



STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

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Regina University

[The committee met at 12:58.]

The Chair: — Okay, we'll convene the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. Welcome to everyone that's here. I'll introduce the committee members that are here today. We have Mr. Hugh Nerlien, Mr. Grewal, Mr. Harrison, Mr. Goudy, Mr. Fiaz, Mr. Friesen. We have Ms. Aleana Young also here.

I'd like to introduce the officials that have joined us from the comptroller's office: Ms. Jane Borland, acting assistant provincial comptroller, and Ms. Tamara Stocker, a director over at the comptroller's office. Thanks for being here.

I'd like to welcome and introduce the Provincial Auditor, Tara Clemett, and her officials for their attendance and their work on the chapters here today.

Social Services

The Chair: — At this time we'll turn our attention to the first set of considerations and that's with the Ministry of Social Services. I want to welcome everyone that's here today and thank you for your time and your work day in, day out. I'd turn it over to Deputy Minister Kratzig to briefly introduce the cast of characters, the officials that are here with you today. Maybe refrain at this point from getting into the chapters. We'll do that when we turn it back over to the auditor and then back to you.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you very much and good afternoon. Before I introduce my colleagues from the Ministry of Social Services who are with me today, I'd like to take a moment to acknowledge the work of the Provincial Auditor and to thank you and your team for your advice and recommendations. The ministry accepts and is acting on all the recommendations to provide the most safe and effective services and care for clients.

Since appearing at Public Accounts committee last year, we have implemented recommended improvements and made progress in other areas . . .

[13:00]

The Chair: — I don't want to be rude, Deputy Minister, but if you can just introduce the officials just now.

Ms. Kratzig: — Okay.

The Chair: — And then what we'll do is we'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor to focus on each chapter individually. And subsequent to that, we'll have your presentation. We also appreciate the status update that you've provided us here, so thank you very much.

Ms. Kratzig: — Okay, absolutely. Thank you. So to assist in responding to questions today, here with us today are Grant Hilsenteger, assistant deputy minister, finance and corporate services, joined by Erin Kiefer and Naomi Shanks, who are executive directors in that area. We have Tobie Eberhardt, assistant deputy minister of child and family programs. Joining her is executive director Joel Kilbride and Mitch Tremblay, also of child and family programs.

Louise Michaud, president, Saskatchewan Housing Corporation and assistant deputy minister of disability programs and housing. With Louise today is Bob Martinook and Sterling Snider, who are executive directors of our disability area, and Roger Parenteau and Sean Burnett, executive directors of housing.

Devon Exner, assistant deputy minister, income assistance programs is also joining us today, as is Jeff Redekop, executive director of income assistance.

Together we will provide information and updates on the status of recommendations, and we're pleased to answer any of your questions.

The Chair: — Well thank you so much, Deputy Minister, for those introductions. Thanks to everyone for being here today. I'll turn it over to Provincial Auditor Clemett to focus on chapter 18 first.

Ms. Clemett: — So thank you, Mr. Chair, committee members and officials. With me today is Mr. Jason Wandy. He's the deputy provincial auditor that is responsible for the Ministry of Social Services. And behind us is Shahfina Ridi. She's an MPA [Master of Public Administration] intern with our office, who is excited to attend and observe PAC [Public Accounts Committee] proceedings today.

This afternoon Jason is going to present the chapters for the Ministry of Social Services in the order that they do appear on the agenda. He will pause after each of the presentations for the committee's discussion and deliberations. There are two presentations, the first and the last, that do include new audit recommendations for the committee's consideration.

And before I turn it over to him, I would just like to extend my thanks and appreciation to the deputy minister of Social Services and all her staff for the co-operation that is extended to us during the course of our work. With that I'll turn it over to Jason.

Mr. Wandy: — Thank you, Tara. Chapter 18 of our 2021 report volume 2 reports the results of our audit of the Ministry of Social Services' processes to monitor quality of care in homes supporting adults with intellectual disabilities. This chapter includes nine recommendations.

The Ministry of Social Services funds and licenses privately owned group homes and approved private service homes to provide accommodation, meals, and care to about 1,600 adults with intellectual disabilities. At August 2021 the ministry licensed about 245 group homes and 200 approved private service homes in Saskatchewan.

Adults with intellectual disabilities are people with impaired intelligence who have a significantly reduced ability not only to understand new or complex information but also to learn and apply new skills. Group and approved private service homes typically provide care 24-7 to adults with intellectual disabilities. Effective monitoring of care provided at ministry-funded licensed homes helps adults with intellectual disabilities to live meaningful and fulfilling lives, free from safety and health threats.

We concluded the Ministry of Social Services had, other than the following areas identified in our nine recommendations, effective processes to monitor whether ministry-funded group homes and approved private service homes provide quality care to adults with intellectual disabilities for the 12-month period ended August 31 of 2021.

In our first recommendation, on page 151, we recommend the Ministry of Social Services monitor resolution of deficiencies stated in conditional licences for group and approved private service homes within a reasonable time frame. The ministry issues conditional licences when deficiencies or delays in receipt of documentation result during the annual licence renewal process. A conditional licence allows a home operator to continue to operate; however the licence expires earlier than an annual licence because of a deficiency such as a faulty fire alarm or outstanding documentation such as not providing health inspection reports on time.

At July of 2021 about 45 per cent of group homes and about 70 per cent of approved private service homes held conditional licences mostly relating to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Examples would be an inability to obtain fire inspection reports from a third party who needed to visit the home.

We found the ministry does not centrally track key information for issuing conditional licences — such as not receiving a fire inspection report versus identifying an existing deficiency such as a faulty fire extinguisher — to help prioritize inspections. As the ministry does not keep data on previously issued licences, we could not assess how many homes in total held conditional licences for more than a year.

We assessed 20 homes and found one approved private service home operating with a conditional licence since October of 2019 due to deficiencies found during a fire inspection and then due to the impact from the COVID-19 pandemic as the operator was waiting for a follow-up fire inspection. At September 2021 this one approved private service home with a conditional licence still did not have a fire inspection report completed two years later. Not tracking and addressing significant deficiencies identified during inspections within a reasonable time frame, such as after six months, may result in clients living in unsafe conditions, for example, a home not protected by a working fire alarm.

In our second recommendation, on page 153, we recommend the Ministry of Social Services update home inspection checklists to cover key risk areas at group and approved private service homes. The ministry uses inspection checklists to summarize areas examined during home inspections. Our analysis found the checklists do not cover all key risk areas requiring evaluation as part of an inspection. For example, we found the checklists did not address adequate handling of medication, setting maximum water temperature for clients' use, and safety measures such as alarm systems for clients at risk of wandering.

During the audit we noted serious incidents relating to several of these key risk areas, such as 34 serious incidents of missing or wandering persons in 2020-21. A comprehensive checklist assessing key home safety areas potentially impacting clients' health and safety is necessary to determine deficiencies and correct them before serious incidents occur.

We also found the ministry did not have written guidance on items required for inspection by third parties during a fire inspection. During our testing of 20 homes, we found fire inspection reports contained different information. A detailed checklist comprising the ministry's expectations required in a third-party report would help to clearly explain inspection and reporting requirements.

In our third recommendation, on page 154, we recommend the Ministry of Social Services annually inspect each group home to assess if it meets the minimum program standards requirements. The ministry requires staff to annually assess each group and approved private service home's physical standards, the home's physical safety and design. However the ministry does not require staff to assess each home's program standards annually. Program standards focus on the daily care a client receives in the home, including meals, medication, and recreational programs.

We tested 10 group homes and found the ministry completed the physical standards report for each home but the ministry only completed the program standards report for a singular home operator and not each of the homes they operate. Without regularly inspecting each group home to assess program standards, the ministry may not know whether clients receive appropriate and quality care. This may lead to licensing group homes that do not meet minimum standards of care, for example, medication being inappropriately administered or having poorly balanced meals.

In our fourth recommendation, on page 155, we recommend the Ministry of Social Services use a central system to track key information about group and approved private service homes. We found two program consultants are responsible to assess all documentation for home licensing, and when satisfied, issue the licence. Both consultants kept a spreadsheet with a list of homes and licence expiration dates; however no centralized system exists to track each home's key information including inspection dates, third-party reports, identify deficiencies, and deficiency remediation dates.

In addition, while the ministry collects information on serious incidents each year, it does not track and compile the data by home. This lack of information inhibits ministry management from accurately assessing the magnitude of issues at a specific home. Having a centralized system to track documentation and steps completed in the home licensing process each year would aid in monitoring whether licences are expired, assessing whether inspections are completed, and determining if required documentation is obtained and reviewed. It would also allow the ministry to collate and analyze common data about each licensed home and identify any persistent issues that may impact client care.

In our fifth recommendation, on page 155, we recommend the Ministry of Social Services verify completion of periodic criminal record checks for people caring for adults with intellectual disabilities living in group and approved private service homes. Approved private service homes require a criminal record check for initial licensing; however the ministry does not require periodic checks after initially approving a private service home. At July of 2021 we found approved private service home operators delivered services for 13 years on average.

The ministry requires group home operators to establish policies requiring criminal record and vulnerable sector checks every two years for management, staff, and volunteers working with clients. However the ministry does not have a process to verify whether this occurs. Good practice in other jurisdictions require periodic criminal record checks. Lack of verification of periodic criminal record checks for people providing services to vulnerable populations, such as adults with intellectual disabilities, increases the risk of financial, physical, or sexual abuse.

The next two recommendations both relate to clients' person-centred plans.

In our sixth recommendation, on page 158, we recommend the Ministry of Social Services periodically assess the quality and fulfillment of person-centred plans for adults with intellectual disabilities living in group and approved private service homes.

In our seventh recommendation, on page 158, we recommend the Ministry of Social Services have regular contact about the person-centred plans with adults with intellectual disabilities living in group and approved private service homes.

The ministry requires a group and approved private service homes' staff to develop person-centred plans with their clients and review them at least every two years. Person-centred plans should include clear objectives, actions, responsibilities, and time frames, and planning should be client-centred. The ministry expects person-centred planning as an ongoing process with regular reviews to ensure it provides appropriate supports to execute the plans.

We tested 30 client records and found seven did not include any person-centred plans and nine had existing plans at least four years old. In addition, we found the ministry did not review the person-centred plans for adequacy. For the 23 clients tested with person-centred plans, we found 16 of the plans did not meet any or most components of a quality person-centred plan and the ministry's policy. For example, the plans did not note what is important to the client and action plans to achieve client goals. In addition, in 19 of the 30 client records tested, we found clients did not have any documented contact with the ministry's community service workers in the last two years.

The ministry expects community service workers to see clients in group homes at least once a year and clients in approved private service homes once every quarter to assess whether clients receive quality care. Without periodic review of person-centred plans and periodically meeting with clients, the ministry does not know whether clients receive quality care and live quality and fulfilled lives. Furthermore the ministry may not know whether any issues or concerns exist if ministry staff do not visit or contact clients periodically.

In our eighth recommendation on page 162, we recommend the Ministry of Social Services monitor for timely implementation of recommendations set out in serious incident investigation reports at group and approved private service homes. The ministry considers any allegations of abuse and/or neglect as critical serious incidents and must be investigated, while other serious incidents — for example, a hospital visit or expected death — are tracked for informative purposes but do not warrant an investigation unless the ministry decides otherwise. In 2020-21,

group homes reported 748 serious incidents and approved private service homes reported 111 serious incidents. The majority of these reported serious incidents related to unexpected illness and medication abuse.

We tested 13 investigations of serious incidents and found all resulted in final reports with appropriate recommendations as required by ministry policy. However the ministry does not have a formal process to monitor whether homes implement recommendations. In addition, ministry policies do not include timelines for implementing recommendations. The ministry does not centrally record recommendations and expected actions or implementation. In 4 of the 13 investigations tested we found no evidence of ministry follow-up on the investigations.

[13:15]

The ministry not following up on and then monitoring the status of serious incident recommendation implementation may lead to similar incidents reoccurring. Identifying delays in implementing corrective actions would provide the ministry with important information to consider when relicensing a home and determining whether it needs to support the home to prevent specific types of incidents.

In our ninth and final recommendation on page 163, we recommend the Ministry of Social Services analyze serious incidents related to adults with intellectual disabilities for systemic issues at each group and approved private service home. The ministry does not analyze serious incidents data to identify homes where more serious incidents occur.

