and staffing levels for PECC did not appear to completely be supported by a proportionate increase in call demand. The agency rationalizing the PECC staffing levels increases the risk . . . without them rationalizing it, increases the risk it is paying CanOps for unnecessary staffing positions for 911 services.

In our seventh recommendation, on page 136, we recommend the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency determine eligible expenses for the administration fee it pays to the Provincial Emergency Communications Centre service provider. The agency approves an annual administrative fee paid to CanOps each year as part of the approved budget request.

This administrative fee increased from \$547,000 in '21-22 to \$1.2 million in '24-25 budget. The budget request provided to the agency from CanOps did not provide any detailed information as to what the fee is used for in regards to the PECC.

In '22-23, CanOps generated \$1.2 million in other revenue from sources outside of agency funding. Without the agency sufficiently scrutinizing what the administration fee is used for, there's an increased risk the agency's funding for public safety communication is used for other non-agency programs by CanOps.

In our eighth recommendation and our final, on page 137, we recommend the Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency obtain and review timely quarterly financial reports from the provincial emergency communications service provider to confirm appropriate expenses are incurred for delivering 911 services. Under the agency service agreement, CanOps is required to provide quarterly financial reports detailing budget and forecast revenues, expenses, net profit or loss, along with variance analysis. We found the agency didn't obtain and assess quarterly financial reports from CanOps during 2023-24.

CanOps does not have to provide audited financial statements to the agency until six months after its March year-end, so September 2024. Therefore at June 2024 the agency didn't know whether CanOps exceeded its approved 2023 budget, as it didn't get quarterly reports through the year and didn't have year-end financial statements yet. CanOps did exceed the approved budget in '22-23 by \$233,000, and the agency provided additional funding to cover that overage in '23-24.

Without timely periodic financial reports from CanOps as required under the agreement, there is an increased risk that

budget overages occur requiring future agency funding rather than being identified and mitigated earlier than later.

I will now pause for the committee's consideration.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Well thank you very much for the new chapter here and the focus of it, the recommendations that are before us. So I'll turn it over to CEO Pritchard for some brief remarks. Thanks again for providing some of the status update. And then we'll get to some of the questions.

Marlo Pritchard: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you for the opportunity to present in front of the committee today. And again I would like to thank the Provincial Auditor and her team. As an agency that's, you know, committed to continuous improvement, these auditing functions are very beneficial to really correct or to identify gaps in service or opportunities for improvement. So with that I will turn it back to the Chair.

Chair Wotherspoon: — All right, thank you. We'll open it up now to committee members for questions. MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Good day. Thank you for coming before the committee. It's quite a lot to cover today, so hopefully we can make it through. I'll start with this: can you talk a little bit about what the agency was doing to expand and enhance its IT security requirements and to safeguard 911 systems and data? Of course I'm referring to that part in the update, some of that information you provided.

Marlo Pritchard: — Thank you for the question. First of all, we've focused a substantive amount of effort into the cybersecurity. What we've done since the Provincial Auditor had made her recommendations: we have established a formal cybersecurity program. We've recruited within SPSA [Saskatchewan Public Safety Agency] cybersecurity specialists. We have enhanced our collaboration with SaskBuilds and Procurement in regards to the ITT cyber group.

We continue to work with SaskTel and other service providers to ensure that the 911 system meets or exceeds the industry standards. We're developing plans to expand the use of advanced technology to support and improve monitoring and rapid response to security incidents. We have hired third-party providers to come in and do assessments or gap analysis, which allows us to identify and prioritize work that needs to be done to respond to or repair potential gaps in the infrastructure that could increase the cybersecurity risk.

So a substantive amount of work has gone into that, and you know, it will continue. And I guess what I would like to also recognize, that some of these recommendations will become, you know, really business practices moving forward and almost policy pieces. Whether they will always be, you know, completed in its entirety, may never because of evolving technology, changing environment, changing situation.

Hugh Gordon: — I was wondering if you could tell us too where the agency is at on working on a formal incident response plan and disaster recovery plan.

Marlo Pritchard: — We are continuing to work on that recommendation. We are working on a continuity plan. We do

have a strategic initiative to establish perimeters and criteria for testing the critical 911 and emergency dispatch systems. There is an evaluation and improvement of system recovery procedures ongoing. We have again the dedicated cybersecurity team and the contracted vendors, which I talked about earlier, that are supporting the disaster recovery and planning for mission-critical systems.

We have the development of a formal business continuity exercise, and that is planned for 2026 and will also be a part of the onboarding of new resources. Part of the aspect of, you know, disaster recovery is the early identification once the systems fail or something happens. So that is part of that onboarding training.

We have the comprehensive audit of the PECC backup infrastructure, and that was the third-party vendor that I talked about that identified gaps and did guide some work moving forward into the '26 year.

And the government has invested in a PECC south facility here in Regina, so we have the segregation. So really a backup facility. So should there be a disaster in Prince Albert that takes us off-line, we will be able to pivot into the PECC south, so the complete redundancy will be built into that. And it should be online . . . We're saying early 2026, but I think the last report I had is probably May of 2026.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you very much. Who was the third-party vendor that did the backup audit?

Charlene Luskey: — It was ESTI that did the backup audit. There was other vendors involved in different phases, but ESTI was one of them.

Hugh Gordon: — ESTI is an acronym for something?

Charlene Luskey: — Yes.

Hugh Gordon: — Put you on the spot, did I?

Charlene Luskey: — Yeah. I'm going to have to get back to you, what that stands for, but . . .

Hugh Gordon: — I'll make a note.

Charlene Luskey: — Okay.

Joan Pratchler: — Are the two letters SD?

Charlene Luskey: — E-S-T-I.

Hugh Gordon: — Oh, E-S-T-I, ESTI. Fair enough. Thank you very much. So it sounded to me like you've got some processes you've engaged, you're working on some issues identified. Seems to be like work in motion, if I understand that correctly. Are you at a stage where you're periodically testing these disaster recovery programs and plans?

Marlo Pritchard: — They're planned to be tested in 2026, so early, you know, in the coming months they'll be tested. We have a good plan. We have worked closely with our service provider to ensure that we have a robust system. But they will be tested coming up in the near future.

Hugh Gordon: — Is there a frequency discussed as to the number of times the system is tested?

Marlo Pritchard: — That will be built part of the policy. It hasn't been finalized as of yet.

Hugh Gordon: — Fair enough, because it will lead to my next question, which I hope you will be able to answer. And if not, if it's something you're working on, you can tell the committee. If you know what the mean time to recovery is in the event of an IT disaster.

Marlo Pritchard: — I guess it depends on what system we're talking about. But I can say that the longest, I guess, failure — because we do have a robust business continuity plan that has been referenced — is we're talking minutes.

We did have a, I guess, a cyber cut when a highway was being built that did take the 911 system off-line. Our team was able to react very quickly — our third party, including our SPSA personnel — and we were literally minutes before we went into our backup plan and our ability to continue dispatching and taking 911 services. So the systems that we have in place in regards to business continuity are robust and have been tested in real life and work well.

The aspect around, you know, the disaster recovery, we did have a recording device that went off-line. It was not caught probably as quick as it should've been, and we did lose about two hours of data. But that is the longest length of an impact. We are hoping to reduce that into, I guess depending on what the technical issue is, to minutes, not hours.

Hugh Gordon: — And if I understand correctly, the south PECC dispatch unit that you hope is coming online, you said this year?

Marlo Pritchard: — Yes, in May.

Hugh Gordon: — Will help to mitigate a disaster. In other words, you have a backup in case other systems fail.

Marlo Pritchard: — That is correct. When the PECC south comes online, we will have complete redundancy for dispatch services.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. Has the agency established a fire-dispatch-time target? And if so, what is that target? National fire prevention association standard is 30 seconds for answering a call and dispatch in 60, for example.

Marlo Pritchard: — We have worked with our service provider through working groups to develop KPIs, you know, key performance indicators, and that definitely is one of the ones that is being tested as we speak. Our target is 90 per cent of calls processed within 64 seconds — and this is in line with your NFPA [National Fire Protection Association] standards — and 95 per cent within 106 seconds.

We are doing a little bit of an adjustment for Sask911 transfer times just because of the technology and moving it to fire services, which will be 90 per cent within 109 seconds and 95 per cent within 166 seconds. And that's priority 1; those are the risk to life.

Your priority 2 calls, again it doesn't align; it's not defined in NFPA. But those, I guess, business best practices is 90 per cent of the calls processed within 79 seconds and 95 per cent within 121 seconds.

[14:00]

And then the priority 3 which are the routine response, the target again is 90 per cent of the calls processed within 94 seconds; 95 per cent within 136 seconds. Adjusted for transfer times, 90 per cent within 139 seconds; 95 per cent within 196 seconds. Those are currently being tested to make sure that they are attainable, measurable, and sustainable.

Hugh Gordon: — You mention KPIs with respect to that. Could you discuss what those are?

Marlo Pritchard: — I'll turn that over to you, Charlene, the KPIs.

Charlene Luskey: — The KPIs that are put in place are the ones, the times that Marlo referred to for the fire and 911 combined. The key performance indicators will be combined with our computer-aided dispatch system and our phone solution as well as our voice recording.

And so our quality assurance monitoring will ensure that those times are met. We also have reporting that will be automated and allow us to monitor that more efficiently in higher volumes of calls, but until the technology's changed and the testing's completed, we're doing manual checks. So the volume's a bit lower but at least we're still monitoring and doing manual.

Hugh Gordon: — The KPIs are measured in the amount of time to dispatch and to transfer . . . sorry, to take the call and then to transfer.

Charlene Luskey: — Correct.

Hugh Gordon: — So is the agency/CanOps meeting this target more or less already?

Charlene Luskey: — Yes.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. Go ahead, yes.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Just to follow up on that, do you have data on fire call processing times this past summer for up north?

Marlo Pritchard: — Not right in front of us. Are you talking about the wildfires?

Joan Pratchler: — Yes.

Marlo Pritchard: — A lot of wildfires would have come through other sources. There would have been some that have gone through 911, but that is not the primary reporting mechanism. We would have tracked volunteer fire departments when they were dispatched and where they were in regards to firefighter safety when they're logged on and logged off and that aspect of it. But the 911 calls is a little bit different, so it would

have not have been the primary source of dispatch.

Joan Pratchler: — Was that part of the challenge, then? Or is that just the nature of it?

Marlo Pritchard: — There is a number of different ways that wildfire can be reported, 911 being one of them. But they could call the wildfire centres. They can call their local fire departments. They can also . . . The initial reporting does not need to go through 911 because it gets the process and gets the response. So I would not consider that as part of the problem.

The issue with this year was extremely dry and high winds. That was the underlying issue which caused significant impacts and significant challenges.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — I know it's not one of the recommendations, but on page 128, the auditor general refers to clauses not typically found in government contracts. The CanOps 10-year contract is due in 2028. I'm just wondering, is the agency reviewing those clauses? And are they looking to make the adjustments noted by the auditor general in her report?

Marlo Pritchard: — Thank you for the question. Yes, absolutely. There has been new leadership within CanOps, and the working relationship, I would say, has streamlined somewhat. We are currently working on recognizing that the contract will come to a conclusion in '28. We're in a conversation both internally and with our third-party provider what that looks like moving forward.

And then, you know, while we're talking about the contract, we're also looking at part of the budget, the concerns that were raised through the auditor in regards to a management fee versus an administration fee and paying for the . . . what is the responsibility of CanOps in regards to administration. So that is already being discussed as we speak, and it started earlier this past year.

Hugh Gordon: — So you'll be looking into making changes to the length of the contract, termination notice length, right-to-audit clause? Okay. Fair enough.

Marlo Pritchard: — All of those are being considered, absolutely.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you very much. Where is the agency currently at with respect to its planned implementation of the NG911 [next-generation 911] system?

Charlene Luskey: — So the NG911 system has been fully implemented in the province of Saskatchewan in all three 911 centres, which we oversee as well as all the dispatch agencies that are a phase 1 agency. So that one they had about a couple months ago, I think, when the last EMS [emergency medical services] agency went live. So now we wait for CRTC's [Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission] direction for enhanced features that will come out, and we meet those mandates and go forward.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. And could you expand on what exactly the advantages of this new system are? Is it just an updated system? Is it more digital? Is it easier to access? What are the advantages of this system compared to the previous one?

Marlo Pritchard: — Again thank you for the question. It is really the next-generation technology. It allows for the use of texting at some point in time, again when you go to CRTC setting the standards. It really does allow for first responders to get more information about the situation, and really an ongoing, almost real-time information sharing. That is the goal of next-gen 911 [next-generation 911].

I will also comment that Saskatchewan is right now the only province that has met the next-gen 911. And so, you know, with the work of SPSA and the leadership of SaskTel, we are definitely a long ways ahead of other provinces at this point in time, and really ready to take on some of those enhancements that will really increase public safety.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. And I noticed recommendation no. 4 with respect to quality assurance with the dispatch services. I was wondering if you could expand on your efforts in that regard and your expectations here for timelines for implementation. If you could comment on that.

Marlo Pritchard: — I'll start and then I'll turn it over to Charlene with some more details. But I can say that since the audit, we have updated all of our quality assurance policies. We've expanded the scope. We have hired dedicated quality assurance and quality improvement specialists that come with significant experience in first response. And they are part of the SPSA oversight of quality assurance.

We've implemented a new online training platform for Sask911, enabling tracking and refresher training for all staff in regards to ensuring that there is a standard met. We will continue to review and update policies and procedures with fire point-of-dispatch, and enhancing and monitoring of those KPIs that we were just talking about. And then we are also looking at adopting a software platform which will enhance or at least support our current quality assurance processes. Did I miss anything, Charlene?

Charlene Luskey: — No, I think that's it.

Marlo Pritchard: — So a lot of work has gone into that quality assurance piece and really shifting it at least from a provincial oversight to SPSA instead of leaving it with the third party.

Hugh Gordon: — Did the agency find a training gap when it responded to the recommendation to periodically confirm whether 911 staff at PECC had the appropriate training certifications?