We found the ministry's serious incident reporting form does not require collecting information on the date the incident was reported to the ministry, which inhibits the ministry from knowing whether homes report incidents promptly. Also the serious incident report form does not provide detailed information on incident location, because it only tracks home operator names and not the specific home. Often one group home operator operates more than one home in Saskatchewan. Thus we were not only unable to identify if one specific home had ongoing serious incidents, but also the ministry does not know which particular homes experience more serious incidents than others. Comprehensively analyzing serious incidents at each home would allow the ministry to identify home operators who are no longer suitable to care for adults with intellectual disabilities and should not be licensed.

I will now pause for the committee's consideration.

The Chair: — Thank you for the presentation and the focus of the work, certainly a very important chapter. I'll turn it over to Deputy Minister Kratzig to briefly respond, and I want to thank her and her team as well for the details they have provided in the status update. Then we'll open it up for questions.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you. Related to the recommendation that Social Services monitor resolution of deficiencies stated in a conditional licence for group and approved private service homes within a reasonable time frame, the ministry agrees this recommendation is partially implemented. As an interim step to meeting this recommendation, the ministry has developed a licensing tracking data set and dashboard. The dashboard tracks

conditional licences and year-over-year licensing information to highlight any deficiencies. The ministry will also develop processes to monitor conditional licences that are identified in the new dashboard to help resolve any deficiencies within the prescribed time frame.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services update home inspection checklists to cover key areas at group and approved private service homes, the ministry agrees this recommendation is partially implemented. The ministry has reviewed its inspection checklist through our work on *The Residential Services Act, 2019* and *The Residential Services Regulations* which came into force on January 1st, 2023.

New inspection checklists will be implemented in 2023 including program standard checklists for group homes, annual review checklists for approved private service homes, and checklists to address best practices around water temperature, medication handling, and waste disposal. The ministry will finalize and implement these new checklists in 2023. As the ministry finalizes these checklists, we're working closely with service providers as licences are reviewed and issued to ensure requirements are met. We will also continue to work with the Ministry of Government Relations to address inconsistencies in fire inspections.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services annually inspect each group home to assess if it meets the minimum program standard requirements, the ministry agrees this recommendation is partially implemented. The ministry is reviewing practices and exploring options to improve accountability and assess group homes' compliance with program standards. This includes work under way on the ministry's person-centred case management project to develop new, clear case management practice standards for our case managers. The implementation of *The Residential Services Act, 2019* and *The Residential Services Regulations* will better protect residents and increase accountability for group and approved private service home providers.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services use a central system to track key information about group and approved private service homes, the ministry agrees this recommendation is partially implemented. The ministry is implementing this recommendation in a phased approach. Phase 1 is complete and the ministry has modified the current licensing database to better track key information related to licensed homes. Phase 2 is under way. The ministry is developing a comprehensive database which will capture all information required for group home and approved private service home licensing.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services verify completion of periodic criminal record checks for people caring for adults with intellectual disabilities living in group and approved private services homes, the ministry considers this recommendation partially implemented. The ministry is in the process of developing policy and procedures requiring service providers to conduct more frequent criminal record checks for group homes and approved private service homes. This aligns with requirements in *The Residential Services Act, 2019* and *The Residential Services Regulations* which came into force on January 1, 2023. The ministry is also working to determine the appropriate frequency of criminal record checks for group homes and approved private service homes, and will develop a process

for verifying the completion of the criminal record checks as prescribed by the policy.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services periodically assess the quality and fulfillment of person-centred plans for adults with intellectual disabilities living in group and approved private service homes, the ministry considers this partially implemented. The ministry is focused on this recommendation through our continued work on outcomes-based service delivery with a goal to develop an outcomes framework that ensures clients achieve their person-centred outcomes. The ministry is committed to reviewing the quality of person-centred plans to ensure they're meaningful and reflect individuals' choice and control over their own lives. Through the person-centred case management project, the ministry is working to review contact standards for case managers, ensuring clients receive a person-centred approach to the services required.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services have regular contact about the person-centred plans with individuals with intellectual disabilities living in group and approved private service homes, the ministry considers this recommendation partially implemented. As part of requirements of the new residential services Act and *The Residential Services Regulations*, group homes and approved private service homes will develop a written resident support plan for all residents, to be updated annually.

The implementation of this new requirement over the coming year will increase oversight of plans for residents' support needs and help verify that these plans are in place. As part of the outcomes-based service delivery pilot project, individual clients are being interviewed to determine their satisfaction with achievement of their personal outcomes as defined in the person-centred plans. And one of the goals of the person-centred case management project is to review contact standards for our case managers to establish consistent contact standards with third-party service providers dependant upon client needs.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services monitor for timely implementation of recommendations set out in serious incident investigation reports at group and approved private service homes, the ministry considers this recommendation partially implemented. The ministry has developed a serious incident dashboard report which tracks data related to serious incidents by client, service type, and service provider. The dashboard has year-over-year reporting capabilities.

In phase 2 of the dashboard's development, the ministry will work to incorporate data related to abuse investigations including status, recommendations, and actions taken. This will better enable reporting and analysis of serious incidents and abuse investigations. The ministry is also working on developing standardized reporting generated by the dashboard ensuring appropriate actions are taken to address any deficiencies.

And finally, related to the recommendation that Social Services analyze serious incidents related to adults with intellectual disabilities for systemic issues at each group and approved private service home, the ministry considers this recommendation partially implemented. As noted in the previous recommendation, the ministry has developed a serious incident report dashboard. The ministry is working to streamline these

reports and develop an automated reporting schedule. A proactive analysis plan is also being created to support identification of potential systemic issues along with the development of strategies to address those issues.

The Chair: — Thank you very much for the presentation and for the work to address these recommendations. At this time I'd like to table document PAC 94-29, Ministry of Social Services: Status Update, dated February 27th, 2023. Thanks again for those involved in preparing that document. I'll open it up to committee members for questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thanks so much for being here today to everyone in the room and for all the work that's gone into partial implementation of these recommendations. So my thanks as well to the auditor and their team.

Perhaps moving through these, just systemically, beginning with the first recommendation on page 151, are you able to clarify . . . It notes in the status update that the ministry will develop processes to monitor conditional licences — and it goes on — projected to be implemented by the end of 2023. Is it projected that they will be developed by the end of 2023 or that monitoring work will be place by that time?

Ms. Kratzig: — I'll turn it over to Louise Michaud who's the assistant deputy minister for the disability services area.

Ms. Michaud: — Thank you. The intention is that they will be fully developed and begin implementation at that time.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Perhaps with a bit of a higher level question here. Going through some of the actions taken to implement since the initial Provincial Auditor's report, I've noticed throughout some of the actions that *The Residential Services Act, 2019* and the accompanying regulations are cited as part of the actions necessary to implement some of these changes. Can you help the committee understand — because I'll admit I'm not overly familiar with this piece of legislation — was it necessary for legislative change to occur before action could be taken on some of these recommendations?

Ms. Kratzig: — Yeah, I can speak to that. Thank you for the question. No, the new residential services Act and regulations certainly strengthened oversight and accountability for residential homes that are licensed by a variety of ministries. So what is within the legislation and the regulations that we were working on certainly supports the work that we're doing and we're aligning with the legislation, but we could have done this work without the changes in the legislation. The changes in the legislation, I would say, crystalize and clarify some of the things that are best practice and will be required for all residential homes in terms of licensing supported broadly across government.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And with this legislation being, you know, relatively novel in the grand scheme of legislation, the opinion of officials is obviously that it would be sufficient to meet the changes necessary and the current best practices as outlined?

Ms. Kratzig: — I would say, absolutely. You know, when the

legislation was developed and the regulations, there was broad consultation. Best practice was looked at, sectors were consulted, etc. So you know, we're confident that those changes enable any sector to develop, sort of, the best practice. I would say the auditor, certainly in this report, has solidified for us the importance of having very strong processes and oversight and accountability with our third-party partners in this regard who provide a very valuable service on behalf of very vulnerable clients that we work closely with. So you know, we're very committed to meeting these recommendations. New legislation and regulations enables us to do that.

And certainly Bob and Louise can talk a little bit more about the journey that we've been on in this sector as well in terms of making sure that individuals do have person-centred plans, that we do have regular contact with our homes, ensure that they are providing the exceptional service to our clients.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. On that, you know, one of the reasons I enjoy this committee so much is learning about the scope of government and all of the hard work and things that people do for public service and as a career in this province. I often feel like the most ignorant person in the room asking these questions. But I'm curious, with these third-party . . . With the private service homes and the contractors that are used, recognizing a lot of this report is focused on, you know, accountability and ensuring some of that monitoring and reporting is actually taking place, what's the average value for a contract with a third party?

Ms. Kratzig: — If you just hold for one moment, we'll just have that discussion.

[13:30]

Mr. Martinook: — Good afternoon. Thank you for the question. Bob Martinook, executive director for community living service delivery. Just a sec. I've got to get a drink here.

So the question that you're asking requires a complex answer actually, because there's a number of service lines to meet specific needs. So when we have a client who comes to us and an emerging need, the client will present with a specific challenge. It might be that they are looking for residential support. They might be looking for a day program support, you know, or they might be in a crisis situation. So they come to us in various sort of need, state of need.

So for example, if someone comes to us and they're looking for a residential support and we assess them and we work with them and we find out what they want to do and where they want to live, we would try to find a resource that would meet that need. So a person could come to us. We would assess them. They would have a DLSA [daily living support assessment] score assigned to them which represents the support needs that they would require. That DLSA score is used to establish a funding level if they were to participate in an approved private service home, for example.

If they wanted to live more independently, we would use that score to come up with a ballpark of support, supported independent living units which would be hourly supports, and it could be as few as 10 or as much as 50 or 60 hours a week that that person could get. And then there's persons who could require

group home supports which means they require 24 . . . seven-day-a-week supports. And those can range anywhere from . . . An individual cost could be, you know, 70, 60, \$70,000 — \$160,000 is not unusual per person in a group home — up to 5 or \$600,000 per person.

So it's a difficult answer to say it's definitively one thing or another. It could be a combination of those things. And then there's day program supports that can range anywhere from supported employment kinds of situations where they might get one or two hours of support a week, right up to a five-day-a-week day program where they'd have six or seven hours throughout the day, one-to-one support or two-to-one support or three-to-one supports and so on.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah, okay. Thank you for that. It helps clarify, and I think in a broader appreciation of the scope of the work that's done. I guess what I'm curious about is these are obviously like, these are real businesses. Overall when these contracts are being re-evaluated or renewed, these are by and large fairly significant amounts of money that are accompanying the renewal of that contract and the provision of those services every year.

Mr. Martinook: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — And so for the residents or the clients of these private service homes or group homes, are there wait-lists for these individuals? Or you know, for somebody who's perhaps in the past been concerned about say — I don't know, like looking at one of the examples here — fire suppression systems or something like that, do they have the opportunity to essentially shop around? Or are you kind of stuck with . . . “Stuck” is a negative term; I don't mean it that way. But essentially you get what you get?

Ms. Michaud: — Thank you. So what we try to do is we certainly try to work with the clients to identify sort of again where they want to live, as Bob mentioned. But when we are looking for service providers, we follow actually government procurement policy, and we are asking for services. And so we actually follow, you know, sort of public procurement process. We'll do invitations for expressions of interest, typically identify not the specific clients, obviously, but we would identify the client needs that we're looking for service for. And then organizations — and I should note the vast majority are non-profit organizations — would come forward during that process.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. So taking that into consideration and again recognizing the work that has been done to, you know, meet the partial implementation of some of these recommendations, if this work is going through, you know, standard procurement processes, being RFP'd [request for proposal] out, all very professionally as things should be done. I guess looking at some of the gaps that have been identified by the Provincial Auditor, it does kind of seem like historically these contracts, or this licensing has just kind of been renewed as a matter of course. Is that fair? Except in those situations obviously where it notes that, you know, serious incidents have been investigated.

Ms. Kratzig: — I think that I'll turn it over to Louise or Bob to maybe comment a bit more generally on what we have done and

the improvements that we're making. But I would say we have always been committed to, you know, accountability and oversight in all of our third-party arrangements. I think the auditor has provided some very strong guidance in ways that we can strengthen our relationships with those third-party providers.

Keeping clients safe is, I would say across the board in our ministry, in all the various areas that we work on, our top priority. I think we can always do better and we are very committed to continuous improvement and taking these types of recommendations very seriously, and I think demonstrating some pretty strong action quite quickly in terms of tracking accountability and oversight.

I think that I will maybe just say that we have been on a journey for probably over a decade in terms of strengthening our person-centred approach to ensure that individuals who are living in these group homes and approved private service homes really are at the core. They determine what they view as a successful life and a full life. And that's something that the auditor certainly speaks to in the chapter as well.

And we made some really good progress that Bob or Louise can talk a little bit more in terms of those recommendations. And I think as you walk through, you'll get into that a little bit later if you're walking through each of the recommendations. I don't know, Bob, if you just want to speak a little more generally — you've been in the area for a while — in terms of how we have licensed and how you see some of these improvements.

Mr. Martinook: — Great. Bob Martinook, executive director of CLSD [community living service delivery]. I don't know if I have to keep saying that or not.

So the licensing process, it's annualized in the group home sector. And so what we would do is we'd be receiving information on the licensing, so fire inspections, health inspections, and a physical standards report. And over the years we've been trying to improve those processes as much as we can, and we've made some strong progress in lots of those areas. The implementation and the collaboration that we've done with Sask Housing, for example, and more recent developments with the wait-list initiative and the Valley View transition initiative.

Lots of the homes have had built-in features that provide for a better quality environment. Fire suppression monitoring systems, for example, is one thing that would make them more effective or efficient. Those are just some of the examples of the kinds of things that we've done to try to make the environments better. As has been pointed out by Kimberly, we take the licensing very seriously.

With this dashboard and with the tracking system, now we're able to monitor those homes more effectively and track them out. Previous to this it's been a manual process. You have to go through a file and record all of that stuff. And with changes in staffing and those kinds of things, sometimes things get dropped, and that's a lot of the problem. So now that it's going to be more automated, it'll become more effective.

Ms. A. Young: — And with some of these, you know, key risk areas that have been identified and the new monitoring or the ongoing monitoring work that's under way at the ministry with

tracking some of this and the centralization of the data, do you anticipate that impacting the ongoing contracting that you've spoken about? Any challenges with some of these third parties in terms of, you know, adapting to some of these new key risks that have been identified in meeting the deliverables and the outcomes that the ministry would want these care providers, these third parties, to be able to meet?

Ms. Kratzig: — I'll maybe turn it over to Louise, but I would say that generally we have very strong partnerships with all of our organizations. They share our commitment to safety and accountability, and I think they have been very good partners. But I'll let maybe Louise comment a bit more on that.

Ms. Michaud: — And no, I would actually just reiterate what Kimberly said. So you know, the partnerships that we have, certainly there is, you know . . . People need a little bit of sort of change management, I'm going to say. And so we work with people to make sure that we're clear on what they can expect going forward. And by doing that we do certainly find partners that are, you know, willing to adapt, that understand that these changes are in the best interests of our clients. So you know, don't anticipate pushback from the sector.

Ms. A. Young: — That's great to hear.

The Chair: — While you're organizing . . . You sound like you're very organized in your next question, but just to interject. We were talking briefly in one of your questions about like a wait-list or how someone's placed. Can you provide us an update as to what that wait-list looks like at this point in time?

Mr. Martinook: — The question was regarding how we handle wait-lists. We refer to the wait-list as emerging need. So we look at the clientele that we have. They present with a number or a variety of needs anywhere from a few hours a day for day program supports, or residential supports, or supported independent living. And so we characterize those as emerging needs and we maintain an emerging needs list, so we identify all of the individuals who are presenting to us with an emerging need.

So for example, in this current fiscal year we have targeted 119 individuals who have an emerging need. And they can be people who are in service, who are already getting a service and want a different service or an enhanced service, or they can be completely new. So they could be people who have come to us, who have lived with mom and dad, or have lived independently, and they need a change. And so we'll assess their need and then we'll make provisions and plan with them to meet that need and find that need. And we're constantly evaluating and looking at the emerging needs lists. So someone who might be an emerging need high priority this week might not be next week, and someone who's far down the list may move up because their circumstances changed.

So it's not a list that just stays the way it is. It's constantly being evaluated and looked at every month, pretty much.

The Chair: — Thanks for that, sort of, some information around that. So you're saying in the last fiscal year, there was 119 clients then that were on that emerging needs list? In full, or at one given time? Just provide a little clarity on that.

Mr. Martinook: — It's 119 individuals who we have identified funding for in the current fiscal year.

The Chair: — Okay. So then I guess to the question then: those that are in need of service — maybe looking more specifically around placement within a home — what sort of a wait-list do you have on that front?

Mr. Martinook: — So we prioritize the need of the individuals. So someone who's pressing, if they need a group home and we've planned for that, then that person would go into that space. So we tend to plan out our group home builds, so to speak, based on what there . . . coming at us because it takes time to build or acquire and develop a residential setting. So we try to plan those out as much in advance as we possibly can. Typically it takes 18 months to procure and build a home that's specific to a need, but we'll also evaluate our current vacancies or any spaces that we might have in a location.

Of course as Kimberly pointed out, we take a person-centred approach to planning. And so we try to ensure that we have a situation where we'll support a person to live in a community that they choose. So we don't just plug people into spaces, but we try to find a space and support families or support the individual around living where they want to live in a community they want to live in.

[13:45]

The Chair: — Thanks for all of that as well. And then just too, sort of, the number of individuals that are looking for placement. How many individuals do you have on a list that are seeking placement, that are needing, have requested placement at this point?

Mr. Martinook: — Those needs are . . . Oh, sorry.

Ms. Kratzig: — I think maybe I would just say the thinking about it as a wait-list per se . . . It's more planning with individuals for when they will need a certain service. So we know in advance. It's not typically a surprise for the team. They're in contact with families throughout and, as Bob said, we're preparing to meet that need which is why we use the language "emerging needs of individuals." So I don't know that there's sort of a number per se.

We'll have a conversation if we have that. And you're looking for a number per se of an individual who at some point in time may need a group home. It sort of depends what services would be provided up until that point. It's not sort of like waiting, maybe some of the other types of wait-lists you might be thinking about.

The Chair: — No, that's good. I appreciate that context, yeah. So just to make sure then as well that I was trying to get a sense of if you have individuals who are in need of placement who aren't placed right now. Would your response be then that there's no one waiting for that, no one that's made that request? That anybody that's in need of care, in need of placement has a placement right now. Is that the current state of affairs for Social Services?

Ms. Kratzig: — We'll just have a quick conversation about that.

Ms. Michaud: — Thank you for the question. So we don't have a specific number that says, you know, we have X number of people waiting for group homes. What we do have is people who have been identified as needing a group home. We do have plans in place whether that be that a group home is . . . you know, we're in the process of sort of tendering for those group homes, etc. So I guess what I would say is while there may be people who are waiting for a group home to be ready, I wouldn't characterize it as the same as sort of a wait-list for people that have an unmet service need. Because while those people are waiting, we do have services in place to support them in the location where they are.

The Chair: — So just to help me understand, I'm just trying to understand the number of individuals then that you're planning towards. So somebody would have . . . You would be aware that they'd have a need for a placement and then you would build out a plan for it. But that placement may be a ways off, a number of months or some period of time. How many individuals would be waiting in that situation?

Ms. Michaud: — I think that changes over time. So I think we'll have to actually get a number, a current number for you.

The Chair: — What I would ask . . . I appreciate that. So it's Public Accounts. We kind of go back and do the historical look at these sorts of matters. If you could go back, and you know, maybe even if we could just have the number on a given date, you know, for each of the last five years or so, so we can have a bit of that picture. You wouldn't have that available here, I suspect, but it is fair to have that information then supplied to us as a committee through our committee Clerk?

Ms. Kratzig: — That would absolutely be fair. And I think just to clarify, you're interested in only people who have a sort of immediate group home need? Or is it, as Bob talks about, there could be individuals who today are getting five hours of service a week, and we know when working with them that probably in the next three to five years their needs may get to the point where they need 20 hours a week. And so they would be on our caseload, we would talk about those individuals as having an emerging need, and we would be planning now to meet that need. So are you focused only on group homes for this discussion?

The Chair: — No, I think that the other information around the service provides a more holistic picture, but as long as it's broken out so that it's understood by the committee. And then understanding as well . . . So if you know that you're going to, you know, require more service two years from now for somebody and you're working towards that plan, that's one thing. There's another assessment that I think would be important to this committee to have, an assessment of those that are in need of service now or in need of a home right now, and that need not being able to be met or supplied in the time period that it's needed.

Ms. Kratzig: — Absolutely.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. I know Ms. Young, she had a sharp question. I hope I didn't throw her off her train of thought there. I'll kick it back her way.

Ms. A. Young: — Not hard to do these days. I guess just maybe my last question on some of these like key risk areas and new

standards for inspection that have been discussed and kind of the second and third recommendations, in particular. What is the process or what timeline is the ministry committed to for a regular review of these internally?

If they haven't happened for some time, of course it's great to do them. But then if, you know, we're back with a whole new cast of characters, you know, 15 years from now and they haven't been reviewed in the interim. I'm just looking for an understanding of what the routine re-evaluation would be for some of these things.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you. Just to clarify the question, are you talking about our review of how often we'll be reassessing homes? I just want to make sure we are answering the right question.

Ms. A. Young: — For sure. For example, in the second recommendation where, you know, the ministry is implementing a new checklist, is there a plan to re-evaluate this every five years, ensure it stays current, and you know, the risks are informed by best practices, and you know, lessons learned in the sector and whatnot?

Ms. Michaud: — So we haven't established sort of a specific review period, actually. As we move forward with our outcomes-based service delivery pilot project and our person-centred case management project, we anticipate that we'll be taking a more continuous improvement approach to these reviews.

Ms. A. Young: — So more of an evergreen process is what I'm hearing.

Ms. Michaud: — Pardon me?

Ms. A. Young: — More of an evergreen process?

Ms. Michaud: — Exactly.

Ms. A. Young: — For recommendation . . . Gosh, I'm not sure which number, but on 155; I suppose that would initially be recommendation no. 4. It notes that the ministry is using a central system to track key information about group and approved private service homes and that the ministry is developing a comprehensive database to capture all information required. Is this being done in-house or is this contracted out?

Ms. Kratzig: — It's in-house.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, great. So consultant is a title as opposed to a . . .

Ms. Kratzig: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, perfect. And seeing as this is expected by the end of 2023, is there an update on how this work is going so far that could be provided to the committee?

Ms. Kratzig: — Yeah, again thank you for the question. I think I would say, you know, we are pleased that phase 1 is complete and we're working on phase 2 to capture all of the information to make this as robust and complete as possible. Again as you sort of alluded to in your previous question, really looking at best

practice and ongoing review to make sure are we getting what we need from this database, and continuing to see if there's any additional things we need to add to it to make sure that we're doing our due diligence in the way we need to.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And the information being tracked in this new database, this is specific to the individual homes, not just the care providers?

Mr. Martinook: — The comprehensive database is going to include addresses and the names of individuals who live at those addresses. It'll be tracking the ins and outs as well, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — So it'll follow both potentially the client and the actual physical location as well?

Mr. Martinook: — Correct, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — On the next recommendation as it relates to periodic criminal record checks, you know, this seems pretty standard, best practice across ministries, anything certainly human services focused. I understand this work is under way. Can you provide a bit more clarity why it takes kind of two years from the recommendation until the end of 2023 to establish best practices? Like just this one in particular.

Obviously I'm new to the world of Social Services, but this seems like, you know, we all have to have criminal record checks. If you're a volunteer in a school, you need a criminal record check updated regularly. To me this one surprised me, as it seems fairly standard practice across other service areas. So I'm just curious why there's that lag in time and what needs to be developed.

Ms. Kratzig: — Sure. Thank you very much. Maybe I'll get Louise to provide a bit of context on what might make this a little bit more complicated, I guess, with the different types of homes we have on this one.