Marlo Pritchard: — I would say there was no training gap. It was a lack of following timeliness in completing certification. We have implemented a process in regards to tracking of certifications and when they're due. And we're looking again at an automated system for training, a learning platform.

Hugh Gordon: — Okay. I'll just go on to this next question. I just was curious; as is noted in the report, why does it take so

long for senior management to approve the CanOps budget every year? We had a significant delay, did we not?

Marlo Pritchard: — There has been challenges in the past, and I would say that there was again challenges of alignment with leadership and agreement. We have corrected that. The budget was approved as an interim budget and then rolled in. The last budget was approved in a timely fashion as an interim budget and then approved as the standing budget.

And we're already in process for next year's or the '26-27 budget, so that one will be approved prior to March 31st.

Hugh Gordon: — Have there been any specific steps senior management have taken to approve those budgets before the fiscal year?

Marlo Pritchard: — Absolutely. We've had a number of meetings prior. If you're talking historically, absolutely. There was regular meetings on it. There was challenges. I guess I'll leave it at that. It had challenges. But there has been again new leadership within CanOps, and I sense — and I can't say; I guess the proof will be in the next couple months — but I sense that there is a strong willingness to work toward meeting the auditor's recommendation and getting this budget approved.

Hugh Gordon: — Right. So I just was curious, like there were issues in getting the required information, documentation about the CanOps budget?

Marlo Pritchard: — Yeah, thank you for the question. That was part of the question. Some of the other aspects were demands or items included in the budget that were not approved. And so that would start a debate in regards to — or meetings to identify — the need, the need assessments, which delayed the approval process.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. With respect to the recommendation no. 6, staffing levels, you mentioned in the update you've established a formula for measuring staffing levels. Can you expand on what that entails, what that formula means?

Charlene Luskey: — So for the call centre, what we use is different formulas that are, you know, industry best practices. One is Erlang C formula, which is a formula that's well known for call centres. And it takes into consideration the volume of calls, the KPIs that you have in place, and number of operators needed in order to meet those KPIs at a peak period. So we're using that for the call centre.

You know, another one of the challenges would be for administrative staff, and one of the other recommendations that was provided by the auditors. But for inside the call centre, we have a strong formula that we feel works well to identify the numbers we needed.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. Have there been any issues with requested funding that were not documented that you can provide to the committee and how that was handled? For example, we noted that the budget increased 23 per cent but calls only rose 9 per cent, according to that portion of the report.

Marlo Pritchard: — That was also an expansion of service for other first responders, P.A. [Prince Albert] police. There was other enforcement pods that were included in that CanOps contract; it would not have just all been 911.

But again, looking back at the recommendation in regards to service providing staff levels using best practices and full analysis, that is ongoing as we speak, which will align with the budget. Part of the current budget is that if there is money that is not spent it is returned from the third-party provider. In the last year there was some money returned just because of that oversight that we have increased in regards to making sure that we do not fill positions or the third party does not fill positions until they are approved by SPSA leadership.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — So that might dovetail into this question regarding how the administration fee is used and why there was, you know, discrepancy and why it was higher than maybe it was expected. Has that been addressed?

Marlo Pritchard: — Thank you for the question. That is part of the ongoing budget conversations that we're having with CanOps right now. We are shifting, you know, based on the recommendations from the Provincial Auditor to more of a management fee. So those HR functions, those payroll functions that have always been in the original contract or the original budget will shift and be part of a management fee. What they do with that will be their responsibility. So just taking those specific functions and moving them into a management fee.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And I'm not sure if you addressed this or explained this, but how much revenue did CanOps generate from non-SPSA sources last year? And what were those sources?

Marlo Pritchard: — We don't know what those sources are. Like I know CanOps is involved in a number of public safety groups. They do work with fire safety, I guess it would be literature in regards to fire safety Acts, but we do not know. At this point in time we've never asked for the audit. And as, I guess, a separate entity, they would be allowed to make profits outside of this, as long it's not using our stuff and our dollars.

[14:15]

Joan Pratchler: — Are quality assurance specialists hired to oversee dispatch and CanOps employees, SPSA, or third-party employees?

Marlo Pritchard: — Yes, the quality assurance staff that we have hired would be looking at all of our PSAPs [public safety answering points] like the public safety dispatch centres. So that would be the PECC or our third-party provider there. As well we partner or we have agreements with the Saskatoon Police Service and the Regina Police Service that also do 911 services. And they will all be part of that quality assurance oversight.

Joan Pratchler: — And you have confidence that they're impartial in terms of their evaluations?

Marlo Pritchard: — I believe so, yes.

Joan Pratchler: — Were there technical issues with the NiCE evaluator?

Marlo Pritchard: — Yes, there was.

Joan Pratchler: — How long were they and have they been ongoing? Has it been resolved?

Marlo Pritchard: — It's ongoing. The issues are still ongoing, but they're being worked on as we speak.

Charlene Luskey: — Yeah. With the evaluator with the NiCE software is the recording device. And the evaluator is a tool that we can use for quality assurance evaluations, which would do some automation for us or help hold those calls. We still can do it manually and we still can monitor and do quality assurance. We just don't have that NiCE efficient tool to use, but we still have the ability to do it. It's a software issue, so it's a vendor issue that we're working with them on.

Joan Pratchler: — Have quality assurance specialists separately evaluated the fire calls from northern wildfires last summer to evaluate specific wildfire situations, or has that been involved in that at all?

Marlo Pritchard: — No they have not. With the northern wildfires, the third-party review through KPMG, the independent review of that would be not so much around the dispatch process. But the overview is from KPMG.

Joan Pratchler: — So the dispatch process is not something that's going to be reviewed or because it'll be apparent?

Marlo Pritchard: — It will be part of the response. But you know, as I spoke earlier, the 911 process is not the primary or only . . . I guess that's probably a better way of putting it — not the only dispatch mechanism for wildfires. Whereas you get a structure fire or a car accident, 911 is called. So that is your primary point of entry to get your first responder. Whereas a wildfire can start at the local community level, you know, like many, many different ways of getting the initial response.

Joan Pratchler: — So do you anticipate the modalities of input regarding reporting wildfire will be looked at in that report as well?

Marlo Pritchard: — I'm not sure what the recommendation is. It's still early but they have, you know, five areas that they will be looking at. And I'm assuming that if that was an area of concern in regards to initiating a response that, you know, calling your local fire department didn't get the ball rolling — I guess that's not the right term — but to get the response moving, that will be looked at. But those recommendations will be coming out in about another month or so.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just going back to getting the quarterly financial reports, did you get them from CanOps last year?

Marlo Pritchard: — Yes, we did. And that will be an ongoing

process and an enhanced process moving forward.

Hugh Gordon: — I can't recall if you touched on this, but is there a reason why you didn't get them in '23-24?

Marlo Pritchard: — You know what? I don't have an answer for that. I can't remember why it wasn't.

Hugh Gordon: — Okay, fair enough because I guess it's . . . You were saying in the update, you're now relying on them with respect to the yearly report to compare to what's been budgeted, etc., right?

Marlo Pritchard: — We always had verbal updates, but we did not get written reports. So we had a good working relationship with the finance, but it was not the robust system that needed to be in place. But you know, again CanOps and our team has worked together to ensure that those reports are timely, and they are reporting to this point in time.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. Getting back to the management fee which was noted to have doubled, I'm not certain if you were ever provided . . . I think, if I recall what you said correctly, it's essentially just their management fee and what they do with it is not known to you. Do I understand that correctly?

Marlo Pritchard: — Yes, I would call it their margin of profit. How they do it outside of SPSA or SPSA function, I don't have an eye on what they do with that.

Hugh Gordon: — So I guess if I asked you to give us an outline of eligible expenses for this administration fee, they don't give those to you.

Marlo Pritchard: — No, because it's . . . What we do have, at least from my perspective, we have an administration fee that should be used for payroll, for HR functions. And when the budget was originally set up, some of those positions were funded.

So what we're in negotiations right now with CanOps is to pivot and say, those functions are yours. How you staff them, how you function with them is totally up to you. But you will get a fixed dollar — whatever that ends up being — to fulfill those functions. And we will no longer be paying that position.

Hugh Gordon: — Okay, thank you for that. I appreciate that. And then I guess the last question I have is, you know, it was noted that the agency didn't provide rationales for funding requests, noting in the report that funding has increased in the dates mentioned by about \$4 million a year. So are you now providing rationales for funding request increases?

Marlo Pritchard: — Absolutely. Those are and they were part of the last year's process. For any funding increase, it's not only documented, but it has to align with the standards that Charlene talked about in regards to the need. So we've really enhanced that process.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you very much.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — So you turn on the radio or the TV; something bizarre is happening south of us. So given the political state of the world today — literally today — what is SPSA's planning? Are they planning to prepare for Greenland, us next? Like you know, that, it seems to me, would fall under that mat. Who knows? Can you shed some light on that?

Marlo Pritchard: — Well I would suggest that SPSA follows the direction, but our mandate is to support public safety. So I mean if our . . .

Chair Wotherspoon: — I should just intervene here. It could be a very interesting conversation and committee, but I think it goes outside the mandate of the Public Accounts Committee as an audit committee of after the fact as to what's occurred. It is not a policy field committee. So interesting questions and deliberations, but not for this committee today.

Any further questions — though good questions — any further questions with respect to the consideration before us? MLA Harrison.

Daryl Harrison: — Yeah, just a comment. I'd just like to thank you for the good work that you've done for the province of Saskatchewan. So please pass it on to your team.

Marlo Pritchard: — Thank you very much.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Anything else? Yeah, thanks for being here today. Thanks for the leadership. Thanks to your team. I would welcome a motion to concur and note compliance with recommendations 1 and 5. MLA Patterson moves. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — That's agreed. I'd welcome a motion to concur and note progress with respect to recommendations 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8. All agreed? Okay, that ones carried.

Also, CEO Pritchard, thanks again for your presence here today, your leadership, and that of your team. Any final remarks for us here before you depart?

Marlo Pritchard: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Again just thank you for the opportunity. Again to the Provincial Auditor, it really does help focus and prioritize some of our work. And again, for the opportunity to speak at the committee, thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you. Committee members, we'll have a very brief recess until the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport takes those seats, and we'll get at them.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Parks, Culture and Sport

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, folks, we'll reconvene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. We're going to turn our attention to the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. I want to welcome Deputy Minister Gettle and his officials here this afternoon. DM Gettle, do you care to briefly introduce your officials that have joined us here today? And then we'll turn it over to the auditor to make presentation and come back your way.

[14:30]

Greg Gettle: — Sure. With me today is Paul Johnson, assistant deputy minister of parks division, and Phil Pearson, who's our executive director of park planning and facility management.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Right on. Thank you very much for joining us here today. I'll turn it over to the auditor to focus on chapters 18 and 19 respectively from the 2022 and 2025 reports.

Tara Clemett: — So thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials.

With me today is Mr. Jason Shaw, and he's the deputy provincial auditor that is responsible for the audits at the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport. Today Jason's going to make one presentation discussing both chapters noted on the agenda.

There's no new recommendations for the committee as the committee has already considered and agreed to the recommendations. Overall, all seven recommendations have now been fully addressed. And I do want to thank the deputy minister and his staff for the co-operation that was extended to us during the course of our work.

I'll now turn it over to Jason.

Jason Shaw: — Thank you. The two chapters relates to our first and second follow-up audits on the seven recommendations we first made in 2019 regarding the Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport processes to provide safe drinking water in provincial parks.

The ministry is responsible for managing the provincial parks under *The Parks Act*. Where it decides to provide drinking water in provincial parks, it is responsible to ensure the drinking water is safe and complies with provincial water quality standards. At April 2025 the ministry operated 43 drinking water systems — 27 were seasonal systems operating from May to September, and the remaining 16 systems operated all year long.

The results of our 2022 audit work are found in chapter 18 in our 2022 report volume 2, starting on page 199, and the results of our follow-up to April 2025 are found in chapter 19 in our 2025 report volume 2 starting on page 203.

In our 2022 audit we found the ministry implemented three recommendations and made progress on the other four recommendations. By April 2025 we concluded the ministry implemented the four outstanding recommendations.

For recommendation no. 1, by August 2022 the ministry developed a new safe drinking water policy to formalize the key operational decisions and processes related to providing safe drinking water in provincial parks. We found the ministry's new policy sets consistent minimum standards that applied to all of its drinking water systems that aligned with good practice. Formalizing key decisions and setting appropriate expectations enables staff to consistently operate its drinking water systems in accordance with good practice.

For recommendation no. 2, by 2022 the ministry assigned clear responsibility to water system operators for preparing and

maintaining procedures necessary to provide safe drinking water in parks. Also its safe drinking water policy planned to form a safe drinking water committee.

Our 2025 audit found the ministry finished documenting procedures expected in its new policy such as start-up and shutdown procedures and quality control procedures. Also the ministry implemented its safe drinking water committee, and we observed the committee met regularly as expected and actively discussed key aspects of complying with its drinking water policy. Having written procedures for key processes to operate drinking water systems helps staff to understand the ministry expectations and regulatory requirements and helps ensure staff follow adequate guidance to operate drinking water systems consistently.

For recommendations 3 and 4 related to maintaining water systems, we found by 2022 the ministry formally outlined its expectations for documenting routine maintenance tasks for all drinking water systems within its safe drinking water policy, but site-specific maintenance checklists were still under development.

By 2025 the ministry documented routine maintenance expectations in templates for its drinking water systems. Park staff continued to work with the new templates to tailor maintenance expectations specific to each park's unique drinking water system. We tested documented maintenance activities carried out in 2024 and found, for two of seven drinking water systems tested, staff used the maintenance checklists appropriate for the specific water system. The ministry indicated it is continuing to support park staff to adjust the new checklist for use. Having documented routine maintenance expectations helps staff complete routine maintenance appropriately and keep drinking water systems working effectively.

For recommendation 5, our 2022 follow-up found the ministry's new drinking water policy appropriately requires park managers to review key water system operational records monthly and document this review using an established checklist. Of the eight water systems tested, we found the park manager or delegate completed the monthly review checklist as expected. Reviewing key water system records allows park managers to verify whether water system operators undertake key water quality activities as required.