Ms. Michaud: — Thank you, certainly. And this is particularly, as Kimberly said, it's a little bit more complicated with approved private service homes because you're not just talking about people's place of employment, but the place where they live and considering sort of every adult that may be moving in and out of that private service home, sort of also, you know, people's family members. And that's why it's a little bit more complicated to put some thought into that.

Ms. A. Young: — So sorry, just to make sure I understand, the complicating factor is . . .

Ms. Michaud: — The complicating factor is, in many ways it's people who are . . . We're not just considering the employees of approved private service homes or the operators, but we're also considering all adult people who live in the home. So we're actually looking at, you know, in some ways people are getting criminal reference checks for living in their residence.

And so that's one of the things, the careful considerations we actually have to put into, is it fair to expect people just to be able to live . . . You know, maybe it's an adult child moving back in with their parents, how often do they need to have a criminal reference check to live there? So like I said, it's not just

employees, but it's all non-client adult residents of an approved private service home, because an approved private service home is usually in a private family home setting.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, appreciating that a bit more. And is that complicating factor the same for vulnerable service checks as well?

Ms. Michaud: — It would be the same for vulnerable service checks.

Ms. Kratzig: — Just to be really clear, this is going to be implemented by the end of this year. We are looking at it, looking at best practice, looking what's happening across other human service areas, our own ministry, everywhere. So it will be implemented this year.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you for that. And have there been any concerns in the past in regards to, you know, individuals living in care homes who have not passed a vulnerable sector criminal record checks in a way that would be, you know, of particular relevance to working with vulnerable clients?

[14:00]

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you for the question. We just had a brief discussion and we're not aware of a time where an individual has had an issue with a criminal record check. We wouldn't license a home if they did.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Moving onto the recommendations 6 and 7 on page 158, I'm looking at the person-centred plans for adults with intellectual disabilities. It's indicated in the auditor's report that management hired a contractor in May 2021 to develop outcomes for home operators, performance management framework, and related tools. Is that currently being used, that work?

Mr. Martinook: — So the ministry contracted with KPMG to assist us in the development of an outcomes-based service delivery model. And so we've developed a framework with them, and then they have assisted us in the development of the interview tool or the evaluation tool that we'll be using with each of the clients as we interview them to assess the quality of the program from their perspective. And then that information would be used to reflect upon the service delivery quality.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. And that was developed in 2021.

Mr. Martinook: — Yes. Sorry. We're working through the pilot phase. So we just completed phase 1 of the pilot, so we're testing the tool and we're just moving into phase 2 of the test. So we started out with I believe it was 50 clients, and now we're going to be moving up to 300 clients. And then the next phase is to re-interview.

And then we've created a number of what are called community of practices around those. The participating agencies meet and discuss the findings of the surveys and look into ways to improve the service delivery across the sector.

Ms. A. Young: — And what was the cost of that contract?

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you for the question. We don't have that number with us, but we can certainly get it to the committee.

Ms. A. Young: — Wonderful. Thank you. And then feeling like I have a grasp on the . . . or hoping I have a grasp on the process, for some of the outliers noted in the auditor's report for clients, you know, without any documented contact with the ministry's community service workers, how many clients would each service worker typically be responsible for? I guess there's . . . How many service workers are there? I can do the math.

Mr. Martinook: — So the caseloads vary in size, but we have community service workers and then we have community intervention workers. Community intervention workers would have caseloads between 10 and 15 clients. And then we have community services workers who could have caseloads anywhere from 80 to 130 or 140 clients. So it's variable depending on the . . .

Ms. A. Young: — What's the distinction in responsibilities between those two?

Mr. Martinook: — Community intervention worker is a caseworker who brings a certain set of skills around complex case management processes, usually behavioural support kinds of background, and also integrated case management experience. So they're usually a senior worker or a more skilled worker.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so essentially like if there's increased complexity or severity of needs, the workers would have fewer of those clients. I'm hearing that kind of 10 to 15 number. And the community service workers you said could have anywhere upwards of 80 or 100 clients.

Mr. Martinook: — Correct, yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — And so I suppose if the ministry's expectation is that the community service workers then see clients in group homes at least once a year, is that a manageable caseload? Like, is that resourced adequately in order to meet the ministry's goals of having these face-to-face interactions with clients at least once a year?

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you very much for the question. We do have the person-centred case management project that we talked a little bit about earlier when I gave the status update, and that is really looking at sort of the triaged approach based on needs of our clients. So it won't be necessarily a one-size-fits-all contact standard.

We're going to look at ensuring that, you know, people are being met with as often as they need to, given their need. If somebody's in a very stable situation it might be once a year. If someone is requiring more than that, it could be more. And we'll ensure that we have the, you know, appropriate resources to meet the needs of the clients that we serve.

But that's being looked at right now as part of that person-centred case management project that we talked about earlier.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Is there kind of a minimum standard then that the ministry would hope each client has access to, regardless of complexity?

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you for the question. So for individuals who are in residential care, the minimum standard is at least once a year. For, you know, much of our caseload who are living either independently or at home or with supports, we don't have a minimum standard. And that's some of the work that we're doing through this project, is to determine how do we best assess what a standard sort of minimum would be.

Ms. A. Young: — Is that an anticipated outcome of this project then, is establishing kind of a minimum level of . . .

Ms. Kratzig: — Yes. Yeah, and it will be very much based on client need. So it will sort of evolve with the client in terms of their needs and ensuring that we're satisfied with the oversight.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Looking at the measure used by the auditor in this section on page 158 where it notes that, you know, of 30 clients, and recognizing I think there's about . . . Was it 1,400 clients in the province? I can't remember the number; you'll correct me . . . [inaudible interjection] . . . 16. And 63 per cent of these clients didn't have any documented contact with the ministry's community service workers in the last two years, recognizing, you know, we're coming out of a pandemic and everybody's been operating in a bit of a new reality. Is that standard of, you know, I guess 37 per cent, only 37 per cent of clients having had documented contact with the ministry's community service work? Is that fairly accurate?

Ms. Kratzig: — I think that, you know, we always think that the auditor's reports are accurate in terms of what they determined and what they assessed. I do think you're quite right in terms of COVID having a significant impact on potentially those numbers. Currently the CLSD caseload is above 6,000 individuals who have some involvement with our ministry in that area.

So it's difficult to say. I don't have the numbers with me in terms of how many of those individuals might be in a scenario where not having interaction with us for a year or two might be perfectly fine and reasonable given their stable living circumstances, and others who might require much more than that.

I don't know, Bob, if there's any additional context you would want to add to that question.

Mr. Martinook: — What Kimberly referenced earlier around the case standards, that would address that issue exactly, and that's what we're looking at, is how to ensure that the clients who need us and want us and want our contact at a set schedule is met. There are a number of clients who want to be on our caseload who actually don't want a caseworker contacting them. And in a person-centred approach we are trying to be respectful of their wishes as well.

And so what we may look at or consider is something like a contact worker who just goes out and makes a phone call, even just a, hey, are you still interested in being a part of the caseload of CLSD? Could be as simple as that. But those, the new standards, will establish those contacted and for which groups would be at that level.

Ms. Kratzig: — I think I would just maybe add, you know, one of the things that I've certainly learned as I've come into this role,

with the bulk of my history being in the health sector, is that in the CLSD area with its, you know, very strong emphasis on person-centred sort of . . . Everything is from the person-centred approach. There really are, as Bob said, individuals who really . . . They are part of our caseload, but they don't have a lot to do with us and that just might be absolutely fine for them and their living circumstance at the time. We want to be there when people need our support and want our support to ensure they can live the best lives that they choose to live.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you so much. Maybe I'll just add my own question here, just you know, recognizing COVID's thrown many things for a loop, as I'm sure you know coming from the health sector. If there is that information available for even, like the past five-year period around what those actual contact numbers look like as noted by the auditor, if the committee could get those, that would definitely be of interest.

The Chair: — Maybe just to put that on the . . . Making sure we have that part of the record then, is that something that can be provided back to the committee in due course?

Ms. Kratzig: — You know, I'm being told that it would be really difficult to do a deep analysis of the 6,000 caseload in terms of how often people may or may not have been contacted. So I don't know that that's something that we would maybe want to commit to right now.

I think what you're asking though is, do we think it's acceptable that some people may not have been contacted for a couple of years. And I think that what I hear Bob saying, and others in the area, that it very well could be in terms of what their need is at that time. And again I would just reiterate with the person-centred case management project that we're doing, we are really looking at ensuring we do have standards, that we could sit and answer this question in a year from now and say, this is what we are saying is our minimum standard for a person with this type of need.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah. I think it's less of a value judgment and more of just a reflection of some of what's noted in the report, that it's the ministry's expectations that people have annual contact and if . . .

Ms. Kratzig: — If they're in residential care.

Ms. A. Young: — If they're in residential care.

Ms. Kratzig: — And that's something that we could certainly get to you in terms of, did the individuals in residential care . . . Again of the 6,000 individuals on our caseload, there are not 6,000 people in group homes in Saskatchewan.

Ms. A. Young: — That would be wonderful then, if that is possible.

The Chair: — Just make sure we have . . . It's kind of clear then that that information that you just described, that's something that can be provided back to the committee. Is that correct? Thank you very much.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Then last question from me on this chapter, for the recommendation on page 162,

recommendation no. 8. It seems to me the opportunity for improvement highlighted by the auditor is more that information kind of follows the client as opposed to the home operator or the home itself. And I note in the actions taken to implement in the update report, it notes that the ministry developed a serious incident dashboard report which tracks data related to serious incidents by client, service type, and service provider. Can you clarify? Is it the service provider or is the individual home location that's being tracked and identified in the new serious incident dashboard? Because maybe I'm mistaken. My understanding from reading the chapter is that the recommendation was that it should also speak to the home, not necessarily the umbrella provider.

Ms. Michaud: — That's correct and it does track . . . Again it tracks the homes and that enables us to identify, you know, we're working towards being able to identify trends with specific homes not just service providers.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Great.

Ms. Kratzig: — Yeah, I think it's actually, just looking at the . . . Probably should have added location as well which is not there yet. But it is in the report itself.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Perfect. Thank you. Mr. Chair, I have no further questions on this chapter.

The Chair: — Okay, well thank you for the questions and the answers. I see Mr. Nerlien has some questions as well.

Mr. Nerlien: — Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair. One quick question. You reference a number of times dashboard integrated reporting, so on and so forth. Is that something that the individual service provider uploads data and information into or is that something that is not accessible by the service provider? And I'm thinking of just some of the simple things like criminal record checks. It's just a matter of a date and time or whatever. There's a lot of that data that would be just automatically or should be automatically loaded up by the service provider.

[14:15]

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you very much for the question. Maybe, Louise, I'll get you to explain how the dashboard works.

Ms. Michaud: — The dashboard is — and Bob will correct me if I'm wrong — but the dashboard is actually something that is maintained in-house. Service providers are required, for example, for serious incident reporting. They provide us with a form. We don't at this time have sort of a cloud ability for them to enter directly into the system, so they provide us with a form that outlines the nature of the serious incident, and then what that also does is it makes sure that there's a pair of human eyes on the incident while it's being entered into the dashboard.

Ms. Kratzig: — So I think the answer is no. Right now it's not accessible to our service providers, but it's probably a good idea for the future.

The Chair: — Further questions? Not seeing any, I'd welcome a motion to concur and note progress with recommendation 1 through 9. Moved by Mr. Nerlien. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. I'll turn it back over to our Provincial Auditor, and I think they'll be turning their attention to chapter 26.

Mr. Wandy: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Ministry of Social Services provides care for children requiring protection and out-of-home care. At September 2021 the ministry used 488 foster families to provide care for 858 children requiring protection and out-of-home care. Chapter 26 of our 2022 report volume 1 reports the results of our first follow-up of the ministry's actions on six recommendations we made in our 2020 audit about processes to monitor whether foster families provide a safe and secure environment for children in care.

By November of 2021, we found the ministry implemented two of the six recommendations. We found the ministry consistently conducted annual foster home safety checks and obtained annual criminal record self-declarations for newly approved foster families. However, the ministry still needs to consistently complete background checks on all adults in a foster home to identify any previous involvement with the ministry — for example, a history of child abuse or neglect — prior to approving new foster families. Our testing identified an instance where the ministry did not perform a background check until 11 months after approving the foster family. Delays in background checks for all adults in a foster family may result in a potential threat to a child's safety when placed in the home.

We found the ministry now requires periodic criminal record checks every three years on all adults residing in approved foster homes; however the ministry had not yet developed the policies and procedures or an implementation plan for obtaining periodic criminal record checks. These checks reduce the risk the ministry has incomplete or inaccurate information about criminal charges against members of foster families, which reduces the risks to children in foster homes.

In addition, we found the ministry improved its compliance rate for completing annual review reports of individual foster families since our 2020 audit. However our testing found annual review reports are not always completed on time and supervisory review and formal approval of the reports are considerably late. For example, 46 per cent of the annual review reports we tested were signed by supervisors more than three weeks after report completion or not at all. Delays in completing and reviewing annual review reports may result in foster families not receiving timely support and reduces the ministry's ability to take timely and appropriate action. The ministry planned to deliver more specific training to staff on the completion of foster family annual reviews and final reports.

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

The Chair: — Thanks again for the very important focus and the recommendations. I'll turn it over to the deputy minister to provide a brief response to the chapter. Then we'll open it up for questions.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you. Related to the recommendation that Social Services complete all required background checks prior to approving foster families, the ministry considers this

recommendation implemented.

In December of 2021 the ministry completed a review of the processes for completing and documenting background checks prior to approving foster families. A consistent process for documenting background checks was established and implemented in January of 2022. Updates to the ministry's case management system in July of 2022 included the addition of a background check section to the provider page, where information obtained during the background check can be documented.

The ministry continues to monitor compliance to the background checks required for approval. In the 2022 program file reviews, the provincial average for compliance to ministry checks was 98 per cent, compliance to reference checks was 100 per cent, and compliance to medical checks was 93 per cent. The quality assurance unit will continue to measure this as part of their program file reviews.

Related to the recommendation Social Services consistently follow its standard to conduct annual home safety checks at foster homes, the ministry notes the auditor considers this recommendation implemented.

Related to the recommendation Social Services obtain annual criminal record declarations for all adults residing in approved foster homes, the ministry notes the auditor considers this recommendation implemented.

Related to the recommendation Social Services continue to follow its standard to complete annual review reports to individual foster families, the ministry agrees this recommendation is partially implemented.

Our quality assurance unit monitors the completion of annual reviews. In July of 2022 the ministry's case management system was updated to incorporate home assessments, which included the addition of an automated task reminder for workers to complete the annual reviews. Upcoming annual reviews and submission timelines are monitored through staff supervision. When required, plans are created to support staff to complete outstanding reviews.

The results of all program file reviews continue to be shared with employees, and where required, action plans are developed to reconcile outstanding recommendations. The ministry also holds community of practice meetings with the intent to promote best practice. These meetings create a network to strengthen policy knowledge, increase confidence in the use of tools, share in problem solving, discuss trends, and provide feedback on changes. Supervisors and assistant supervisors attend these meetings and then share the information and skills with their teams as a mentorship opportunity.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services train staff responsible for monitoring foster families specifically on conducting annual reviews, the ministry considers this recommendation implemented.

The ministry has developed a training package that is in use for staff to complete annual reviews. The training focuses on appreciative inquiry, solutions-focused questions, critical

thinking, and crucial conversations. The training includes the completion and implementation of the professional development agreement to ensure the tool is used in a helpful manner.

The training is now part of the regular training scheduled for all new employees working in out-of-home care and is offered once per year at minimum. The ministry holds community of practice meetings with service-delivery and out-of-home care staff, each with the intent to enhance and promote best practices. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you for the response. I'll open it up to committee members for questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. One question on one of the implemented recommendations, that Social Services require periodic criminal record checks on all adults residing in approved foster homes.

I'm just curious with the note in the fifth action bullet that the ministry is going to consider adding this standard as a measurement to its program file reviews in the 2024 review year, which coincides with the practice of allowing a year of implementation prior to measuring a standard. Am I to understand it'll be 2024 when the ministry is confident that this has been fully implemented across the board and everybody within the system has an up-to-date criminal record check?

Ms. Kratzig: — Yeah. I think what we're saying is that we have started to do this, but we're allowing a year of ensuring that all of our staff are trained, everybody understands the requirement, and then we will be measuring it.

Ms. A. Young: — Perfect. So then to date there . . . I guess the concern would obviously be that there are adults, you know, found to have criminal records of concern potentially as foster parents. And there's not information at this point available from the ministry on whether or not that's been found to be the case yet?

Ms. Eberhardt: — Hi. Tobie Eberhardt, assistant deputy minister for child and family programs. Currently our policy is that any adult in the foster home at time of approval has to complete a criminal record check, and then they do a yearly self-declaration or report if there's been any changes. What we've implemented now is every three years they will be required to do a criminal record check. So that was implemented this summer. And so it's already happening.

So as they work with them over the year, around their review with the foster parents, the ask would be to bring it. And we're trying to stagger it. And what this is, is our . . . We have a quality assurance team that does an annual audit of files. And so this is about the quality assurance team going in and adding this as part of their annual audit.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, perfect. Understand. Thank you. No further questions on this one, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: — Further questions? Maybe I'll just clarify the — what is it? — the third recommendation with respect to the compliance rate that . . . Now the policy is 85 per cent — is that right? — of the ministry?

Ms. Eberhardt: — Well our policy is 100 per cent.

The Chair: — One hundred per cent.

Ms. Eberhardt: — But I know when we do our file audits they sort of select 85 per cent to . . . Like, they like to focus on different standards to sort of be prioritized for our staff. And so sort of it's at 85 where . . . Anything below 85 is, we will have a stronger action plan. But you know, the expectation would be 100 per cent.

The Chair: — And so with respect to that then last year, the year that was audited, it was 52 per cent. Is that right? The compliance rate? And I think it's been shared that the previous year, 2022, it was 69 per cent. Sixty-nine per cent was the provincial compliance. And 100 per cent being the target, but 85 per cent triggers some different treatment or different policies by the ministry.

Is it fair to say then that that's the expectation in the year ahead? Is implementation in fact what you're doing then, if you're going to consistently follow the standard to complete annual review reports of individual foster families? Is it your expectation to fully implement that recommendation in the year ahead?

Ms. Eberhardt: — I think that, you know, realizing that we've been making progress, but the progress, the amount it was . . . you know, our goal is of course to get 100 per cent, but realistically I think, you know, with the focus we want to reach the 85 per cent.

The Chair: — What is an impediment to making sure that you meet the full goal on this front?

Ms. Eberhardt: — I think, you know, a lot of the policy standards are impacted by, you know, emergencies for example. So a resource worker would maybe have a plan to go out and meet with a foster parent; something might come up in another home that they have to attend immediately.

So while they do their best to plan their days and to meet those standards, there are some times that a crisis might occur that they have to attend to.

The Chair: — And they're doing such important work out there, so thanks to all of them. Is it a bit of a matter of capacity then? Are additional workers required on this front to fulfill this obligation to the homes and to the children?

Ms. Eberhardt: — I think it's partly around, you know, the prioritization of the work. We did bring in some pieces to help our staff. You know, so with the changes to our case management system that will now allow them to have . . . will give alerts to both them and their supervisors. That will help with managing that, the day-to-day work and planning out your day.

The Chair: — Thank you for the information and the work on this important front. Certainly, we support the ministry in working to, you know, fulfill that recommendation in a full way.

Any other questions from committee members? Not seeing any. Now these are outstanding recommendations so we don't have to vote on them the same way, but I'd ask for a member to move

that we conclude consideration of this chapter. Mr. Grewal. On the record. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. I'll move along now and pass it back to the Provincial Auditor to focus on chapter 24.

Mr. Wandy: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Ministry of Social Services spends over \$120 million on salaries annually. In fiscal 2021-22, the ministry's average sick leave usage rate per full-time employee, excluding medical leaves, was just over seven days. Its target was seven days of sick leave per full-time equivalent employee.

Chapter 24 of our 2022 report volume 2 reports the results of our third follow-up of management's actions on two outstanding recommendations we made in 2015 about processes to minimize employee absenteeism. By August 2022, the ministry implemented both remaining recommendations. We found the ministry actively encourages supervisors to take available attendance management training and monitors completion. Training promotes understanding of attendance management expectations and provides guidance to supervisors to address absenteeism issues with their staff.

[14:30]

In addition, the ministry assessed the effectiveness of its attendance management strategies and planned to report the results to senior management in fall 2022. The strategies included staffing a disability consultant and improving awareness of the Be At Work program. Reporting on attendance management strategies helps senior management understand causes for employee absenteeism and whether actions taken are successfully reducing absenteeism.

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

The Chair: — Thank you very much for the focus and the follow-up. I'll flip it over to Deputy Minister Kratzig for a brief response, then we'll see if there's any questions.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you. And thank you to the auditor. I will just mention that both of the recommendations in this chapter have been considered implemented by the auditor.

The Chair: — Thank you. I'll turn it over to committee members. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — One question of interest: page 243 in the second paragraph where it notes the ministry's average sick time leave usage going from, you know, basically ten and a half days in '19-20 down to just over six and a half days in '20-21 and then back up to just over 11 days in '21-22. In reading this chapter it struck me that it's considerably lower in 2020-2021, and then I'm curious just for explanation of potentially what that drop is and the ministry's understanding, you know, impacts of potentially work-from-home on sick leave and what conclusions you're drawing from that.

Mr. Kratzig: — Yeah, thank you very much for the question and observation. You know, at a ministry like Social Services with

1,800 employees, certainly chapters like this and ensuring that our staff are healthy and safe and supported to be at work is really important to us. I think in response to your question, we've had lots of conversations about, so what is it that occurred in that year that saw that type of a drop?

And I think it is fair to say, as you would know, that many of our staff were working from home. Many of our front-line staff were having less contact with individuals and being in sort of vulnerable, difficult situations that could also of course impact their overall health and safety. So I think that is sort of probably the anecdotal conclusion of what occurred in that year, and we would see the numbers as staff returned to work, as we start having that very important front-line, one-on-one contact with individuals who need our support, that we do see our sick time has returned to what would be more of a, I would say, ministry normal.

I think that as we see the trends continue, we're probably going to see a blip up as well in terms of the path forward, and some of the things around that are just, I think, culture in the work place. We've now really talked a lot about not coming to work when we're not feeling well. You know, if you're coughing, sneezing, fever, have children who are home sick, we are encouraging people to stay at home, and I think that, you know, that is what we're seeing happening as well. And that's really a trend across many areas, in particular the human service areas as well.

Ms. A. Young: — I think just one last clarification for myself on that point. When you talk about, I mean the return to work obviously impacting the health and safety of some of, I would assume especially your front-line workers, is that also like . . . Am I understanding health to be health and mental health as well?

Mr. Kratzig: — Absolutely. Mental health is a very big priority for us. We have as a ministry many programs and through the Public Service Commission access to various services for our staff. We really are normalizing the conversations around mental health and well-being, recognizing that that is equal to and as important if not more important than physical health for many of our staff. So we're really ensuring that that is a priority.

Ms. A. Young: — Is that a distinction we track within the ministry?

Mr. Kratzig: — I don't think it's a distinction we track in terms of, you know, why is someone sick, but it's certainly something that, as part of things like attendance management training and just leadership and good supervision, we're always having conversation with our teams in terms of checking in — how are you doing? — ensuring that they know they're supported.

We have through the Public Service Commission access to an employee family assistance program that people are encouraged to utilize. So we do see some statistics through that in terms of whether that's being utilized or not, and we hope that it is for folks who would benefit from it. So we are having regular conversations about people's mental health and ensuring that they are supported to be very healthy and thriving in their careers.

The Chair: — Good questions and exchange. Any further questions? Not seeing any, I'd invite a motion to conclude

consideration of this chapter, chapter 24. Moved by Mr. Goudy. Let the *Melfort Journal* record this. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — All right. That's carried. I'll turn it back over to the Provincial Auditor to focus on chapter 6.

Mr. Wandy: — Thank you. Chapter 6 of our 2022 report volume 2 reports our annual integrated audit of the Ministry of Social Services and its three special purpose funds for the year ended March 31 of 2022. This chapter includes one new recommendation along with the updates on the status of four outstanding recommendations.