Recommendation 6 related to water quality test results. We noted by 2022 staff inconsistently completed reviews of drinking water test results on time. By 2025 we observed significant improvements in completed reviews of water quality test results. We found the number of lab test reviews not completed within the expected 48-hour time frame significantly reduced from about 40 per cent in 2022 to only about 17 per cent in our 2025 sample results. Documenting timely reviews of drinking water quality tests enables the ministry to continuously track water quality, ensuring safe drinking water at its parks.

Lastly for recommendation 7, our 2022 audit found the ministry updated its agreements with three of four municipalities who supply drinking water to certain provincial parks. The fourth agreement was agreed to in principle; however the municipalities had not signed the revised agreement for supplying drinking water to Buffalo Pound Provincial Park by August 2022.

We found the four updated agreements appropriately included a requirement for the municipality to inform the ministry of any drinking water concerns timely and included quantity of water municipalities were to provide. Having appropriate agreements in place ensures the ministry promptly receives notification of any water quality concerns from municipalities so it can take appropriate action to protect park visitors.

Thank you. That concludes my presentation.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay. Thank you so much for the focus of this work, the follow-up. And obviously safe drinking water in our provincial parks is an important matter. I want to thank as well the ministry for their work on this front and the actions that have been detailed in the status update. And I'll table that status update now: PAC 81-30, Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport: Status update, dated January 21, 2026.

I'll turn it over to DM Gettle for some brief remarks, then we'll see if there's some questions.

Greg Gettle: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll keep my remarks brief. I just wanted to point out a few things. The supply of safe drinking water in our provincial parks is a critical responsibility of the ministry and one that we do take very seriously. The Provincial Auditor's initial 2019 report acknowledged the ministry had effective processes to provide safe drinking water in provincial parks; however they did identify seven recommendations for improvement. I'm pleased to tell the committee that the auditor's most recent report from 2025 has recognized that the ministry has implemented all seven of those recommendations.

I would also like to recognize our parks team for making significant improvements in the written procedures for operating our park drinking water systems, the documentation and completion of routine maintenance, and the processes used to document water quality test results.

I would like to note that in the audit findings some consistency gaps remain in the documentation of our routine maintenance. However the auditor has indicated that the intent of the specific recommendation has been met. We are committed to continuous improvement within the ministry, and we will work with our park operations staff to ensure those inconsistencies are addressed.

I would like to extend my appreciation for the work done by the Provincial Auditor and her team, as these recommendations have allowed us to make meaningful improvements in our processes for ensuring that safe drinking water exists in our provincial parks.

With that, that concludes my opening remarks, Mr. Chair, and I'd like to turn things back over to you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Right on. Thank you very much. I'll look to committee members. Remember we've considered these chapters in the past here before, had the officials before us, but looking to see if there's any questions from committee members. MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay, thank you. Good to see you again. I understand the Water Security Agency and the Ministry of

Health are the two agencies that regulate or this falls under, but I also saw mention of the safe drinking water committee. Can you help me understand who's on that committee or how that works?

Paul Johnson: — Thank you. Yeah, it's an excellent question. The safe drinking water committee is an internal committee that we established across parks so that we're being consistent park to park and water system to water system. So they provide the general direction and oversight to all of the water systems that we operate in parks, and it's an internal committee.

Joan Pratchler: — And is there one for each park? Is that what it meant?

Paul Johnson: — No. It's one across the parks system that oversees the operation of all the individual water systems that we operate, but there's just one oversight committee that we operate.

Joan Pratchler: — And the Ministry of Health is involved with that?

Paul Johnson: — No. This is an internal Ministry of Parks, Culture and Sport committee.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. All right. And how many people are on it? Are they water experts or process experts?

Phil Pearson: — So currently we have about 10 representatives on that committee. So we have a mix of regional directors who oversee various parks; park managers; we've got maintenance supervisors directly responsible for water. We also have the ministry specialist who is our wastewater and water specialist that provides direction from that office to that group.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — I was wondering if you could tell us, were there any problems with drinking water quality in the parks before these recommendations? Were there any issues you identified prior?

Paul Johnson: — The easy answer is no, and maybe it depends on how far you look back. But since and even prior, leading up to the first audit in 2019, there were no major issues in parks. I mean, like all water systems, we suffer breakages in our water lines from time to time that requires us to cleanse the system, repair it, purge the system, submit samples for retesting, and get reapprovals. But we know of no major incidences that have led to illness or health issues from our water systems.

Hugh Gordon: — And nothing since, I take it.

Paul Johnson: — Yeah, nothing since. We don't track any kind of illnesses. That would be something maybe the Ministry of Health might track, but as far as we're aware there's been no incidences.

Hugh Gordon: — I just wonder if you could tell the committee how key operational decisions are documented. The update mentioned there is a policy, but you didn't provide details on documenting decisions.

Phil Pearson: — So our safe drinking water committee has got a SharePoint site that's accessed by any of our ministry staff — so that's field staff or our head office staff — and so any decisions made by that committee are documented. Minutes are posted to that SharePoint site; policies, documentation that we're asking the parks to complete are all encompassed on that water resources SharePoint site. That's accessed quite frequently by our staff out in the field and staff that are in our regional offices.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you for that. And I was wondering who is assigned the responsibility for preparing the written procedures mentioned. The update doesn't specifically say.

Phil Pearson: — Yeah, that responsibility falls to that safe drinking water committee, so that's chaired by directors at head office and supported through the field.

Hugh Gordon: — I just was wondering if you could tell the committee how documenting routine maintenance, including your checklist of the water systems, have helped to improve or maintain the water quality in our parks.

Phil Pearson: — I think, I mean it's more about the consistency across our system, right? The cross-training and the, you know, less room for error or margin for error as we cross-train across our staff. I don't know that it improves the water quality itself. It's more about being able to document and provide that support that that regular maintenance is happening.

But it also does hold a certain level of accountability in that field to do that daily, weekly, monthly, annually. There's many levels of that routine maintenance and documentation. It also provides that opportunity for a double-check through that park manager or delegate as noted, to confirm that that work is actually ongoing and happening on a day-to-day basis.

Hugh Gordon: — And I suppose what you're saying is that also includes the maintenance of the systems themselves.

Phil Pearson: — That's correct.

Hugh Gordon: — Right. So what were some of the challenges that you guys faced in eventually implementing these recommendations?

Paul Johnson: — I'll go. Yeah, I think in implementing some of these recommendations, we found that of the 43 water systems, we had inconsistent application of principles and policies and procedures. So that was a challenge that thankfully the Provincial Auditor flagged for us and that we were able to address and continue to address to this day to gain that consistency to make sure that we're following documented procedures and that we are, in all of our locations, doing all that we can to provide that safe drinking water.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. Could you tell us if the ministry has signed its last agreement with Buffalo Pound Provincial Park regarding quality water standards? The 2022 report said that agreement was still outstanding.

[14:45]

Phil Pearson: — Yes, I can confirm that all four have been

signed.

Hugh Gordon: — It has been signed?

Phil Pearson: — Yeah, it has been signed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — So just to make sure that I have the, you know, the governance part of this. There's the water safety committee, and then you have all the parks, and then you have the templates and the checklists happening. They feed through to the manager of the park, given the discussions that happen between the committee, and that's the accountability. The daily, weekly, monthly comes through the park. And then if there are any issues, they're dealt with either there or get support from that committee to help ameliorate whatever the situation may have been?

Phil Pearson: — Yeah, that's correct.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay.

Phil Pearson: — And the safe drinking water committee also does audits and reviews of those park manager checklists as well. There are samplings of those that go through that safe drinking water committee just to provide one additional level of oversight as well as support to the parks.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And there's been no breaches other than what would have happened historically. But this has been working well?

Phil Pearson: — The process has been working well. I mean there are processes when there's issues with our water systems, and obviously those follow either Water Security Agency or Ministry of Health protocols that we have.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just a final question. If you could tell me who is in charge of monitoring monthly reviews. And what would be done to ensure compliance if key operational records were not found to be completed?

Phil Pearson: — So that's where the park manager or delegate is responsible for those monthly reviews. And again that oversight from the safe drinking water committee provides that level of additional review and additional scrutiny on those. We haven't had an occurrence where they're not happening. They have been happening quite regularly. But that's where it would fall is within that committee.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. That's all my questions, Mr. Chair.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you. Any further questions from committee members? We appreciate your work on this front. As a question not related directly to the chapter but pertinent to the public accounts — you may not have the information — but a bit of a comment. The parks merchandise that you've got looks

great, right, those bunnyhugs and T-shirts and whatnot. I love seeing it around. We like it as a family, wear some of it. How is that working as far as a bit of a revenue source and stuff? What's that look like?

Paul Johnson: — Thank you for that. I look forward to seeing you wearing your parks merchandise and helping us promote the park system. It's working great for us. In the large scale of our parks budget, it's not making a significant impact, but it's a small revenue item. Somewhere around \$10,000 a year. So it's not a significant source for us. It's about more free marketing or inexpensive marketing by individuals that choose to support our gear.

Chair Wotherspoon: — That's great. We have a few bunnyhugs in the household, and yeah, they're great. I see sort of the brand and the celebration of those parks go around the province as well. I also regularly inspect the ice cream at Lanterns on the Lake at Rowan's Ravine, and G&S Marina has a pretty good offering on that front as well.

Okay, without any further questions here today for our parks folks, I would welcome a motion to conclude consideration of the two chapters before us. Moved by MLA Patterson. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — All right, that's carried. Deputy Minister Gettle and your officials, thanks so much for being here today. All those that are involved in the work we've considered here today and the parks across the province. Do you have any final remarks for us before we kick you out of here?

Greg Gettle: — No, we're good. Thank you very much.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, good. Thank you very much. Okay, very brief recess, folks, and we'll turn our attention to . . . Who do we have coming in next? Education next.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

Education

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay folks, we'll reconvene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, and we'd like to welcome the leadership from the Ministry of Education that have joined us — DM Repski and officials. DM Repski, would you care to briefly introduce the officials that have joined you here today, and then we'll kick it over to the auditor for presentation and come back your way.

Clint Repski: — Perfect. I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the work of the Provincial Auditor and thank them for the recommendations. To assist me in responding to questions today, here with me from the ministry is Jason Pirlot, assistant deputy minister; Sameema Haque, assistant deputy minister; Cindy Jeanes, director of early learning; Kevin Gabel, executive director of programs; and Rhiannon Shaw, executive director of corporate services. We'll provide information and updates on the status of the recommendations, and we'll be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Chair Wotherspoon: — All right, thanks so much. And thanks as well to your team for providing the status update that you did in advance. I'll table it now: PAC 82-30, Ministry of Education: Status update, dated January 21, 2026.

I'm going to turn it over to the Provincial Auditor to focus on chapter 4, and we'll go from there.

Tara Clemett: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Mr. Victor Schwab, and he's the deputy provincial auditor responsible for our education division. Behind him and to my far left is Ms. Jennifer Robertson, and she was a principal in our office that was involved in leading the work around the independent schools audit. And then beside her Ms. Michelle Lindenbach, our office's liaison with this committee.

There are four new recommendations for the committee's consideration in the first presentation. We will pause after each chapter to allow for the committee's discussion and consideration.

Before we do begin our presentations, I do want to thank the deputy minister and all his officials for the co-operation that was extended to us during the course of our work.

Independent schools are private institutions owned by a person or an organization that provide educational instruction to students of compulsory school age, that is, between the ages of 6 and 16, and are controlled and administered by an entity other than a government agency. An independent school must be registered with the Ministry of Education in order to educate students in the province.

[15:00]

There were 54 independent schools across Saskatchewan as of January 2025 providing educational instruction to over 5,400 students. There were six different categories of independent schools in the province including registered, alternative, historical high school, qualified, certified, and associate.

Chapter 4 of our 2025 report volume 1 reports the results of our audit of the Ministry of Education's processes to oversee independent schools educating students in Saskatchewan for the period ending January 31st, 2025. We concluded the Ministry of Education had effective processes except in the areas of our four recommendations.

In our first recommendation, on page 43, we recommend the Ministry of Education complete risk assessments for alternative independent schools. The ministry's risk assessment process begins each spring. Ministry superintendents review reported information, complete a risk assessment checklist, and determine whether an elevated level of risk exists — for example, if there's significant staff turnover, missed reporting deadlines found within agreements, receipt of public complaints over the past two years, or findings from previous inspections of independent schools.

The ministry had not completed risk assessments for the eight alternative independent schools as of March 2025. It told us it planned to complete these assessments in '25-26. Since the

ministry hadn't performed risk assessments and had not assigned risk ratings for alternative independent schools, it only inspected these schools annually. As a result, the ministry may not be inspecting these schools frequently enough.

Having incomplete risk assessment increases the risk of the ministry not inspecting riskier schools frequently enough, increasing the risk that deficiencies go unaddressed. Maintaining risk-based plans of inspecting independent schools can help the ministry prioritize resources and focus on schools that may present higher risks to educational quality, safety, and regulatory compliance.

In our second recommendation, on page 43, we recommend the Ministry of Education centrally track its risk ratings for all categories of independent schools. The ministry classifies the risks of qualified independent schools as either red, high risk — yellow would be medium or moderate risk and green was low risk — based on its risk assessment process. It tracked the associated risk ratings in a central spreadsheet.

The ministry did not currently track risk ratings centrally for the other categories of independent schools such as certified or registered independent schools. Instead it used checklists to assess the risk rating and save those assessments in the independent school's file. The ministry intended to use the central tracking process for all schools starting in 2025-26. Centrally tracking the risk assessments would allow the ministry to more easily identify the higher risk schools and assign appropriate resources and inspection frequency of those schools.

In our third recommendation on page 46 we recommend the Ministry of Education centrally track all non-compliance notices issued to independent schools. During inspections, if a superintendent who works for the ministry finds that an independent school is non-compliant with significant legislation or ministry requirements, such as not having submitted its discipline policy, the ministry will issue a letter of non-compliance to the school.

Non-compliance notices outline deficiencies, required corrective actions, and the due dates. If the school continues to be non-compliant, the assigned superintendent will escalate the matter to the executive director who will then escalate the matter to the responsible assistant deputy minister. Health and safety issues or issues of a criminal nature are automatically escalated to the assistant deputy minister.