We found each special purpose fund under the ministry complied with authorities governing their activities and had reliable financial statements for the year ended March 31st, 2022. The ministry complied with authorities governing its activities and had effective rules and procedures to safeguard public resources except for the areas highlighted in our three outstanding recommendations.

I'll begin by addressing two recommendations the ministry implemented during 2021-22. In 2021-22 we found the ministry continued to not follow legislation or policies and procedures for making payments to Saskatchewan assured income for disability — or SAID — program clients, resulting in incorrect payments during the year. However our analysis found the overall estimated errors in SAID payments were not significant at just over 1 per cent of the ministry's total SAID payments to clients during fiscal 2021-22.

As a result of this analysis, we concluded the ministry implemented the intent of our recommendation on page 41 of our 2022 report volume 2, that the Ministry of Social Services follow its established processes that ensure only eligible clients receive assistance and that they receive the correct amount of assistance.

The ministry continues to reinforce with staff the importance of paying social assistance clients at the correct rates. We will continue to examine SAID payments on an annual basis to determine significance.

During 2021-22 the ministry paid third-party service providers, that is community-based organizations, over \$390 million for services delivered to at-risk residents of Saskatchewan, for example, elderly or persons with disabilities. Our testing found the ministry reviewed the results of service providers annual financial analysis reports within reasonable time frames. As such we concluded the ministry implemented our recommendation on page 46 of our 2022 report volume 2 that the Ministry of Social Services perform timely reviews on all the performance information submitted by the community-based organizations.

The three remaining recommendations in our chapter highlight the need for the ministry to improve its processes to administer the Saskatchewan income support, or SIS program. During fiscal 2021-22, the ministry averaged almost 13,000 clients on SIS each month and spent over \$154 million on SIS payments to clients.

Page 44 of our 2022 report volume 2 includes a new recommendation where we recommend the Ministry of Social

Services reinforce with staff the requirements for paying shelter benefits under the Saskatchewan income support program. We found the ministry does not consistently comply with legislative and policy requirements associated with paying shelter benefits to clients under the SIS program. The ministry paid out about \$103 million in shelter benefits during 2021-22.

We found two instances where shelter benefits were paid at incorrect rates and four instances where there was no support for benefits paid. For example, we found one client caring for three children who received the shelter benefit for a single individual, that is \$525 per month, rather than the family benefit, that is \$850 per month. The ministry staff rectified the error once we notified them of it.

Not complying with legislative and policy requirements increases the risk of the ministry paying clients incorrect income assistance amounts. Providing staff with additional training or guidance about the shelter benefits available within the SIS program should help enhance staff understanding of and compliance with the various requirements.

We found the ministry has not yet implemented the recommendation on page 44 of our 2022 report volume 2 where we recommended the Ministry of Social Services verify client income information for its Saskatchewan income support program. We found the ministry does not yet verify the accuracy of SIS program clients income information with third-party sources, for example, the federal government. Not obtaining and checking third-party information to verify client income increases the risk of providing income assistance through SIS to ineligible clients or the ministry paying incorrect SIS benefits.

Finally we found the ministry partially implemented the recommendation on page 45 of our '22 report volume 2 where we recommended the Ministry of Social Services record and recover overpayments related to its Saskatchewan income support program in a timely manner.

Our testing found the ministry continued to inconsistently record and did not adequately recover SIS program overpayments during 2021-22. At March 31st of 2022, the ministry recorded a \$3.8 million accounts receivable related to SIS overpayments. The ministry expects staff to initiate recovery of overpayments in the month following payment.

The ministry's IT [information technology] system used to administer SIS program benefits allows staff to establish automatic payment recovery beginning the following month and record the related amount due for overpayments from future SIS benefits. We found staff were not always setting up an automatic recovery for known overpayments.

Not complying with legislative and policy requirements or not regularly verifying SIS client income with third-party sources increases the risk of the ministry paying clients incorrect income assistance amounts. This can result in the ministry overpaying clients and having difficulty collecting overpayments if clients leave SIS.

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

The Chair: — I'll turn it over for Deputy Minister Kratzig to

respond, then open it up for questions.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you. Related to the recommendation that Social Services follow its established processes that ensure only eligible clients receive assistance and that they receive the correct amount of assistance, the ministry considers this recommendation implemented.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services reinforce with staff the requirements for paying shelter benefits under the Saskatchewan income support program, the ministry agrees this recommendation is partially implemented.

The ministry is using the '21-22 audit results to inform a provincial audit improvement strategy in '23-24. This strategy focuses on areas requiring improvement, such as ensuring shelter benefits are provided only to eligible SIS clients who have met the documentation requirements.

The provincial audit improvement strategy was introduced in '19-20 for the previous income assistance programs, and proved successful at reducing errors. As part of this improvement strategy, the ministry is continuing to ensure staff receive the training and tools required to deliver programs and benefits in compliance with program legislation and established processes. Training will continue to be offered to staff throughout the year.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services verify client income information for its Saskatchewan income support program, the ministry considers this recommendation partially implemented. The ministry will continue to consider opportunities to include interfaces with critical organizations that could include matching data on other income sources with Saskatchewan income support data. This includes assessing the cost-benefit of building these processes.

Program rules require clients to report all income or changes in income. That requirement is stated in policy and in consent documentation signed by clients upon becoming eligible. The ministry has updated its information-sharing agreement with the federal government and has begun accessing and reviewing income tax information for SIS clients on a case-by-case basis. The ministry will also match information on common clients between the Canada Revenue Agency data and the SIS program in '23-24. This work will help inform next steps related to this recommendation.

Related to the recommendation that Social Services record and recover overpayments related to its Saskatchewan income support program in a timely manner, the ministry considers this recommendation implemented.

Prior to system functionality being implemented in February of 2020, the ministry manually tracked potential SIS overpayments. Once functionality was achieved, all overpayments were promptly recorded and actioned. The ministry ensured all outstanding overpayments were recorded in its MiCase system by April 15th, 2021. As part of our regular business, the ministry provides onboarding and ongoing training for staff on adherence to policy and procedures and use of the system functionality for overpayment recovery.

And finally, related to the recommendation that Social Services

perform timely reviews on all of the information submitted by community-based organizations, the ministry notes the auditor considers this recommendation implemented.

The Chair: — Thank you for the presentation, for the responses, for the work. I'll open it up to committee members if there's any questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. I'm curious about the timeline as it relates to recommendation 4.3, income verification with third parties for SIS clients.

[14:45]

So in reading this chapter and the actions taken to implement since the auditor's report and looking at the planned actions for implementation, a lot of this is forward looking. And yet it was I think widely reported that there were clawbacks of SIS benefits as a result of the CERB [Canada emergency response benefit] payments and some of the federal programs during the COVID-19 pandemic. So can you help the committee understand that kind of timeline discrepancy?

Ms. Kratzig: — Sure, absolutely. I think I'll turn it over to Devon Exner, our assistant deputy minister for income assistance, just to speak to that.

Mr. Exner: — Thank you for the question. So Devon Exner, assistant deputy minister, income assistance. So we actually have two pieces of work going on around interfacing with the federal government. One, which is the first one which Kimberly described, around matching with CRA [Canada Revenue Agency] to gather information on our cases going forward on the SIS program.

The second piece that we have is we've recently signed a memorandum of understanding and data-sharing agreement with the federal government to collect CRB [Canada Recovery Benefit] information. We most recently have sent off a sample of our caseload that happened to be on the program at the time when CRB, Canada Recovery Benefits, were in play, and so we are waiting for the results of that to inform next steps around what the ministry may contemplate as far as the next selection.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And that data-sharing agreement that was signed or re-signed with the federal government?

Mr. Exner: — It's just recently been signed.

Ms. A. Young: — Recently been signed. So with the clawbacks that were happening during the pandemic, how did that occur without a data-sharing agreement? I'm just trying to square kind of like what I read in the paper and what was widely reported with what's in the updates here.

Ms. Kratzig: — If you just give us a moment just to discuss a bit.

Thank you very much for that question. So just to clarify — as I stated in the information update — clients, when they're on income assistance on the new program, they are required to provide us with their income. So in terms of CERB there were situations where, if an individual's basic needs were met by

CERB, that they would not have been eligible for that amount of money in income assistance. So that would have been based on individual identification to us. It was not a sort of a post-data-sharing agreement. It was individuals telling us that they were in receipt of CERB at the time of the pandemic, which is a requirement of the program for individuals to declare their income.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so the people self-declaring were the ones who were then subject to potential clawbacks.

Ms. Kratzig: — Yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — And so then the data-sharing agreement that's been signed, is that retroactive? Like is the ministry anticipating then looking back? Or is this on a go-forward basis with, you know, God forbid potential future federal pandemic support payments or something of that nature.

Ms. Kratzig: — I think I'll just start by saying that we don't yet have any of the data back. We're just starting to explore that with the federal government in terms of what that might look like as a go-forward. So we don't really have sort of a decision point yet in terms of what that would look like.

Ms. A. Young: — So, I'm sorry, am I hearing the ministry doesn't know if it's applicable retroactively or only on a go-forward basis?

Mr. Exner: — So thanks for the question. It is retroactive. So we are looking back and gathering information on individuals that were on our caseload that potentially received the CRB. So that information, once we receive it, we will reconcile our client files and determine did they receive it, how much, and what does that look like, and make those assessments on a case-by-case basis.

As far as going forward, the intent of this memorandum or data-sharing agreement with the federal government is very specific around the CRB or the CESB [Canada emergency student benefit], so it could not be leveraged for other sort of data-matching requirements.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so just to hopefully summarize what I'm hearing accurately, the data-sharing agreement is only specifically for federal government pandemic-related supports and has no further future applications for ministry clients. It's really just targeted at those potential overpayments of benefits.

Mr. Exner: — That specific data-sharing agreement, that's correct.

Ms. A. Young: — And so then for, just for the committee, it notes in the auditor's chapter that the ministry's other assistance programs electronically screen clients against information provided by third parties. Why is this possible for other programs and not for the SIS program?

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you for the question. In terms of some of our historic programs, as noted in the chapter, there are data-sharing agreements in place where we do match around income from individuals. With the new program, the Saskatchewan income support program, we currently have the new data-sharing agreement with the CRA that's alluded to that will be

implemented in 2023-24. We've talked about the CERB or the pandemic-related support data-sharing agreement. And we'll continue to look at whether there are other data-sharing agreements that we might want to have in place going forward. So it's not that it's been ruled out. Currently we have the ones that we've identified.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. So like historical programs like SAP [Saskatchewan assistance program] and TEA [transitional employment allowance], those would have had their own data-sharing agreements historically that when the SIS program was rolled out there weren't . . .

Ms. Kratzig: — Some of them did.

Ms. A. Young: — Some of them.

Ms. Kratzig: — It wasn't consistent. It wasn't sort of . . . A lot of it was historic. These are programs that have been around for decades that may have had layering on of certain things at certain times. So we will continue to assess that with our new income support programs to ensure that, you know, we have the right controls in place as highlighted for us.

Ms. A. Young: — And is this the first and only data-sharing agreement of this kind for the SIS program?

Mr. Exner: — Thank you. So these are the first data-sharing agreements. And just, you know, going back to kind of the program vision, goals, and objectives, the intent of this program is to work with clients differently. So they are required to report any changes in their circumstances. And we want that to occur so that we can work with our clients around their plan to become self-sufficient to the best of their ability.

Data-sharing agreements and that sort of information is great, but it can be retroactive, so it doesn't necessarily prevent or stop somebody from having an overpayment because our payment periods may not align. So this is where we want to work with our clients in a different way rather than just a financial transaction and have conversations about their income they're receiving, what that means to their circumstances and their family composition, and their go-forward plan. So that's part of the change in direction around kind of our philosophy around the new program.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. And are there any, you know, not my area of expertise, but privacy concerns or things that clients would have or that the ministry would have to be negotiating through for data-sharing agreements that are retroactive? You know, if I was a SIS client in — can't remember when the program rolled out — 2019, not anticipating my information being shared with the federal government and then retroactively.

Ms. Kratzig: — I would just say, generally speaking all of our data-sharing agreements anywhere in the ministry are, you know, heavily reviewed for all privacy legal matters, whoever we're having the data-sharing agreements with, the federal government, etc. That is always a primary issue.