While the ministry established processes to issue the non-compliance notices to independent schools, we found it wasn't centrally tracking these notices. Therefore the ministry cannot easily determine how many non-compliance notices were issued during our audited period. Management had to check individual files for documentation of the non-compliance notices to determine how many instances of non-compliance took place during the period. Without centrally tracking non-compliance notices to schools, the ministry may be unable to identify trends occurring or be slow in responding to outstanding compliance matters at independent schools.

In our fourth and final recommendation on page 46 we recommend the Ministry of Education periodically analyze and report to senior management on independent school student

achievement. Prior to 2023-24 the ministry prepared data cards for qualified and certified independent schools annually. These data cards provided information on student attendance, reading data, and credit attainment. The ministry has since stopped preparing this information, but still requires independent schools to report the information in its IT system.

We observe the ministry extracts grade 1 to 3 reading assessment data submitted by independent schools from its IT system, however beyond saving the data centrally, we saw no evidence of the ministry analyzing the available data. Additionally, we did not see any evidence of the ministry obtaining credit attainment or graduation rate data related to independent school students.

We were unable to see any consistent periodic reporting to senior management that outlines the success, or lack thereof, of independent schools. The ministry should analyze student achievement by category of independent school. If the ministry determined a specific category of independent school as underachieving, it would then need to consider the impact on its assigned risk ratings for schools in that category and conduct inspections more frequently.

Insufficient reporting on independent school operations may not keep senior management aware of ongoing issues, impacting their ability to make informed decisions, allocate resources, and ensure the ministry takes appropriate action to address concerns at independent schools.

I will now pause for the committee's consideration.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay. Thank you very much for the presentation and the focus of the work. I'll turn it over to DM Repski for some brief remarks, and we'll open it up for questions.

Clint Repski: — The Provincial Auditor's 2025 report volume 1, chapter 4 reviewed the ministry's processes to oversee independent schools educating students in Saskatchewan. Independent schools provide parental choice with respect to children's education.

The Ministry of Education is pleased with the Provincial Auditor's findings that the ministry has effective processes to oversee independent schools, except for four new recommendations. Of the four new recommendations, the ministry considers three recommendations are fully implemented and one recommendation as partially implemented.

Related to the recommendation that the ministry complete risk assessments for alternative independent schools, the ministry considers this recommendation as implemented. Alternative schools are a category of registered independent schools that enrol students who are wards of the province who require educational programming in a non-traditional educational setting. Alternative schools must be designated by the Ministry of Education and are funded through a service agreement. The ministry is pleased to report that all alternative independent schools have had a risk assessment completed for the '25-26 school year, and all are considered low risk.

Related to the recommendation that the ministry centrally track its risk ratings for all categories of independent schools, the ministry considers this recommendation as implemented. Risk

assessments have been completed within the '25-26 school year and are now tracked within one comprehensive document in the ministry.

Related to the recommendation that the ministry centrally track all non-compliance notices issued to independent schools, the ministry considers this recommendation as implemented. During inspections of independent schools, if the independent school is found to be non-compliant with requirements, the ministry will issue a letter of non-compliance to the school which details the corrective action required.

The ministry is pleased that the Provincial Auditor found that the few instances of non-compliance issued to independent schools were handled appropriately. The ministry now tracks all compliance notices in one document.

Related to the recommendation that the ministry analyze independent school student achievement and report the findings to senior management, the ministry considers this recommendation as partially implemented. The deployment of the Saskatchewan student assessment program will enhance the reporting and analysis of student achievement in independent schools.

And we would pause for any questions the committee has at this time.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, thank you for that. I'll open it up to committee members that may have questions. MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. Thank you. Good to see you again. On page 44 of the report, in the box at the bottom, it says that we know that there's annual inspections for independent schools and what the requirements are regarding instruction. And that's what I'm looking at there under instruction. It says, "Conforms to teaching practices consistent with Goals of Education." Whose goals? Which goals? What does that refer to?

Jason Pirlot: — Jason Pirlot, ADM with the ministry. So the goals of education are a provincial document. So they're the goals that have been laid out by the province. They date back a few years, but we could kind of walk through the high level of that if you would like.

Joan Pratchler: — Sure, just to know what the . . . you know, for people that may not be . . . Yeah, thank you.

Jason Pirlot: — Sure. Perfect. Thank you.

Kevin Gabel: — Hi. Kevin Gabel, executive director of the programs branch. The goals that I have are from 1985, just to be clear. So they're broken into some major subcategories such as basic skills, which would include read, write, and compute; acquire information and meaning through observing, listening, reading, and experiencing; process information through intellectual and technological means; solve problems by applying basic principles and processes of the sciences, arts, and humanities; communicate ideas through written and spoken language, mathematical symbols, and aesthetic expression.

Lifelong learning would be the next category: seeking value of learning experiences; active, self-reliant learners; base actions on

the knowledge that it is necessary to learn throughout life.

Understanding and relating to others: act on the belief that each individual is worthwhile; base actions on the recognition that people differ in their values, behaviours, and lifestyles; interact and feel comfortable with others who are different in race, religion, status, or personal attributes; develop a sense of responsibility towards others.

Self-concept development: perceive themselves in a positive way; appreciate their own abilities and limitations; set and work towards personal goals; accepts praise and criticism realistically; present themselves with confidence.

Positive lifestyle: practise appropriate personal hygiene; engage in sufficient physical activity and maintain a nutritionally balanced diet; avoid harmful use of alcohol and other drugs; cultivate interests that may be the basis for personal development and leisure pursuits; recognize the importance of productive activity; display initiative and pursue tasks diligently; maintain a safe and healthful community; respect and seek to enhance the environment; appreciate beauty in its many natural and constructed forms; express themselves creatively.

Spiritual development: seek an understanding of the purpose and worth of human existence; develop a knowledge of God; respect family, religion, and culture in a pluralistic society.

Career and consumer decisions: develop an awareness of career opportunities; develop interests and abilities in relation to vocational expectations; adapt to shifts in employment patterns and technology; make informed consumer decisions.

Membership in society: assume responsibility for their own actions; work with others to achieve individual and group goals; participate in the democratic process of government and perform the duties of citizenship; respect the rights and property of others; act with honesty, integrity, compassion, and fairness; develop a sense of national pride and acknowledge the need for international understanding; work toward greater social justice; assume responsibility for dependent persons in a manner consistent with their needs; respect law and authority; exercise the right of dissent responsibly.

And final category is growth with change: work toward immediate and long-term goals; base actions on an understanding that change is a natural process in society; select workable alternatives in response to changing conditions; and develop confidence in making decisions that involve risk.

Joan Pratchler: — And would those goals apply only to the independent schools? Or is that overriding through goals of education for the province?

Jason Pirlot: — Thanks for the question. So I would say at a high level, at a broad level, those goals would apply to all school divisions. Specifically though, I would say that we wouldn't call out those goals necessarily to school divisions, but, you know, I think many school divisions would have administrative procedures that more or less relate to these goals.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. The auditor made several references about lack of assessment of student achievement. All

teachers in independent schools are certified teachers, or that's what I understood from page 32. Is that correct?

Jason Pirlot: — So it depends on the category of independent schools. So funded categories of independent schools — schools that receive funding from the provincial government — are required to use certified teachers.

[15:15]

For unfunded categories of independent schools, there's a couple different scenarios at play. There's religious categories of unfunded schools and non-religious. And you know, I think at a high level so as it relates to the religious categories of unfunded schools, not required to use certified teachers. And for the non-religious unfunded schools, may use certified teachers, probably do use certified teachers, but a little bit different in terms of the requirements.

Joan Pratchler: — So for those schools that are required to have certified teachers, that category, are you finding challenges with getting the documents or the data on assessment of achievement?

Kevin Gabel: — Thank you for the question. We don't see any issues with that whatsoever between the funded independent schools and a school division school, because they would be certified teachers that are there with the same training.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. So if I understand right, there's a sense from the auditor that there's a lack of assessment for student achievement. Or is it the reporting of the assessment of student achievement in that risk assessment? Inspection . . .

Jason Pirlot: — If I might, I would direct that to the auditor to explain kind of what their observance was.

Tara Clemett: — Oh, in terms of our recommendation no. 4, it's a combination of both. But it would be a matter of there's information right now that the ministry is getting. There probably could be more information. So any student in the province, you know, you'd have an expectation that they're being educated as such, and there's information that flows to the ministry we're looking for the ministry to analyze.

We talked about the grade 1s to 3, like reading levels, where are you at. Having a look at, at the end of the day, if you're being taught in an independent school, what are sort of those achievement rates looking like? Probably more to category level, because the extent of students in some of these schools are very small, so it's probably at that higher category level.

Looking at it to get an overall sense, is there specific categories of independent schools that seem to be obviously not meeting the expectations of a student achievement level that the ministry will set as such? And is there anything that they should do that should escalate from a reporting standpoint? And then should they do anything to obviously address those deficiencies? And that might come back to, like you said, is there any supports needed or training from the teachers' side? Yeah, like the root cause would have to be determined, right?

Joan Pratchler: — So if I look at the different categories of the independent schools, is the ministry getting achievement data

from the certified schools?

Kevin Gabel: — Yes, we do get the data from . . . The staff are in these categories of schools, supervising, so they are witnessing the assessments. They are witnessing the teaching of outcomes and everything else, so yes.

Joan Pratchler: — And would the same thing be true for the qualified schools? That you're getting data from them as well on student achievement?

Kevin Gabel: — That would be correct.

Joan Pratchler: — And of course historical high schools you would absolutely . . .

Kevin Gabel: — That is correct.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And alternative, well they would have a very unique way of their operations as well.

Kevin Gabel: — That is correct. Alternative independent schools are generally dealing with students who are in an individualized learning plan and everything else, so correct.

Joan Pratchler: — So you're getting the data. Is the data then analyzed in order . . . a) is the data analyzed; b) who is analyzing that data that comes in on those schools? Is that done at the local level and then they provide a summary to the ministry? Or how does that go forward?

Kevin Gabel: — Thank you for the question again. The data that is collected from there would be the same as what we collected from the public schools, like credit attainment, all that. All the funded independent schools are required to take part in all the same assessments the school divisions are.

Joan Pratchler: — And so I'm just looking at what that circle would be. Student completes an assessment, it is probably sent to the administrator of the school, and is it compiled at the school to analyze, you know, where the improvements need to happen? And then is that sent to the ministry? Or is the ministry a repository after all the assessment, data analysis, and improvement plans are completed?

Kevin Gabel: — It would be an ongoing process. Like as I said, the superintendents are out in the school regularly in the funded categories. So this is ongoing with the exception of the grade 1 to 3 reading data, which are specific collection times, which are across the province as well. Credit attainment would only take part at the end of the school year, but overall, so we're getting the same data from school divisions. And then we would analyze it at the branch level. If there happened to be an issue, we would address it to the school. If it's serious, it would go upwards. It would go up to the ADM and above.

Joan Pratchler: — And so if there were challenges, let's say in reading, that those scores would be a challenge at, you know, grade 2 or even grade 3, those would be really addressed at the school. The ministry basically just provides oversight to see that, you know, some improvement plans have happened or the issues are being addressed.

Kevin Gabel: — Yes. So what would happen, the superintendent would be in there, would be talking with them about their reading scores, and then they'd talk about what they could do.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay, good.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — He had a comment.

Jason Pirlot: — I was just going to . . . Yeah, just to add onto that. Like I guess with the independent schools, our approach and expectation, obviously we're monitoring data. But the expectation is that the administration of those schools is responsible for . . . Right now if we're unsatisfied with what their prescriptions might be to change things, we'll have conversations with them.

Kevin's team, the superintendents, they observe the classroom teaching practices. They're going into the classroom. They're paying attention to what's going on. And they'll, from time to time, provide advice on better practices, better whatever, right.

But at the end of the day, you're quite right in your question. Our role is related to oversight as opposed to actually delivering the instruction.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Joan Pratchler: — Sorry.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Sorry, MLA Pratchler, you're on a bit of a thread there. You're continuing with another one? Yeah, keep the floor for now and we'll come back to Gordon or whoever else has Qs [question].

Joan Pratchler: — When we look at reporting for independent schools' achievement from K to 9 [kindergarten to grade 9], was there any reporting for the last . . . When did that start happening, that that reporting from independent schools was sent to the ministry or reviewed by the ministry?

Kevin Gabel: — Thank you again for the question. In response to the K to 9 schools, in the funded schools we have been collecting attendance data, for example, since they began. And when it came to the grade 1 to 3 reading data, when the province started collecting, mandated that across the province, the year after that is when we started collecting that from the funded schools.

Joan Pratchler: — So that would be for quite a few years now.

Kevin Gabel: — Yes.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And then following up on that, so the new assessment program that's coming in the future, that's for all schools, including independent schools?

Jason Pirlot: — So that will be for all schools, including funded categories of independent schools. For unfunded categories, we have invited them to participate in the program. We would be

encouraged if they took us up on that invite. But that invite also includes First Nations education authorities as well.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And if I understand, the purpose of that new assessment program is to enhance reporting?

Jason Pirlot: — I don't know that I would frame it as to enhance reporting. At the end of the day, it's to improve student learning and to provide valuable information back to schools to utilize, to support teacher practices, to support student learning, and quite frankly to give us advice on, you know, maybe our curriculum needs to be changed in a certain way to support student learning, right. So there's a lot to that assessment program, and it's quite a bit more than just reporting.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And what would be the driving criteria then with that program?

Jason Pirlot: — I don't follow the question.

Joan Pratchler: — So it's a new assessment program.

Jason Pirlot: — Correct.

Joan Pratchler: — What's the driving criteria? Is it curriculum? Is it attendance? Or what would . . .

Jason Pirlot: — Yeah, so for grades 4, 7, and 10 in English language arts and grades 5 and 9 in mathematics, it'll be a census-based assessment program. Obviously we'll work with school divisions and schools on accommodations that might be required for certain students.

But the focus of it — and this is why we're feeling pretty good about the path we're on here — is the assessments will be in relation to students' understanding of the curriculum, right. So for grade 5 mathematics, for instance, the assessment at the end of the year will provide a snapshot of a student's understanding of that grade 5 mathematics curriculum. And so at a high level that's really what we're doing here.

Joan Pratchler: — And so to understand how well . . . that's not the right word. To gather all that data and analyze that data is to help know better how, for example, grade 5s were understanding math.

Jason Pirlot: — Correct. And at the classroom level, at the school level, at the school division level, and at the provincial level. And through our work with our education partners, the school divisions, through the provincial education plan, we have processes in place to have these conversations.

And we'll have processes in place to reflect on the . . . You know, that first field test is coming in short order. I guess once we get the full rollout of the assessment, we'll have processes in place to have conversations across the province with our school divisions and our independent schools on what to take from it, like what we might need to change in terms of curriculum, and conversations with our teachers on how do we support teacher practice. Yeah.

Joan Pratchler: — And so is it in addition . . . well actually it wouldn't be addition, but is there any connection to the

assessment of learning, assessment for learning? Is it following that type of close connection between curriculum and outcomes?

Jason Pirlot: — So I think you're referring to the older assessment program that was in Saskatchewan.

Joan Pratchler: — Yeah.

Jason Pirlot: — I would say . . . Yeah, assessment for learning. To my knowledge, that hasn't been deployed for quite some time in Saskatchewan. So I wouldn't necessarily say it's a replacement for it, but I think it's an acknowledgement that there's an opportunity to have conversations about — again, at all four levels: classroom, school, school division, and the province — how do we better understand the information that is available and how do we support improvements in the classroom at the end of the day to support our students.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — I have a question about uncertified teachers. I just was wondering what the ministry is doing to ensure that people who've been given letters of eligibility to teach in independent schools have at least a grade 12 diploma. She noted in her report on page 40 that they found eight teachers who didn't graduate from high school.

Jason Pirlot: — So we'll take a minute to pause on that, but just as a quick point of clarification, those uncertified teachers without a grade 12 diploma in those instances are solely related to unfunded categories of religious schools. And there's religious rights that have been afforded to families to direct their education and in some instances, say certain colonies in this province, for them to provide education in the manner they see fit. It's simply the case that those folks won't have grade 12s. Yeah. But we'll pause for a second and get back to you.

[15:30]

Hugh Gordon: — Yeah, sure.

Jason Pirlot: — Yes, thank you. So I think we'll kind of pause on the answer that was provided there and see if you have any follow-up questions.

Hugh Gordon: — No, I think it just comes down to like measuring student achievement too, right. Like how do we know what's working in these schools for these students or not. And if we're not using certified teachers, if we're giving them letters of eligibility because they meet certain qualifications, and yet we've got student achievement that, you know, matches or doesn't match those qualifications, it's another measuring tool to determine whether or not, you know, the learning or the education these kids are getting in these schools is meeting standards. That's all I'm suggesting.

And so I bring up the question just to see what impact it may have — if you're even aware of it — on learning outcomes.

Jason Pirlot: — Yeah, I take your point on the question. I guess I would observe again for the instances where the auditor made

that observance, these are for unfunded categories of religious schools. And so those communities might view student achievement in a different manner than I view it or you view it. They're going to place a heavier emphasis on culture and their religion. And so from our perspective, parents are making decisions in the best interest of their kids insofar as those schools are operating in a safe manner. That's kind of the extent of our oversight.

Joan Pratchler: — How many independent schools in this province have a high-risk rating?

Kevin Gabel: — Thank you for the question. I think I'll first start to talk about how we come up with a risk rating because I think that's really important for a background for the committee. When a risk assessment is undertaken, we take such things as is the school currently on probation or has been on probation in the past two years? Have they met all deadlines? Is there a high staff turnover, which we classify at 50 per cent or more? Is there a new principal? Has there been public complaints over the past two years that are founded? We then go into the inspection supervision concerns over the past two years, such as health and safety, environmental, facility, enrolment, staffing personnel.

So once we go through that, we immediately get the risk assessment. As well, if a school is new to a category, its risk rating is automatically elevated. So if it's a new unfunded school, its risk rating is going to be elevated just because they may not understand all the rules yet. So we must provide more support to them. But for the '25-26 school year, we currently have five high-risk schools in the province. That's out of 54 schools in total.

Joan Pratchler: — And how many of them would be alternative schools?

Kevin Gabel: — None.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And what are the most common risk factors in those schools that are rated as high risk?

Kevin Gabel: — Thank you for the question there. It is high staff turnover and a new principal, understanding in some of these schools with the funding they receive that there is a staff member turnover going to school divisions in a lot of cases.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. How many inspectors carry out these risk assessments?

Kevin Gabel: — We currently have three full-time superintendents.

Joan Pratchler: — And do you need more?

Kevin Gabel: — Thank you for the question. I do believe we're adequately resourced. But this is also the reason that we have moved to a risk-based assessment approach, so we can make sure we're deploying the resources to where they're most needed.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Good.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Just on that, the five schools that you identified that are of higher risk or deemed higher risk, which categories do those fall within?

Kevin Gabel: — They fall in the registered independent; they fall in the certified and the qualified.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you. Pratchler, you still working a thread there or should I hit Gordon?

Joan Pratchler: — It's his turn now.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay. Gordon or Chan. I'll go over here.

Hugh Gordon: — Just with respect to I guess inspections, I'm just wondering how many independent schools are currently being inspected monthly. And I know there's quite a frequency amount depending on the risk. Could you give us an idea of how many independent schools are currently being inspected on a monthly basis?

Jason Pirlot: — So when Kevin's pulling some of that information together, like is just kind of a scale helpful, like something like that?

Hugh Gordon: — I know it changes, because some have issues for only a short period. Let's say for the last year of information you have.

Jason Pirlot: — Sure. Sounds good.

Kevin Gabel: — Thank you for the question. I'm going to start by saying our qualified independent schools and certified independent schools have a minimum number of visits that must occur regardless of risk assessment and that. So that will skew the results a little bit.

Where our visits go, if a school is high risk it is visited monthly at a minimum. So if we believe it needs more support or more oversight, it will be at least monthly. If a school is medium risk, it will be similar to that. If it is low risk, if it's a funded school, minimum three or four times a year. Unfunded, one or two times a year if they're low risk.

Hugh Gordon: — Can you tell us how many independent schools are being inspected monthly? Or can you tell me how many were inspected monthly last year? That was the question.

Kevin Gabel: — I have the current data for this year, and I can say that nine qualified independent schools are being inspected monthly.

Hugh Gordon: — And so when we're talking about risk ratings, I imagine that changes throughout the year too. So does that risk rating change like after an inspection is done or review is done? A problem, an issue has been resolved, some of the risk categories you've identified, that also changes? And that changes at the moment you've made those decisions or determinations?

Jason Pirlot: — That's correct. Yeah, so it's not a static rating. It's a dynamic rating. And as we receive information, as we spend time with schools and, you know, obviously staffing changes happen throughout the year, right. And that's one of the things that can lead to us just wanting to spend a little bit more time at a school. So you're quite right.

Hugh Gordon: — And by virtue of changing in a risk category, that'll also change the frequency in which it may be inspected?

Jason Pirlot: — Correct.

Joan Pratchler: — How many non-compliance notices were issued to independent schools last year?

Kevin Gabel: — Based on the information I have with me, five.

Joan Pratchler: — Five. And has that trended upwards or downwards in the last five years?

Kevin Gabel: — It would be about . . . That would be pretty stable.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. What would be incidents of non-compliance that were noted last year?

Kevin Gabel: — An example would be needing to install another smoke detector, not having enough fire drills completed by the time we got out. One other one would be not having . . . They had not sent AP 152, an administrative procedure, to parents.

Joan Pratchler: — And that is?

Kevin Gabel: — It lists all the contact information for all the school staff as well as the ministry. And we require it be sent out to all parents every year.

Joan Pratchler: — And how much time is typically given to get back into compliance?

Kevin Gabel: — Three to four months generally.

Joan Pratchler: — And have any schools failed to return to compliance since being served notices?

Kevin Gabel: — No.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Have any . . .

Jason Pirlot: — Just on the — sorry — on the three to four months, obviously that is highly dependent on the nature of the non-compliance, right. So yeah, stuff that puts kids at risk, we're on it, right.

Joan Pratchler: — Have any schools been served with multiple non-compliance notices in the last five years? And if so, which ones?

Kevin Gabel: — Yes, that has occurred. And so our staff would provide extra support to help them work through. It would not be the same issue though every time of non-compliance.

Joan Pratchler: — Oh, okay. So it's not . . .

Kevin Gabel: — No.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Has the ministry stopped preparing any information on attendance, reading data, credit attainment for this group of independent schools at all?

Jason Pirlot: — No.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just the last question here. You know, I understand you're in the process of . . . Well you're partially implementing recommendation no. 4, which is to analyze and report on student achievements to senior management. And I think really at the heart of a lot of this, these recommendations, is about that. Although the Provincial Auditor noted that you weren't reporting on student achievement or you weren't measuring it, but you're in the process of finding some metrics of that. So maybe it's a work in motion.

But I was just wondering if you do plan to publicly report on student achievement when you've obtained enough information and made enough assessments, as well as the funding and the enrolment of these schools? Do you plan to publicly report on student achievement outcomes at these schools to give the public a general idea of the quality of the education they could expect to obtain at those schools?

[15:45]

Jason Pirlot: — Yeah, like I think determinations are still being made on exactly how we're going to report on the assessment program once we get it up and running. What I would say though to that is, it's clearly the case that the value of the assessment is providing the information to the schools so that folks can make informed decisions about whether they need to change what they're doing. So to be determined to the specific nature of your question, but a high level of the plan is to have reporting about that.

Hugh Gordon: — Okay. Because extensively that's what it's all about. Like we want to provide choice to the parents and to students, but we want to give them enough information so they can make a proper educated decision as to which place to send them to. They may determine independent school A is better than independent school B or public or what have you, correct?

Jason Pirlot: — Yes.

Hugh Gordon: — Thank you. Those are all my questions, Mr. Chair.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler? Looking to see if any other committee members may have questions on the chapter before us. Not seeing any others, I would welcome a motion to concur and note compliance with recommendations 1, 2, and 3. Moved by Deputy Chair Thorsteinson. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — That's carried. And I would look for a motion to concur and note progress with respect to recommendation no. 4. Deputy Chair Thorsteinson moves again. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Carried. We'll now turn our attention to chapter 14 of the 2025 report volume 2. And I'll kick it back

over to the Provincial Auditor to make a presentation.

Victor Schwab: — On August 13th, 2021 the Ministry of Education and the federal government signed an extension of the Canada-Saskatchewan early learning and child care agreement to 2025-26 to ensure continuity of programs and services under the previous agreement. The early learning intensive support program is funded within this agreement for preschool-aged children — three- and four-year-olds — experiencing significant delays in development and may include children diagnosed with autism, cognitive delays, physical challenges, auditory issues, or significant behavioural issues.

Chapter 15 of our 2025 report volume 2 describes our second follow-up audit of the Ministry of Education's actions on the recommendations we made in 2021 regarding processes to evaluate whether the early learning intensive support program helps preschool-aged children requiring intensive supports to receive a good start in their early learning and development.

We made two recommendations. By August 2023 the ministry implemented one recommendation. By July 2025 the ministry improved its processes for evaluating the program by implementing the last remaining recommendation.

In 2024 the Ministry of Education reviewed school divisions' action plans that sought to address challenges originally identified in the ministry's 2021 evaluation of the early learning intensive support program. Some of these challenges included a lack of support for teachers to attend training to enhance related skills.

The ministry also evaluated the program again in spring 2025 and expected school divisions to develop associated action plans to address identified challenges by February 2026.

The ministry also maintains ongoing communication with school divisions to monitor whether they continue to meet the program's expectations. Addressing challenges identified in program reviews help to reduce the risk of the program not meeting the learning and developmental needs of children with intensive needs. Implementing improvements may also result in increasing these children's success in school and life.

I will now pause for the committee's consideration.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you for the presentation, the focus of the work here, and some of the follow-up that's contained within it as well. I'll turn it over to DM Repski and officials to provide a brief remark, then we'll open it up for questions.

Clint Repski: — The Provincial Auditor's 2025 report volume 2, chapter 15 is a follow-up audit on recommendations initially made in 2021 related to evaluating the early learning intensive support program. This program helps children requiring intensive supports to receive a good start on early learning and development.

The ministry has been collecting and reviewing action plans and maintains close communication with school divisions to ensure the program's expectations are met. The ministry agrees with and thanks the Provincial Auditor for the assessment that this

recommendation is fully implemented. And we would entertain any questions at this point.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, committee members, do we have any questions? Of course that recommendation has been before us. We've considered it in the past, supported it. MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. What would you say might be the top three common challenges that were identified in that review?

Sameema Haque: — Sameema Haque, assistant deputy minister at Ministry of Education. Good afternoon to the committee members and a very happy new year to you all.

I would say that the top recommendations based on our survey, which we survey teachers, we survey educational assistants, and as well as parents. And based on the information that we collect, within the information the top issues often are increased support for professional development; collaboration amongst the partners, which would be parents, EA's [educational assistant], teachers that are involved; increased survey participation. Sometimes in certain programs you won't get a lot of survey results, and therefore there isn't value-added feedback that we can give at the division level. So we continue to engage the partners in that.

And those are the main themes. Generally it comes down to communication and professional development.

Joan Pratchler: — And just continuing on that thought of professional development, on page 186 it talks about professional development is identified as one of the key . . . obviously to support improvement. Where does that funding come from to support teachers in that professional development? Is that part of that grant as well, or is that the school division providing that professional development to support, you know, whatever needs they have in that area?

Sameema Haque: — So the funding for this program is, we provide annually 25 K for two spaces in each program. And 20 of that is for . . . You know, our intention is, of course, this is not conditional money. This is given to the school division to implement the program. This is to provide additional EA supports. As well we consider in that funding if there's speech language pathology or any other supports that are needed, particularly based on the children that are in the program.