And I just had a note: clients sign consent. So there you go.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. So at the time they would have signed

consent when they onboarded with the program, or when the . . .

Ms. Kratzig: — Upon application, yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And is it with the implementation of the data-sharing agreement or on application to the program?

Ms. Kratzig: — It would be to the program itself.

Ms. A. Young: — So the ministry will then have to potentially go back and have consent forms signed with clients retroactively?

Ms. Kratzig: — No. I think it would be when you apply for the program you're consenting to your data being shared and income data from other sources being shared, etc.

Ms. A. Young: — Great, thanks. I'm just trying to get a scope of how much work is involved juggling new privacy agreements and programs that have been in place for a number of years with obviously a situation in a bit of a state of flux.

It's noted there's, I think it was \$3.8 million of accounts receivable related to SIS overpayments as of March 31, 2022. Looking at some of the work that's outstanding on specifically as it relates to Saskatchewan income support, I guess I'm wondering how much will some of this work cost? Like is there a number of FTEs [full-time equivalent] assigned to it? Is it anticipated to cost the ministry, you know, \$2 million to track back \$3.8 million? If you can comment on kind of the scope of the work as well as the impact on your budget.

Ms. Kratzig: — Sure, absolutely. Maybe I'll just turn it over to Devon to kind of walk through how we approach overpayments with our clients and how our staff handle things.

Mr. Exner: — So when an overpayment is identified and we're reconciling in the client file, that information gets posted on the system. So it could be an overpayment or it could be an underpayment. So we reconcile; we determine the value of that. If the client is still active on assistance, our recovery rate on SIS is \$50 per month. So that recovery would kick in the following month and it is recovered until such time as the overpayment is recovered in full.

If at any point the client happens to leave income assistance or the Saskatchewan income support program, we continue to pursue the collections of the money that's owing to the ministry as a debt to the Crown. And so we pursue the collections, working with that client after they've left assistance.

Ms. A. Young: — So for this specific, the new concern about overpayment, is it related to the federal income support programs then? Does that require more, like more FTEs for the ministry or like a material cost?

Mr. Exner: — So I'd say at this point, until we actually get the data back and understand how many potential matches there are, I can't really predict what that would take from an FTE perspective.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so there's no clear picture at this point then in terms of what the cost-benefit . . . I suppose cost-benefit

isn't the right term, but I think you get my meaning in terms of the cost to the ministry to pursue these potential overpayments.

Mr. Exner: — So that is what we will be looking at as we receive the data back. Did the majority of the clients inform us that they were receiving CRB, as an example. And so what is the cost-benefit of proceeding with, you know, a larger match, as an example.

Ms. A. Young: — And forgive me, when do you anticipate that information being complete?

Ms. Kratzig: — Thanks for the question. I think it will be throughout this fiscal year that we'll be receiving data, looking at, again as Devon talked about, you know, did the majority of the individuals tell us that they were receiving CERB, is there a discrepancy there, and what does that look like going forward.

[15:00]

Ms. A. Young: — New fiscal year?

Ms. Kratzig: — Yes, yes. Pardon me.

Ms. A. Young: — Not working very quickly.

Ms. Kratzig: — It's almost March. No, '23-24.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. And last question, you mentioned underpayments as well. I know that's a bit of a departure from some of the federal income support program conversation that we've been having. But the same process, I should understand from the ministry, occurs for tracking and notifying clients of underpayments as well and, you know, benefits they may be entitled to as noted under the shelter benefits portion of this chapter as well. That's the same level of diligence and reporting system?

Mr. Exner: — For sure. You know, if a mistake is made — and I think the one case that was drawn where we were paying the incorrect shelter benefit — as soon as that comes to light, we would notify the client, we would adjust the file, and get that underpayment out to the client as quickly as possible.

Ms. A. Young: — And that's done retroactively as well?

Mr. Exner: — Absolutely. It goes back to the date that they're actually eligible for that benefit.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And is that the same if they've left social assistance?

Mr. Exner: — The policy would be in place at the time of the file, so yes. In effect if they happen to leave assistance and for some reason they appeal the decision and we found out that they're no longer on assistance but they were eligible for a benefit, that benefit would be paid.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. No further questions.

The Chair: — Thank you very much. Mr. Fiaz, any other questions? Okay. All good. Not seeing any other questions at this point, I'd welcome a motion to concur and note progress with

respect to the new recommendation before us here today. Moved by Mr. Harrison. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried.

Saskatchewan Housing Corporation

The Chair: — We'll move along now to focus on the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, and I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor.

Ms. Clemett: — Thank you, Mr. Chair, committee members, and officials. With me today is Mr. Jason Wandy who is also responsible for the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation. Jason's going to present the chapters for the housing authority in the order that they do appear on the agenda, and we'll pause for the committee's deliberation and discussion after each presentation. The presentations do not include any new audit recommendations for the committee's consideration.

I do want to thank the president of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation, to her and her staff for the co-operation that was extended to us during the course of our work. I'll now turn it over to Jason.

Mr. Wandy: — Thank you, Tara. The Saskatchewan Housing Corporation owns over 18,000 housing units across the province. It rents these units to individuals with access or affordability issues to help promote self-sufficiency and independence. In 2019 the corporation spent \$51 million on maintenance and renovation.

Chapter 30 of our 2020 report volume 1 on pages 277 to 279 reports the results of our third follow-up of the corporation's actions on the two outstanding recommendations we originally made in our 2012 audit about the corporation's processes for maintaining its housing units. The outstanding recommendations highlighted the corporation's need to develop a corporate maintenance plan for the medium- to long-term time frame. It also needed to regularly report to senior management and the board on its maintenance activities and the overall condition and key risk to its housing units.

By February 2020 we found the corporation implemented both remaining recommendations. We found the corporation was working to align projected housing needs with having the right amount of housing units in the right communities. It had a report that outlined affordable housing needs in Saskatchewan over the next 15 years. It also had plans to prioritize maintenance activities for housing units based on housing unit condition to maintain them to a fair condition rating level.

At March 2020 the corporation's housing units were overall in poor condition. However, the board expected to receive and approve the corporation's long-term strategy to maintain the housing units the corporation expected to keep in 2021. Setting a long-term strategy helps ensure housing units are maintained to the level expected.

In addition, we found the corporation regularly gave senior management sufficiently robust written reports about the

maintenance of its housing activities, including maintenance projects planned, completed, cancelled, in progress, and not started during the year. The corporation also regularly provided the board with information about the financial impact of maintenance as part of its annual budget and quarterly financial reporting processes.

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

The Chair: — Thanks so much for the focus on this front and the follow-up that's reported. I'll turn it over to Deputy Minister Kratzig for brief comment. I appreciate the actions that have been detailed in the status update. We'll see if there's questions.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you very much. Really nothing to report, other than to say that we're pleased that the auditor notes that both of the recommendations originally from 2012 have now been fully implemented. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thanks so much. I'll open it up to members for questions. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks. Me again. Appreciating, I think the initial report was 2012 — Is that right? — and we're 11 years from then, and Saskatchewan has changed considerably in that time frame as well as, I would imagine, its affordable housing needs, I'm curious because I'm looking for your thoughts or statements on whether the strategies developed at that time remain adequate to date to meet the needs of SHA as well as for affordable housing in the province.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you for that question. And we do have Louise Michaud who is the president of the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation here, so I'll sort of turn it over to her to give you a general overview of our thoughts in terms of where we're at in the housing renewal strategy and all of our approaches to housing to ensure that we're aligned with the needs in 2022 and '23 and '24 going forward.

Ms. Michaud: — Thank you. So you ask a very good question. And we have put in place in 2022 a housing renewal strategy that is designed to ensure that the Housing Corporation remains financially sustainable, that we have flexible programs to reflect the housing needs, the changing housing needs of Saskatchewan people, and to make sure that we have the right housing in the right place. So that is part of basically our portfolio management strategy to ensure that we offer the right housing to people in the right locations.

So we do certainly recognize that the needs of Saskatchewan people where it relates to affordable housing and appropriate housing are changing. And our housing renewal strategy is designed to guide us to 2028 for that purpose.

Ms. A. Young: — And it's noted on page 278 that as of February 2020, SHA was using its 2019 projection report to determine which housing properties to keep and maintain or sell. Do you have any numbers in terms of how many housing units are sold or have been sold since then or are typically sold or projected for sale on a year-to-year basis? This chapter feels very timely with some of the things that we hear in the province.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you. Just one moment.

Ms. A. Young: — I don't want to make you folks scramble at the end of the day too. So if it's easier to get this, you know, in the future, I'm fine with that as well.

Ms. Kratzig: — Thank you for the question. Louise will give some context in terms of how decisions are made around disposition of properties, that type of thing. But I do have a number. One hundred and forty-seven properties have been sold since 2017. And then, Louise, you could give some context in terms of what that looks like and how those decisions are made.

Ms. Michaud: — So the way that those decisions were made is, when we identify units that have been sort of chronically vacant or where there's a community with very low demand for housing services, again what we do is we do consultations first with the municipal government, and then we identify whether the municipal government wishes to acquire the buildings that we've identified for sale.

We also speak to organizations in the community to see if there's an alternative use for those properties. So if we can actually partner with an organization to offer a service that might provide some supportive housing, we also look into . . . We try to do that. And then in the event where the properties are identified and, you know, as appropriate for sale, they're actually appraised by a third-party professional appraiser and then they're sold on the open market.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. I have one more question, kind of in the general area. And obviously this is fairly topical. There have been, you know, public concerns around some of the condition of affordable housing units in the province. And of course we had the one blow up here in Regina, which I know is not anybody's plan. But looking at the . . . The overall facilities condition index was increasing as of March 2020, up from 12.1 per cent in 2017 to 15.8 per cent in March of 2020. Do you have a current number for what that is?

Ms. Michaud: — Thank you. So yes, the facilities condition index unfortunately has increased. It currently sits at 17.1. But I would like to put some context around that basically to, you know . . . As of course we all do, our housing units have continued to age since that time.

But I think the other thing that's worth mentioning is that when we look at the facilities condition index, we also need to consider sort of what components make up the facilities condition index. And so you know, where we experience the sort of highest — I'm going to say deferred — maintenance liability costs, those relate to things like interiors of the building. So they might relate a lot to sort of the life expectancy of things like kitchen cabinets and flooring.

But where we are in better condition are things like the building envelope, the roofs of the building, the foundations of the building, the mechanicals of the building, and basically the things that contribute to life and safety and to providing people with basically a safe, warm, dry place to live. We're in better shape when you factor in just those elements.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Appreciating then . . . I guess maybe I'm just hoping you can expand on that.

[15:15]

And my background's in education. When we looked at like our facilities condition index, it was comprehensive, you know. It would take into account the boiler, the roof. Obviously we've got some old schools in the province. We've got some new schools in the province.

Can you help me understand then? If I'm hearing that the FCI [facility condition index] is maybe not the best way to evaluate how suitable a housing unit is for someone to live in it, what's a better way for the committee or for a member of the public watching at home to understand what potentially a poor condition means then? Does it just mean that it's got ugly cabinets?

Ms. Michaud: — That's a very fair question. And actually the facilities condition index really deals with, you know, when it's time, I guess when things are getting close to life expectancy. And so what we do is we do again focus on prioritizing the investments in, again as I said, sort of the building envelope.

Now in 2023 we anticipate spending about \$48.22 million on modernization and improvement in our facilities. And in addition to that, just on general day-to-day maintenance, we'll also be spending an additional \$25 million across the province. So I think I would say that, you know, each unit does need to be assessed sort of on its own for the family that's going into it.

We do look at . . . Like I said, the facilities condition index is how we . . . it's the tool we have to evaluate the condition and the eventual need to replace the entire portfolio. But we look at, you know, what are the things that we need to make sure that people have a safe, dry, warm place to live.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. So you know, again recognizing this chapter is really focused on ensuring that the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation has, you know, a long-term corporate maintenance plan and is reporting on that properly to the board and to senior officials, and obviously it does.

I guess what I'm trying to understand is if some of these measures, like the FCI, are continuing to increase. And there seems to be increased public concern from some residents as well as, you know, events happening that would indicate that perhaps some of the maintenance isn't happening as . . . I'm trying not to put value judgments on it, but there are some concerns that have been reported. I guess, is the feeling that the corporate maintenance plan is in fact actually maintaining the stock of affordable housing adequately in the medium and in the long term?