When we specifically talk about the professional development opportunities, there's lots of opportunities. We, through the Ministry of Education, provide lots of professional development opportunities that are free of cost. We advertise them. We send communication to school divisions in regards to all the opportunities that are coming up through the ministry.

There are several associations and other partners that provide professional development opportunities, and some are supported by the ministry. Some are just within the mandate of those associations. Some are national level. Some are provincially. So again we are always there as a conduit to pass on that information to the school divisions. We collect that information, consolidate it in our communication, and send that information out to school divisions so that our partners are not researching that

information, looking for opportunities for professional development. They have that information in a cohesive form available to them.

And post-secondary institutions again, whether they are nationally or even internationally, because of the technology being available now and lots of options that are often very value-added based on, you know, experiences that are national and international in early years, and developmental knowledge that has been gained through research and technological interventions that's available. So all possible opportunities that we can find and that can be delivered efficiently to those partners, we provide those opportunities.

I would also say the school divisions do get funding from us, but they have discretion as to how they utilize those fundings. So there might be at-cost funding too that the school division particularly wants to support. That is, I would say, part and parcel of developing a customized action plan. In their action plan, they determine what particular supports and actions they are going to take and how are they going to implement that.

And should there be any customized support needed from us, we would of course do that. Sometimes, I would say, based on their feedback, we might develop a module that would assist them in a need that they've identified as a professional development need.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. How regularly do you collect that information about the divisions' actions for early learning?

Sameema Haque: — So our process, which now it's in a perpetual cycle, we do surveys every spring. And with the surveys we provide those results, which is themed reports to our partners, by about May, June. So February, like March, April is when we're doing surveys. Then by May, June, July, somewhere in the summer we'll provide them results. And then we meet with them in fall, we discuss the results and we discuss some preliminary action plans and provide them . . . They have a template of the action plan, the formal action plan submission. They do send those action plans to us, and we review them. And they provide the progress on those action plans to us in February, which should be coming, in their mid-year reports.

Often, after we provide them with our survey results, by the time we meet with them in fall they have already implemented action plans. So I would say we're reaching a level of maturity in our programs where, because these are such common themes and these are somewhat mature programs, there is a bit of momentum in our partners. And the fact that we have ongoing communication, one-on-one attachment with our partners, allows us to continue to engage in discussions.

We have our staff available to them. There is correspondence whether it's by phone, in meetings, or one-on-one. In regards to an individual case, we provide that support and the work continues on.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. And would you say that that is a connection with every individual school division?

Sameema Haque: — That is a connection with every school division that is our partner. So in this program we have, every

school division is participating with the exception of SETH [Southeast Techhub] because SETH doesn't have a provincially funded program. They have federally funded programs.

Joan Pratchler: — And then the oversight for SETH would be from the federal, or do you do some oversight of that?

Sameema Haque: — Our doors are open to any collaboration with all our school divisions. Ultimately they're all our partners in the sector, so they are not segregated from participating in them. They just don't have the same due diligence in regards to reporting.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Thank you.

Sameema Haque: — You're most welcome.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just a quick question. This agreement is the Canada-Saskatchewan early learning and child care agreement that oversees the intensive support program, correct? Is that a separate agreement signed with the federal government that's outside of the Canada social transfer, for example, that the provincial government would receive?

Sameema Haque: — The funding for this program flows through a bilateral agreement that's separate from the Canada-wide agreement. So we have several agreements with the federal government. Each agreement has very specific stipulations within the agreement as to what kind of programs can be funded through those agreements, and this particular program is funded through the bilateral agreement which has its own separate action plan and reporting structure.

Hugh Gordon: — That's all I have. Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Looking for any other committee members that may have questions. Not seeing any at this time. Good to see the implementation, the action that's been taken on this front. I'd welcome a motion to conclude consideration of chapter 15. Moved by MLA Patterson. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, that's carried.

And then we've got the SDLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre] up here next. I want to thank DM Repski and all the officials from the Ministry of Education that have joined us here today. Now, DM Repski, you're sticking around for the last ones here too, the distance learning pieces as well. So we won't say good-bye to you right now. And do you need to adjust officials for the SDLC? Okay. A very brief recess as we change chairs, but thanks for the team here at the Ministry of Education.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

[16:00]

Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, we'll reconvene the Standing

Committee on Public Accounts. I want to welcome CEO Gasper and the team from the SDLC that's joined, the officials that have joined us here today. We still have some of the leadership of the Ministry of Education here with us as well, DM Repski and crew there at the table just in behind.

And we'll cut to it here, but I invite CEO Gasper to introduce the officials that have joined him here today. And then we'll turn it over to the auditor to make a presentation, and we'll come back your way.

Darren Gasper: — Thank you. So greetings. My name is Darren Gasper. As mentioned, I'm the CEO of the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre. Today I have with me Michelle Miller, who is our vice-president of corporate services, and Sara Hawryluk, who is our executive director of finance, planning, and HR.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, thank you. Thank you very much. And I want to thank you for the status update that you provided us, and I'll table it now. PAC 83-80, Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre: Status update, dated January 21, 2026.

And at this time I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor to make a presentation, and we'll come your way.

Tara Clemett: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, Deputy Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Mr. Victor Schwab, and he's the deputy provincial auditor that is responsible for the audit at the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation. Behind me as well and to my far left is Ms. Diana Fink. She's a principal in our office who was responsible for the annual integrated audit of the corporation. And then beside her, Ms. Michelle Lindenbach, our office's liaison with the committee.

There are three new recommendations for the committee's consideration in the first chapter. Victor will pause after each chapter to allow for the committee's discussion and consideration.

Before Victor does present the chapters on the agenda, I do want to thank the officials at the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation for the co-operation that was extended to us during the course of our work. With that, I'll turn it over to Victor.

Victor Schwab: — Thank you. In 2022 the Government of Saskatchewan established the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation, a treasury board Crown corporation responsible for providing centralized online learning courses for kindergarten to grade 12 students.

For the year ended August 31st, 2024 the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation prepared reliable financial statements. The corporation had effective rules and procedures to safeguard public resources and complied with authorities governing their activities related to financial reporting, safeguarding public resources, revenue raising, spending, borrowing, and investing, except for the area of our three recommendations.

In our first recommendation on page 15, we recommend the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation document and make public its board meeting minutes, including resulting decisions. The Minister of Education is appointed as the sole

member of the corporation's board. Per discussion with corporation management, meetings occur occasionally with its board, but these meetings are informal and meeting minutes have not been taken since the corporation formed in December 2022.

Board minutes provide a key record of a board's governance processes and decisions made. The corporation's legislation requires it to make board minutes public. It has not done so. Documenting board meetings and decisions and making them public support the corporation in fulfilling its legislative requirements as well as demonstrate that the board provides proper oversight of the affairs and businesses of the corporation.

In our second recommendation on page 16 we recommend the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation's board approve a detailed budget annually. And in our third recommendation on page 16 we recommend the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation provide periodic financial forecasts that include written variance explanations to its board.

The Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation's board did not formally approve the budget for the corporation's 2023-24 fiscal year, nor did it receive periodic forecasts. Per corporation management, the corporation was included in the Ministry of Education budget submission for treasury board; however the extent of the details related to the corporation would have been limited. The corporation could not provide evidence of board approval for its budget prior to submission to the ministry. Additionally the corporation has not established a process for periodically reviewing its financial activities compared to budget throughout the fiscal year, which enables management to identify significant variances throughout the year, assess reasons, and take action.

During our financial statement audit we found several instances of unrecorded expenses and incorrectly recorded transactions. These errors resulted in delays in completing the audit of the financial statements. Establishing a robust forecasting process, including assessing variance explanations for any significant deviations from budget, help management and the board to better understand the corporation's financial results when making decisions and allows for effective oversight.

I will now pause for the committee's consideration.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thanks. Thanks for the presentation, the focus of this work, new recommendations before us. I'd invite brief remarks from CEO Gasper and his team and then we'd open it up for questions.

Darren Gasper: — The 2025 Provincial Auditor's report volume 1, chapter 1 outlines results from the annual audit of Sask DLC [Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation] for the fiscal year 2024-25. There were three recommendations related to documenting board meeting minutes, documentation of board approval of the annual budget, and providing fiscal forecasts to the board. All of these recommendations are in process.

So recommendation 4.1 around making public its board meeting minutes. During the school year 2024-25 Sask DLC has begun its regular board meeting minutes. A minute format was established, and minutes were recorded for these meetings. Minutes will be taken at each meeting of the board and will be

made publicly available.

For recommendation 4.2.2, Sask DLC's board approve a detailed budget annually, the fiscal year 2025-26 budget was approved by Sask DLC's board and was provided to the Provincial Auditor in October of 2025. Sask DLC will continue this process annually.

For recommendation 4.2.3, to provide periodic financial forecasts that include variance explanations to the board, Sask DLC provided the board with quarterly financial forecasts with variances in fiscal year 2025. Sask DLC has developed a template to accompany future forecasts with high-level variance explanations for each quarter.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you. We'll open it up now for questions. MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you, and welcome. How many board meetings has the SDLC had this fiscal year, and how many are scheduled for the rest of the year?

Darren Gasper: — So far during this fiscal year we've had one board meeting minutes. And we're in discussions right now on scheduling those other board meeting minutes to meet the requirements.

Joan Pratchler: — And how many meetings do you anticipate to have like this year?

Darren Gasper: — Four official board meetings are required.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And why were they . . . Were they done to that same frequency in the past years?

Darren Gasper: — We met with each minister regularly throughout. But again I think as a relatively new organization, I think we're still committing to improvement to officially hold board meetings and the minutes connected to it as well.

Joan Pratchler: — So because it was a new board, you didn't have board meetings? Or maybe I misunderstood.

Darren Gasper: — Yeah. No, that's okay. Yeah, go ahead.

Michelle Miller: — I'll take over here for a moment. So we had regular meetings with our board right from our inception until now. It's just that we didn't have a formalized process to document the actual minutes for those meetings nor make them publicly available.

So we have put the format together to officially capture those minutes. And we will be posting them annually at the end of our year, which our fiscal year also is different than the government year. We're based on the school year, September to the end of August. Therefore only our first quarter meeting for this year has taken place at the end of November with the next one hopefully in March. But those are not quite officially in the books yet, but we're working on dates.

Joan Pratchler: — Is it a specialized board minute template?

Michelle Miller: — No, it's just we didn't formalize when we were a brand new organization. And as you can imagine, all

policies, all templates, everything was brand new and we were kind of building the airplane as we were flying it. So that was just something that kind of fell off our radar. We were meeting with our board regularly. Just didn't have a formalized meeting template or way to take those minutes.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Why didn't the SDLC formally approve the budget for the '23-24 fiscal year? And what has been done to avoid this reoccurring in the future?

Michelle Miller: — Sure. I can continue. So there's a little bit of a challenge for us again. Our board is our minister under this format, and so we did have the board approve our budgets annually. So it's not that it's been a miss; it's just again we didn't separate board from minister and actually have that formalized template again. So it has been approved by our board annually, just not in a documented format.

Joan Pratchler: — So am I to assume that there's no public record of the budget for that year?

Sara Hawryluk: — Yeah. So just like any treasury board Crown, we are a subvote under the Ministry of Education. So you can see our budget line under them. And as well we also have our annual report, which has our audited financial statements in it every year.

Joan Pratchler: — And that's publicly available?

Sara Hawryluk: — Correct, yeah. It's on our website.

Joan Pratchler: — What expenses and transactions were unrecorded or incorrectly recorded in the '23-24 financial statements? And what was done to prevent similar issues in last year's financial statements?

Sara Hawryluk: — So I can take that one. So again because we're on the school year, I think there was a little bit of confusion around the end of our fiscal year. So there were some unrecorded invoices. It could be travel. It could be whatever it is, folks travelling during the summer, and they weren't recorded within that fiscal year. So it was more like a fiscal year issue. They were eventually recorded, and we have processes in place to improve that. But that was essentially for that year the issue with those.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — What were some of the variances in financial forecast the Provincial Auditor mentioned in her report? What did that constitute?

Michelle Miller: — So we have a process to record anything over a certain percentage threshold on any budget line item. And so we were providing forecasts with the variances to the board; however we didn't include a detailed explanation of what those variances were.

So for example, I believe in my budget per se I had consulting fees, a variance in there. And so we record the variance. We explained the variance in a very limited, clipped version. But we have now expanded our template to further explain to the board

why the variance. And then that is just a timing budget line versus the timing of when we had engaged the consultants.

[16:15]

So we could have budgeted in August and it didn't come to fruition until November, and so it wasn't budgeted in that period. So overall not a budget variance but more of a period variance.

Hugh Gordon: — So consulting fees was one example of a variance.

Michelle Miller: — Correct.

Hugh Gordon: — But there were others.

Michelle Miller: — Yes, but all very minor.

Hugh Gordon: — Okay. Fair enough. My last question is, page 14 of the Provincial Auditor's report, looking at the budget and actual for '23-24, there is a huge discrepancy in what was budgeted and then was actually received from the province of Saskatchewan in terms of grant operating. So the budget said \$18,000, but the actual was only 10. Or 10 million — sorry — yeah, 18 million. Getting a little googlie-eyed here, Chair. Been a long day. Sorry, 18 million versus 10 million. Excuse me. What's the explanation for that?

Michelle Miller: — So that's the difference on timing versus the government's fiscal year versus our fiscal year.

Hugh Gordon: — I understand.

Michelle Miller: — So we did receive the whole 18 million over time, just not in their time frame.

Hugh Gordon: — Is that just how it's normally reported? It'll look like that?

Michelle Miller: — Correct.

Hugh Gordon: — Okay, thank you.

Michelle Miller: — You're welcome.

Hugh Gordon: — No more questions.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — And so when I look at the numbers in that chart, if I am seeing this right, \$6.7 million was overspent compared to the budget.

Michelle Miller: — Yes, at that point in time we did have a deficit of \$6.7 million.

Joan Pratchler: — And what would that be attributed to?

Michelle Miller: — Well again there's a couple of factors there. The timing difference in receiving that grant from the government, also in our tuition revenue, which was estimated to be \$15 million to come in. We only received a little over 11 million that year. So we charge, per course fee, \$500 for our

courses that we offer. And of course our registration was not as high, nor did we collect in timing. We had some issues in that first year and a half or so, collecting from the school divisions in a timely fashion. So we eventually did collect the money, but there was also timing on that.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. So you anticipated 15?

Michelle Miller: — Correct.

Joan Pratchler: — You got 11?

Michelle Miller: — Correct.

Joan Pratchler: — Over time, did you get the other four to make . . .

Michelle Miller: — Not quite the full 15, but a little bit more than that 11. So we did not invoice the full 15 million in that year of operations.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Gordon, any further questions? Any further questions, folks? Okay. Thanks for the actions that you've committed to to see this through to implementation and have the governance and accounting in these pieces in order in the way that it complies with public sector and the recommendations of the auditor here.

I guess if I'm looking at the recommendations, I'd welcome a motion to concur and note progress with recommendations 1 and 3. Moved by MLA Patterson. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — That's carried. And then recommendation 2, we've heard that that's been implemented. So I'd welcome a motion that we concur and note compliance with recommendation 2. Moved by Deputy Chair Thorsteinson. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Okay, agreed. And we'll move right along and turn our attention to chapter 21, and I'll turn it back over to the Provincial Auditor.

Victor Schwab: — Chapter 21 of our 2025 report volume 2 describes our first follow-up audit of the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Centre's actions on recommendations we first made in 2022 regarding processes to support students to complete grades 10 to 12 distance education courses. We made seven recommendations. By April 2025 the centre implemented all seven recommendations.

The centre formalized a course development and maintenance framework in 2024-25 as well as enhanced its course maintenance request process so that courses are updated and renewed on a regular basis. Throughout the school year teachers submit course maintenance requests such as correcting grammar or broken hyperlinks, or request major course change proposals. Formalizing the course development and maintenance process supports adequate course reviews and updates during the year, which reduces the risk of outdated courses.

The centre uses reports to monitor teachers' marking workloads, identify those who do not meet its targets, and support actions to address backlogs of marking. We found reports appropriately identified teachers more than five working days behind in marking assignments. The reports are then used to discuss reasons for delays and determine expected completion dates. Monitoring timeliness of teachers returning marked assignments to students increased student engagement, success in completing courses, and better learning outcomes.

The centre developed new guidelines for addressing student inactivity in November 2024, referred to as "levelling procedures." The new guidelines expected teachers to assess students' completion of assignments monthly and then initiate levelling procedures for identified student inactivity. Our review of a sample of five teacher-student enrolments found that teachers applied levelling according to policy. The renewed guidelines and actions taken to address student inactivity are reducing the risk of students not completing their courses due to lack of student engagement.

The centre now offers specific distance education training for its teachers online, such as a course focused on teaching in a virtualized classroom as well as other courses summarizing curriculum interpretation for online course development.

We found the online training system logged the training taken per centre teaching staff, which allows the centre to monitor course completion. Ongoing training specific to distance education will help teachers obtain the necessary tools to effectively engage and support students in the distance education environment.

The centre set course completion rate targets in 2024-25 for all high school student groups. Different targets exist given the circumstances in which the students engage with the centre. Generally each of the different student groups were meeting their targets. The centre has also started to track and analyze why students drop courses, to understand the root causes. These can include student inactivity, moved out of province, or no longer in school. Understanding root causes allowed the centre to address issues like updating content and structure of courses and increasing the availability of academic advisors to increase course completion rates.

Since 2024-25, the centre provides its board with regular written reports outlining course completion rates, including the reasons why rates are lower than expected. We found the board reports evolved since our initial audit to include completion rates for all student groups and better insights into why students dropped courses, allowing the board to better understand what the centre plans to do to improve course completion rates.

I will now pause for the committee's consideration.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thanks so much for the presentation, the follow-up work on this front. Thanks as well for laying out some of the actions that the . . . or I guess stating that the implementation has occurred. We've considered this before as a committee, but I'd invite a brief remark and then I'll see what we've got for questions.

Darren Gasper: — Thank you. So the 2025 Provincial Auditor's

report volume 2, chapter 21 aligns results from the audit of Sask DLC's processes for supporting students to complete grades 10 to 12 distance education courses. Originally these recommendations were directed at Sun West School Division. Since then, the Saskatchewan Distance Learning Corporation has assumed responsibility for online learning and will be addressing these recommendations. Of the seven recommendations that were issued, all have been fully implemented.

So recommendation 3.1, the new course development and maintenance framework, is fully implemented. In 2024-25 Sask DLC developed a course development and maintenance framework and revised its course maintenance request process to ensure courses are updated and renewed regularly.

In 3.2, to monitor the timeliness of teachers marking distance education in accordance with its policy, Sask DLC developed a report to monitor teachers' marking workloads and identify those who do not meet established targets. Supportive actions have been developed to address backlogs of marking, including discussions on reasons for delay and to determine expectations of completion dates.

For recommendation 3.3 that Sask DLC consistently apply its student inactivity policy to engage distance education students, Sask DLC developed new guidelines for addressing student inactivity in November of 2024. This process allows teachers to identify students who fall behind in their studies and offer support through intervention steps with the goal of re-engaging with those students.

For recommendation 3.4, to assess the need for ongoing focused professional development for teachers working in the distance education environment, Sask DLC provides ongoing professional development time to all teaching staff throughout the year, including specific distance education training offered online.

Recommendation 3.5 (a), to establish target course completion rates for its students who solely attend the Distance Learning Centre, Sask DLC established course completion rate targets for different groups of students, analyzed why students do not complete distance education courses, and provided its board with reports on student completion rates.

For recommendation 3.5 (b), to analyze key information to support students' completion of Grades 10 to 12 distance education courses to identify potential issues and take action, Sask DLC established completion rate targets for different groups of students, analyzed why students do not complete courses, and provided its board with reports on completion rates. This information is used to identify which courses may require review or where our students may require more focused engagement efforts to assist them to be successful.

For recommendation 3.5 (c), to regularly provide complete written reports and analysis to its board about supporting students' completion of Grades 10 to 12 distance education courses, so beginning in 2024-25, Sask DLC has provided its board with reports on student completion rates and will continue to do so annually.

That's it.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Thank you for the update and the actions that have been taken. I'd open it up to committee members now that may have questions. MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Thank you. Can you tell me a little bit more about the types of courses created? Are they typically just grade 10 to 12?

Darren Gasper: — We do offer online education right from kindergarten to grade 12. The vast majority of our students are at the high school level though. Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of our students would be high school age or young adults.

Joan Pratchler: — And how many would be from K to 3 would you . . . or K to 3 and then let's go, you know, 4 to . . .

Darren Gasper: — Yeah. I'd have to get back to you on the exact number.

Joan Pratchler: — Could you?

Darren Gasper: — Over the three years we have typically averaged about 700 full-time students from kindergarten to grade 9. The larger numbers are in the higher grades. So kindergarten, grade 1, grade 2 would be our smallest numbers in grades, getting larger as you move up to middle years, for example.

Joan Pratchler: — And what would be the reason that students would attend from K to 9?

Darren Gasper: — A variety of reasons. Oftentimes what we're seeing as a trend is, you know, family-driven needs. So it may be, for example, travelling families who are on the move. We see a higher and higher number of competitive athletes which, you know, typically used to be at the high school level only, and that is moving into lower grades all the time. So we do see a lot at the middle years level, for example, that are full-time online because of their athletics.

But honestly we have a wide variety. In some cases there are complicated health issues that don't allow them to attend a traditional school. And in some cases it might be a mental health issue, for example, with some of the families.

Joan Pratchler: — Do you find, or what percentage would you say of those 700 would be intensive-needs students?

Darren Gasper: — Again I'd have to go back to get you a specific number. But from my experience working within the school division system for many years, we are seeing a trend a little higher than what we saw in a traditional school division, you know, for whatever reason. That's typically . . . We see a little bit higher than you would in a brick-and-mortar school.

Joan Pratchler: — Would you be able to furnish our committee with a breakdown of what we just talked about with a little more detail?

Darren Gasper: — For sure. Yeah.

Joan Pratchler: — Would that be all right, Chair, for us to do that? Would it be all right if they could furnish our committee

with the details of the breakdown of the type of students per grade and level?

Chair Wotherspoon: — I think that sounds great. You've committed that that's an undertaking you can provide. Is four weeks — one month — reasonable to get that back to us as a committee?

Darren Gasper: — Yes.

Chair Wotherspoon: — The Clerk will provide you the information on how to send that back to us, and then that will be tabled for us. And thanks so much, Member, and CEO Gasper.

Darren Gasper: — You bet.

Joan Pratchler: — And specifically, you know, the upper grades, high school, who would direct course development? Is that teacher-directed? Outside organizations? Or how is it decided which courses you will . . . I mean obviously we have the standard, but I mean there's different ones that we find in school divisions and maybe here as well.

Darren Gasper: — Yeah, we have quite a robust program review process that identifies a number of factors that go into making that priority list of redevelopments. Part of that is looking at data, for example, that we collect on course completion rates, drop rates. That was mentioned earlier.

[16:30]

So for example, as students drop courses, we ask them to identify the reason why they dropped, and for example if they found that the courses are complex or difficult. And we track each of that. So for each course, how often is that reason cited. And again that will drive a priority. If we see a trend in a particular course, we'll focus our efforts on redeveloping it.

Other factors that go into play is, we have professional learning networks, which our instructional teachers are grouped into. So for example, science teachers are all in one PLN [professional learning network]. And they are probably our most familiar staff with the courses themselves; they're in them every day. So our PLNs provide feedback as well in terms of which courses are in need of . . . whether it's minor maintenance that was mentioned before or full renewals.

There's some other factors go in as well if we get a curriculum renewal in the province. So for example the new ELA [English language arts] curriculums that are recent, those will require a redevelopment as soon as those curriculums are finalized. So basically it's a combination of looking at student experiences within the courses, staff experience within them, and provincial changes that are coming.

Joan Pratchler: — So it would be safe to say that they all follow under Saskatchewan curriculum.

Darren Gasper: — They do. Yes, they do.

Joan Pratchler: — And like a grade 10 algebra, you may have to modify it for a reason of some nature, and that would be like a new course.

Darren Gasper: — We would have some modified courses for students that require that. So whereas we'd have a foundations 10 math, for example, there would also be a math 11 that is a modified math. And within each course — so if we look at the foundations 10 — every teacher is expected to apply the adaptive dimension to it and modify for student learning needs as well, as part of the regular instructional duties.

Joan Pratchler: — But sometimes it might facilitate just creating another course to make sure that that child has or that . . .

Darren Gasper: — Typically it's additional resources that are a part of that course. They won't necessarily build an entire new course. But they may take one particular area, unit of it, or one lesson of it and adapt it to fit students.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. I want to talk a little bit about enrolment data that I see on page 220. The data that's provided here, perhaps it needs to be updated — you will know that. How many full-time students . . . What I saw here, there's 2,900 full-time students as of this writing. Can you comment on that number as the most current number?

Darren Gasper: — Yeah. Yeah, we've had some updates since then, so we are currently sitting at approximately 3,500 full-time students. The majority of those . . . We do track them. We talk about five distinct learner groups to us. And the reason why we group students into five is to identify the supports that each needs. Each is in a little different learning situation. So adults for example are quite different than our under-18. And our school-based students have a different learning structure with supports than our full-time at-home students.

So the breakdown of that 3,500, you're looking at about 2,500 roughly that are under 18 years of age, and that has been relatively stable for us for these three years. And then a larger group that we have is about 1,000 students that fall between 18 and 21 years of age. So a little higher-sized number than we initially anticipated.

Joan Pratchler: — And so what would be a typical class size then?

Darren Gasper: — It would vary a little bit depending on the type of class and the enrolment. So if I looked in the K to 9 world, for example, we offer both synchronous, which is live scheduled teaching throughout the day, versus asynchronous, which is the recording, more work at your pace.

So our synchronous ones, which are time driven, they may vary anywhere . . . 25 would be typical. We do have some larger than that that would get into the 30 range. Down in the kindergarten world where it's a little bit smaller, they would tend to be a little bit under 25, down in there. But at the high school level, 25 to 30 is pretty typical.

This might take a little while to explain, but when we monitor our teacher workloads, it's not on a per-class basis; it's on the number of students that they have in each semester. So they would typically have . . . 125 to 140 would be pretty typically on that teacher. They might be in only one or two different classes, for example, ELA. They might be spread across a number of

classes if they're electives, for example. But we try to monitor the teacher workload based on student numbers.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. And then for part-time, can you talk to me about that? How would that class size be seen as? Or are they conflated into the full-time class?

Darren Gasper: — Yeah, in our classes they'd be melded in together with our full-time at-home. So students that might be taking an elective like psychology, that teacher's class might be a blend of students who are full-time and part-time in a school. So it would be a mix.

Joan Pratchler: — Oh, and so that would not preclude . . . or the teacher might have 25 to 30 students in a classroom. Some may be full-time, some may be part-time?

Darren Gasper: — Yes.

Joan Pratchler: — Am I understanding that right?

Darren Gasper: — Yeah, that's correct.

Joan Pratchler: — All right. Is there any mandatory professional development that you find people need?

Darren Gasper: — Yes. We have a pretty detailed breakdown beginning with an orientation process when teachers are new to us. There's a multiple-day orientation process where we are covering a wide variety of topics from some of the technology systems that they use to — like the Moodle platform, for example — host our course content, to some instructional practices included in that.

And then there would be ongoing PD [professional development] throughout the year. We have regularly scheduled PD days where we cover a wide variety of topics related to online instruction and assessment.

Joan Pratchler: — All right, thank you. What are the target course completion rates? I know some were identified in here on page 225. And can you talk a little bit more about that?

Darren Gasper: — If I can get the exact ones. I mentioned the five learner groups before. We have completion rate targets identified for each of those. So for example, our full-time students, our target rate is set at 70 per cent. Our part-time asynchronous is set at 80 per cent. Our part-time synchronous is set at 90 per cent. And our adult students is set at 60 per cent as of this time period.

Joan Pratchler: — And when we compare that to the completion rates, are you satisfied with that, those numbers that are there? Or what are you looking at for, you know, continuous improvement?