Ms. Michaud: — I think we do feel that in the medium and long term that it is maintaining. You know, we do feel confident that we have a plan to identify sort of which housing units might be, you know, better disposed of so that we can focus our resources on providing the housing in the areas where it's needed the most.

In response to sort of your questions and some concerns that are raised about the general maintenance of the units, one thing I would sort of outline is that, as the auditor has said, we have over 18,000 housing units. And we do have, you know, certainly situations where things happen that need to be addressed. And our housing authorities do try to work with clients as quickly as

possible to address maintenance issues as they arise. And certainly, you know, if it's questions of . . . if it's something that needs addressing right away, it gets addressed right away.

Ms. A. Young: — For sure, and I appreciate that good work. I've been waging war against mice all winter. They've eaten my dishwasher. I understand things happen.

Just picking up on one comment that you made in terms of the strategy looking at addressing, you know, which units may be better disposed of and which are kind of prioritized. Is it then an appropriate assumption that some of those units with . . . I'm not sure if it's a higher or lower, but in poor condition would be the units that are being considered for disposal then? You know, you're not going to maintain a unit that you're not necessarily using for . . .

Ms. Michaud: — The main consideration is whether there's a need for the units in the community. And so if the unit needs to, you know, have a significant investment and there's a need, then we'd look at making that investment. So the main consideration really is client need. And then when we prioritize units, what we look at is, is there somebody available or is there somebody able to rent that unit.

So you may . . . For example, if we have units that we don't have a lot of demand for, then this will also impact our FCI. We won't be repairing units right away where there's not a demand for those units, where there's no tenant waiting to rent it.

Ms. A. Young: — For sure, that makes sense. And for locations where there is a demand for units . . . You know, thinking of Regina obviously, there are some demands for affordable housing in this city currently. As the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation looks to maintain or make some of those investments in units where there are areas of higher demand, is there a time frame? I don't want to go back to wait-lists necessarily, but is there an expected turnaround time that the Housing Corp. uses kind of as a target to move units up to a level that's acceptable to meet the demand in the community?

Ms. Kratzig: — Yeah, I think that Louise will provide a lot more context on this but it really is an evolving issue in that in some of our larger centres, the vacancy rates might actually be quite high. So you know, is there demand? Why isn't there demand? And we're looking at all sorts of ways to partner with communities, etc., to ensure that people are able to utilize the housing stock that we do have.

Different issues might exist in rural Saskatchewan depending upon a whole range of things. Every community is different if you think of sort of where it's at and what its housing needs are.

So there are a lot of things that do go into play. It's not sort of a one-size-fits-all answer. It really is . . . And I know the housing team very much looks at each of the markets that it's in to make the best decisions on that market. So maybe, Louise, you can elaborate a little bit, for example, say in the Regina situation.

Ms. Michaud: — I'm happy to. I mean we all know, for example, that we have a high vacancy rate in Regina while we experience a demand for housing. And this is one of the things that is critical to our housing renewal strategy. It's about having

the right housing in the right locations to meet the needs of individuals.

What we experience in Regina in particular is there are certain core neighbourhoods where we do have housing stock available, but people with families choose not to live in those neighbourhoods. They may choose to actually wait or live in private-market housing and stay on a wait-list until something comes available in a neighbourhood of their choice. That may be for feelings of safety. It may be because they want to be closer to supports, with their families, etc.

The other thing that I'll say that's evolving a lot in housing is the need for supportive housing where, you know, the need for people to access appropriate housing is more than economic. For that, what some of the things that we do is we look to partner with agencies that offer supportive housing, so for example the recent partnership we've entered into with Phoenix Residential Society.

And what we've done there is we've been able to make 24 housing units that were chronically vacant available to an organization, not only to make them sort of units for people with economic challenges but people who just experience a number of other complexities. And they're able to be supported in those housing units.

So you know, it's truly a complicated situation where you appear to have demand and you appear to have supply and yet they don't appear to match. And you know, we are working very hard to look for more of those partnerships when we do identify units that we're looking to dispose of. The purpose for that is to reinvest in the portfolio where it's needed.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. That anticipated my next and I hope my last question on this. So what I heard was that, you know . . . Looking at the Regina example, I think what I heard is that the location of the housing supply within the community, people don't want to live where the houses are located is I think what I heard.

Ms. Michaud: — Yeah, that's part of it. Also the houses are not the right size for the families. So many of the housing units in Regina that we have available are for seniors. And so if we have, you know, people that have a large family . . . Even it was interesting because I remember when I first started working in the field in the '90s, we talked about housing units were too big; family sizes were down. These days we're finding that housing units are too small. We're seeing families and we're seeing demand for four- and five-, even six-bedroom houses. And typically we haven't built much more than three-bedroom houses since, you know, since these programs began.

Ms. A. Young: — So then how do you anticipate . . . With this long-term plan projecting out to 2028 as it relates to the maintenance of housing units, how do you anticipate addressing some of the changing nature of that demand? And more specifically, obviously in markets where there is a significant demand for affordable housing but the stock that's available, from what I'm hearing, doesn't match the needs of those seeking it. Is there going to be an investment in — I don't know — neighbourhoods deemed more desirable? Or are you looking to build four-, five-, six-bedroom houses?

Ms. Michaud: — So actually what we . . . Through the national housing strategy, which is a federal government initiative that also results in a bilateral agreement with the Saskatchewan government, we work with our federal partners to deliver three different programs, one being the Saskatchewan priorities program. And what we do with that program is every year the Housing Corporation puts out requests for expressions of interest for organizations to, you know, propose building new housing developments or rental housing developments. We do focus that on people who have difficulty obtaining housing. And so that's one way in which we invest.

Another piece that's also very helpful is that . . . Sometimes finding people appropriate and affordable housing isn't necessarily within SHC's [Saskatchewan Housing Corporation] housing stock. An important program that we also have co-developed with the federal government and we co-deliver is the national housing benefit. So that program offers affordability supports for people who pay rent in the private market and who pay more than 35 per cent of their income on rent. So they're able to access a flat-rate benefit depending on their family size in order to improve housing affordability in that way.

So we are, you know, sort of part of the answer through social housing, but also in working with our federal partners we're able to deliver on a couple of other programs that also help people find housing affordability.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. MLA [Member of the Legislative Assembly] Harrison just reminded me I've lied about my last question, so this will actually be just to reiterate what I thought I heard. This is . . .

A Member: — I'm expecting five more.

Ms. A. Young: — No. It's largely the federal programs that you anticipate addressing the changing need for affordable housing in markets like Regina, where there is a higher demand?

Ms. Michaud: — I just want to be clear, when you mention the federal programs that they are actually co-owned. They're 50/50 federal and provincial partnerships.

The other things that we're doing too is we are looking to use our housing stock differently wherever possible. So for example, in Regina we've begun a pilot project where instead of doing an assessment for people based on their income to determine their rent, we've actually made it possible for people to access our housing units as roommates in some situations, or as extended families if that's how they choose to live together. So over the past year we did pilot, you know, 10 units in this way, and that's proven to be very successful.

[15:30]

So I think I would say that while we do depend on, you know, we do look towards the federal housing partnerships that we have, we also try to align our services very closely with the services that are offered by, you know, our CBO [community-based organization] partners and we look even within the housing stock that we do have. We're very focused on finding different ways to deliver our programs and services so that more people can access them.

I'll also mention we have, for example, introduced two new streams to the Saskatchewan housing benefit so that we can focus on people who need supports to remain successfully housed. So this will really help people who need, you know, sort of more than affordability, but who might need to access supportive housing through a CBO. And that is one of the groups that's targeted in this stream, and we also have a stream for people who are seeking safety from domestic violence. And that's another way that we offer people the opportunity to, you know, to access affordable housing, either in the housing, you know, like they can either work through CBOs or they can access private-market housing.

So it's important to note I think that while our social housing is an important solution, we also — and we're constantly looking to improve how we deliver those programs — we also have other programs that support the same goals, which is to help people be, you know, stably, successfully, and safely housed.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you.

The Chair: — Do you have any further questions from members on this chapter? Not seeing any, I'd welcome a motion to conclude consideration of chapter 30. Moved by Mr. Fiaz. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. We'll move along to chapter 24, and I'll turn it over to the Provincial Auditor.

Mr. Wandy: — Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through its social housing rental program, the Saskatchewan Housing Corporation uses various local housing authorities in over 300 communities across the province to place eligible clients in over 18,000 rental units. This program is to provide safe, quality housing at affordable rents to households where income is too low to obtain accommodations in the private market.

Chapter 24 of our 2021 report volume 1, on pages 261 to 265, reports the results of our first follow-up of the corporation's actions on four recommendations we made in our 2017 audit about providing adequate social housing to eligible clients.

By November 2020, we found the corporation implemented all four recommendations. We found housing authorities consistently followed the corporation's policies and procedures to calculate point scores prior to placing clients in suitable rental units. Those policies expect authorities to determine eligibility and priority for social housing placement based on a client's assessed needs, that is by calculating point scores for each client.

While our testing found some inconsistencies between the point scores in the corporation's database and those kept by the housing authorities, we found the inconsistencies did not affect the prioritization or placement of applicants in rental units. We also found housing authorities retained sufficient documentation to show they placed clients in rental units based on greatest need. For example, they would have had the highest point score.

In addition the corporation set timelines for housing authorities to assess client applications and notify applicants of decisions regarding program eligibility. The corporation set the

notification time frame at 20 days after receiving client applications. Where the 20-day time frame was not met, we found housing authorities contacted applicants regularly about the status of their applications.

These improvements should help ensure housing authorities place eligible applicants in suitable homes within reasonable time frames and applicants do not live in housing not meeting their needs for longer than necessary.

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

The Chair: — Thanks for the focus of the chapter and the recommendations. Thanks for the status update and actions taken on this front. Any brief comments, Deputy Minister?

Ms. Kratzig: — Yeah, thank you. I would just say that the ministry notes that the auditor does consider all the recommendations in this chapter fully implemented. Thank you.

The Chair: — Questions from committee members? Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — I honestly just have one. In looking at the point scores that are used and hearing some of the discussion earlier around perhaps changing dynamics between client needs and the availability in the market, how often is the point system itself, you know, reviewed to ensure that it's like accurately capturing the needs or complexity of the clients who are seeking housing? And is that done regularly on a scheduled basis, or is that just kind of as needed?

Ms. Kratzig: — We'll just have a quick discussion.

Thank you for the question. Before I ask Louise to respond to that, I do want to put a correction on the record. Earlier I mentioned that 147 units have been sold since 2017. I have a new number that was provided to me, a bit of a math error probably on my part. It's 399 units. So I just wanted that corrected on the record. Thank you. And Louise will respond to your question about how we assess individuals for social housing.

Ms. Michaud: — Thank you. And I believe your question was how often do we review the policy or the point-scoring method, and that's something that we don't actually have a specific timeline for how that's reviewed. It's something that is — again I'll use one of your terms from before — it's evergreen. It's something that we look at, as you know, as we identify if there are concerns, then it's always available to be looked at.

The Chair: — Any further questions? I'm not seeing any. Just to identify too for anyone that's watching, I know our ratings are high this afternoon. This is sort of the way it's supposed to work, right. So you have the auditors recommendations and chapter, you have the engagement with the ministry, you have implementation that's occurred, and then you have the follow-up process that confirms that and comes back to the committee. So thanks to everyone that's been involved in that work and for being here today.

With respect to chapter 24, I'd look for a motion that we conclude consideration. Mr. Fiaz moves. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That is carried. That concludes our business on the agenda here for the day. I want to thank Deputy Minister Kratzig and all the officials that are here today and all the other officials that are involved in this important work, the work connected to the chapters today, but the important work day to day as well. So thank you very much, Deputy Minister. Any final questions or comments, sorry, or questions for us?

Ms. Kratzig: — Just thank you very much to the committee for your time. Thank you.

The Chair: — Okay. Thank you very much. I would welcome a motion of adjournment. Moved by Mr. Grewal. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — That's carried. This committee stands adjourned to the call of the Chair.

[The committee adjourned at 15:39.]