Darren Gasper: — Yeah, they've been steadily improving each year, and we've been hitting the target rate for each. Each year we do analyze, and in occasions we may reset that target rate at a higher level as needed.

Part of the demographics and the needs of the students are driving that target setting as well. I mentioned to you before that large

group of 18- to 21-year-olds, for example. We used to include them in with our full-time students, but the learning needs of that group are very different. And so we've broken them out to better identify their completion rate and adjust our supports for them.

As an aside, through our Moodle system we're able to actually track when students work, how long they work on things, where they might struggle, and so forth. That group I mentioned, it was a learning piece for us this year. Those folks often tend to work very late at night, between 11 a.m. and 3 in the morning, which is quite different than our other student groups. So that's when we looked at our supports need to match that timeline of when they're working. And so a lot happens in recorded videos and things like that instead of live sessions with them.

Joan Pratchler: — Right. And so that wouldn't be indicated on this chart that's on page 225, that special group?

Darren Gasper: — Yes. Yeah, we've broken them out since.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. So what would be the target rates for that group then?

Darren Gasper: — They're lower. They're our most challenging group. I believe their target is down at 50 per cent for that group. Like I mentioned, they're our most struggling ones. They're often young adults who didn't complete high school for a variety of reasons. They might be young parents. They might be working. Often they're working during the day and trying to complete their education at night, which is a challenge. So they're usually in our toughest circumstances.

Joan Pratchler: — What are the top three issues and the action that might be taken from them when you analyze the information related to supporting their completion rates for grades 10 to 12?

Darren Gasper: — Sorry, I just want to make sure I have your question correct.

Joan Pratchler: — So the completion rates for grade 10 to 12 are X.

Darren Gasper: — Yes.

Joan Pratchler: — What are the top three challenges that are really impacting that?

Darren Gasper: — What I've observed, we track completion rates by school division and by supports provided as well. So for example, we do have places where space pressure is a significant issue, like in Saskatoon for example. And so we take a little different approach in terms of where our support people work out of there. So that might be out of the library for example. So we do adjust the supports to fit the circumstances.

In some of our rural divisions where space is less of a pressure, we're able to establish a dedicated room within the building that kids are scheduled into throughout the day. And so that makes success more feasible, and we see that in the results, right. Some of our rural divisions have long established experience with online, and so their support systems in place are also long established and we see that. So meeting the needs is one.

I mentioned about those young adults. The time of day when students work on their assignments is complex because if they're working on them during the day, we have staff available to, you know, work with them live and immediately answer their question. If they're working at 3 in the morning, they're going to get a recorded answer the next day. And so that's not quite as good as working with them live, for example, but it's the circumstances of that learning group.

Joan Pratchler: — And when we look at intensive-needs students, I mean there's a real spectrum — no pun intended or anything — you know, various abilities, disabilities, autism. How is that managed online?

Darren Gasper: — There's a lot of similarities to how the supports are done in school, but a lot of processes — you're right — are adapted to fit. I'll be honest: technology is getting better every year, so our ability to see and observe online is improving every year. Internet capabilities in homes is getting better all the time, so it's improving. No doubt there are some challenges compared to working with the student face to face, for sure. But I would say that technology is improving.

And our support staff that work with them are constantly improving their skill sets in an online environment compared to face to face as well. There are some things that are just more feasible online than in person actually, right. And we do see that. It's not a high percentage, but we do see some students that are more comfortable interacting with us at a distance than kids who are face to face.

Joan Pratchler: — And if we looked at a typical class of 25 students to 30, would students with intensive needs be in that typical synchronous classroom as well?

Darren Gasper: — Yes, they would. Yeah, very similar to what you'd see in school divisions. There would be some, you know, whose needs are significant that would have a lot of one-on-one time as well, but you'd definitely see them included in some of our regular courses.

Joan Pratchler: — So that one-on-one time would be outside of that typical synchronous classroom?

Darren Gasper: — We have some flexibility. I guess that's one of our advantages within the system is we can adjust students' schedules to meet. So it would happen outside of class times, for example later in the day at times too. Part of it depends on the family's availability as well. Some of them prefer maybe a later meeting time.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Thank you. I want to talk a little about funding and the impact it would have on a home school division. And I just have a little scenario, and help me understand how this would work. So if we have student X enrolled in math 20 in their own school division, and the student decides that they wanted to take it online — don't like their teacher, whatever, there's something happening — then they enrol to the distance learning school. So the school division would pay a tuition for that student then to take math 20 in the distance learning school. Am I correct?

Darren Gasper: — That's correct, yeah.

Joan Pratchler: — Student X then says, I've got to work here too. I don't think so. I'm going to go back to Ms. Smith's classroom. And so when they go back to their home school division, do they get a refund? How does that work? And could potentially the taxpayer be paying two or three different tuitions for a student to get math 20?

Darren Gasper: — So we do have a refund policy in place for students. So when they first sign up for a course, it's a \$500 course fee that they're invoiced for. If they drop that course within the first 15 days, which is often when students make that decision early, there is a full refund. So there is no cost to that. If they drop it within 15 to 30 days, there's a half a refund is provided to the school division for that. After 30 days there's no more refund after that point.

Joan Pratchler: — Where are the teachers hired from to staff the SDLC?

Darren Gasper: — Our teachers come from all over the province. We have campuses in a number of locations around the province, ranging all the way from La Ronge down to Estevan and Swift Current. And so when we first started up, the majority, almost all of the teachers that were involved in online education previously, all came over and were hired by it.

So the majority of the initial staff came from the existing online schools. And then as we've grown, we've been adding staff literally coming from all corners of the province. They do need to work out of those campuses that I mentioned though. It's not a work-from-home situation.

Joan Pratchler: — So would you be able to disaggregate that between how many urban teachers have come over from urban to help work in this school division and how many rural teachers have been hired in that learning . . .

Darren Gasper: — I could break it down by how many staff are located at each campus, so for example the Saskatoon campus separated from La Ronge for example, or Swift Current. We definitely have that number feasible.

[16:45]

Where they originated from would have some variance to that. I know of a few that came from a smaller centre and needed to be in Saskatoon for whatever reason, or Regina, and applied for a spot there. Be some pretty detailed data dive to try and figure out where each came from, but certainly we could see the trend of urban versus small city or rural locations for employees.

Joan Pratchler: — Like not now, but could you provide that within the next month or so . . .

Darren Gasper: — For sure. Yes.

Joan Pratchler: — To segregate it between that. That would be great.

Michelle Miller: — I'm sorry, can I clarify if that was rural versus urban or by campus location? Just because rural versus urban would mean a lot more work and digging into files. We don't have that in a database. Whereas I could give you by

location fairly easily.

Joan Pratchler: — I think we'd like it between rural and urban. And if it takes longer than 30 days, would two months be appropriate to be able to help us understand a little bit where staffing is coming from?

Michelle Miller: — Yes.

Chair Wotherspoon: — The only challenge, and maybe I'm missing something, because you want to make sure that you're getting what you need because like Swift Current certainly wouldn't be rural, right? So yeah, so I'm just wondering maybe would it be best to have the information provided by the locations that they are and then it could be assessed from there? Or am I missing . . .

Joan Pratchler: — Well if I understand right — and maybe I don't — that there's various campuses. They need teachers. Where did those teachers come from? So someone could be looking at campus X, but they might have come from a small town over there or rural over there, rather than they came from Saskatoon to work in campus X. So just like where did the teachers come from to staff them at whatever campuses they're at?

Michelle Miller: — So I'm sorry, I just want to clarify to get the right data. So would perhaps home addresses of the teachers reporting to campus, so I could say that we have you know, this many teachers from, say, Canora that are in this campus. Right, so like you're looking for perhaps people that are reporting to the campus in Regina but actually came from rural divisions.

Joan Pratchler: — Yeah, so I guess what I'm wondering, these aren't all brand new teachers that are working in this. They had to come from another school division. They would have been experienced.

Michelle Miller: — Okay, so you want their home school division.

Joan Pratchler: — Yes. That would be helpful. I guess I didn't word that properly. Thank you.

Michelle Miller: — No, that's okay. I just want to make sure to clarify. Thank you.

Joan Pratchler: — And I think we already did talk about the analysis of students' completion of grade 10 to 12 and where you see issues and the items for improvement. And we've discussed that; is there anything else to add to that? Those rates, you're hoping that the target rates would be, you know, increasing.

Darren Gasper: — Yeah, every year we're looking to push them higher and higher, and so when we build our operational plan in the fall, that's typically the strategies that we look at implementing.

I'll maybe give you an example of that to help. So one of the analyses we did last year was that our core subject areas — and when I say core, I'm talking about ELA, math, science, social — we noticed that their completion rates are lower than our electives. And part of that is understandable; kids are interested

in their electives. They choose them. They're passionate about them, and so they tend to complete them higher. But we still wanted to drive the completion rates of those core classes higher. So we developed and implemented a policy called guided learning for this year.

What's different about that is we'd always observe higher completion rates in our synchronous broadcast. And it makes sense — kids are scheduled in every day, they have a live teacher to answer to, all of the good things there. So when we implemented guided learning, it's aimed at the asynchronous, or recorded, core subjects. And what we did is sat down and analyzed the timetables across the province to figure out when could we connect with every single student, for example, in foundations 10 math? And we found five different time slots of about 20 to 30 minutes every day that would fit pretty much every student in the province. And so if you're a foundations 10 student, every Monday, for example, you will now connect live during your assigned period with your teacher to then talk about the week ahead.

So the beauty of that is I think it strengthens the relationship between the student and teacher. It provides a live opportunity to maybe cover a complex topic, to keep kids on track from week to week, to have a better sense when a student is beginning to fall off pace or fall behind. It just gives us greater and quicker awareness of the student progress and the comprehension side. So by implementing that guided learning, it provides a little more structure.

It's a bit of a trade-off because we are identifying a pacing that we'd like to see out of kids. It's really a minimum pacing that we want to see out of them. Fast kids who blaze through are no problem. But our kids who maybe tend to take more time or fall behind are the ones we want to have a stronger connection to, more structured meeting time with them and, like I said, an ability to help them with those complex topics that can just be better taught live. So that was one of the strategies that we implemented within our course subject areas this year.

Joan Pratchler: — And one last question. The inception of this type of school, or distance learning, was built on the 14 online learning schools — I guess we could call them online learning schools — that had preceded this, historically preceded. Do the original 14 online learning schools still operate in school divisions?

Darren Gasper: — Not quite all, but the vast majority of them became campuses for us. And as I mentioned, the vast majority of the staff that were at those online schools came over and joined our staff as well. So if you walked into Swift Current campus, you would see a lot of familiar faces that were Chinook Cyber School before for example. So a lot of continuity.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. Thank you. And that's for public school. So the Catholic separate schools have their own distance learning per school division or province?

Darren Gasper: — So there's two operating. So Regina and Saskatoon Catholic both operate an online school.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay, thank you. That's all my questions.

Darren Gasper: — Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Gordon.

Hugh Gordon: — Just a quick kind of follow-up question. I'm just wondering how monitoring the timeliness of teachers' grading of online coursework as well as the application of the centre's student inactivity policy have helped to improve the students' course completion rates.

Darren Gasper: — So we use a system called IntelliBoard. It's an add-on platform to our Moodle one that tracks everything from assignment submission to assignment return. So in other words, how timely are our staff getting back to students and answering their questions and providing that constructive feedback on the assignment to assess their learning and adjust instruction as needed. So that system has been pretty important to us to stay on top of that.

We have occasions where staff may fall behind because of a rush of assignments coming in. So picture yourself as an ELA teacher and 50 essays arrive that night. It's going to take some time. So that's where we work with staff to support them. At times admin jump in and help with the assessment load at times for some of this flood. At other times we make an improvement plan with that teacher to keep them on track and get them back to kids timely. So that timely feedback we feel is really important for student learning and impacts the completion rate in the end.

Hugh Gordon: — Have you noticed an improvement in those completion rates, I guess is my question.

Darren Gasper: — We have, yes. We've seen a steady improvement rate. A variety of reasons for that. There's some other supports we've put in place at the same time, so we probably couldn't specifically identify the marking timelines as, you know, resulting in a 2 per cent improvement. It'd be some of the other supports occurring at the same time that would be driving that improvement as well.

Chair Wotherspoon: — MLA Pratchler.

Joan Pratchler: — Just one last question. I forgot I had a second side to the page. Is there a way that you could provide us — and I don't know if you can do it here, and I appreciate that — the trends in enrolment as they pertain to students with intensive needs, various abilities and disabilities from the inception of distance learning to present day? What have you noticed about the enrolments or challenges? Just so we can get a sense of what's out there since inception. Would you be able to furnish that along with . . . I mean not now.

Darren Gasper: — We would. Yeah, in the next month I'm sure we can get you that information.

Joan Pratchler: — Okay. That would be helpful. Thank you.

Chair Wotherspoon: — So there's been a few items there. Thanks so much for the undertaking. Same process. Just through the committee, and the Clerk will provide you the route to do that. So thank you very much.

Darren Gasper: — You bet.

Chair Wotherspoon: — Any further questions, folks? All right, not seeing any. Thank you, CEO Gasper and your team, for the time here today and the work on these fronts. We don't have new recommendations here, so I'd welcome a motion to conclude consideration of chapter 21 of the volume 2. Moved by MLA Patterson. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — That's carried. CEO Gasper, any final words before we shut this thing down?

Darren Gasper: — No, just thank you for having us today.

Chair Wotherspoon: — All right. Be safe on those roads here today too, back up Highway 11 there. And thank you for that.

Committee members, thank you for the last couple of days here. Thanks to the Clerks, thanks to the auditor and her team, thank you to the Comptroller, thank you to Hansard. Am I missing anyone? I just said thank you to you as the Clerk. Broadcast of course, yeah. Cafeteria, Linda and the team in there, very good.

Okay, that's it. I'd seek a motion of adjournment.

Megan Patterson: — I so move.

Chair Wotherspoon: — We have a mover, moved by MLA Patterson. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

Chair Wotherspoon: — The committee stands adjourned until the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 16:55.]