

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY



Speaker: Hon. Francis (Buck) Watts

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Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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LOCATION: LEGISLATIVE CHAMBER, HON. GEORGE COLES BUILDING, CHARLOTTETOWN

SUBJECT: WORK PLAN

COMMITTEE:

Bradley Trivers, MLA Rustico-Emerald [Chair]
Hannah Bell, MLA Charlottetown-Parkdale
Kathleen Casey, MLA Charlottetown-Lewis Point
Darlene Compton, MLA Belfast-Murray River
Alan McIsaac, MLA Vernon River-Stratford
Hal Perry, MLA Tignish-Palmer Road
Allen Roach, MLA Montague-Kilmuir [Vice-chair]

COMMITTEE MEMBERS ABSENT:

none

MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE:

none

GUESTS:

none

STAFF:

Ryan Reddin, Clerk Assistant (Research and Committees)

The Committee met at 10:00 a.m.

Chair (Trivers): Folks, I'd just like to call this meeting of the Public Accounts Standing Committee to order. Welcome everyone in the gallery; great to see you here. Welcome the press; good to see you here as well.

Reminding everybody watching from home that you can come into the gallery and watch these meetings. Although you can't participate directly it might be a great experience for you.

It's good to meet. I think today's meeting will be primarily to consider our work plan, but our first order of business – oh, and one other thank you. I want to thank Ryan Reddin for all the work he's done to help prepare for this meeting (Indistinct)

First order of business is nomination and election of the vice-chair, the vacant seat beside me here. I'll open the floor to nominations.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Chair?

Chair: Yes.

Mr. McIsaac: I'll nominate Allen Roach.

Chair: Allen Roach's name has been brought forward.

Any further nominations?

Chair: All right.

All in favour of Allen Roach being the vice-chair?

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: Anyone against?

Any other discussion on the issue?

All right, I'd like to welcome Allen Roach as the new vice-chair of the Public Accounts.

Mr. Roach: Thank you.

Chair: I believe you can come and sit up here next to me if you like. You don't have to.

Mr. Roach: Whatever is the practice.

Chair: That's the normal practice.

Mr. Roach: Okay.

Chair: Although we're now meeting here in the Legislative Assembly, so it's a little bit new for everybody, I'd say, right now.

Welcome.

Mr. Roach: (Indistinct)

Chair: There you go; great to have you here.

Anybody like to move that the agenda be adopted.

Mr. Perry: So moved.

Chair: Hal Perry has moved.

I don't believe we need to have a vote on that so the agenda is adopted.

The first item on the agenda is the consideration of the committee's work plan. I'd like to open the floor for anyone that would like to bring forward a motion for items to put on the work plan.

Darlene Compton.

Ms. Compton: I'll start with (Indistinct) a few, but I'll start with a motion requesting a briefing on IIDI identities and legislative budgetary accountability frameworks around what they do and where the loans are, just basically, the framework around IIDI.

Chair: So, IIDI. Any discussion on this motion?

Mr. McIsaac: I'd like to see us go through the blue books; I think that's pretty important. I put that high on our agenda myself. I'd like to also look at the idea of internal trade too, the trade between the provinces. I mean it's been brought up in the House a few times and we'll have a little discussion on that.

Chair: Thank you for that.

So, there's two items and –

Mr. Roach: There's another here.

Chair: Yes.

Ms. Casey: Mr. Chair, the Auditor General did a section in her report last term on housing and I would propose that we ask her to do that again, just the state of what the housing stock is.

Chair: Sort of an update on the housing situation –

Ms. Casey: Yes.

Chair: – based on hopefully recent improvements.

Ms. Casey: Thanks.

Chair: Okay, great.

Hannah Bell.

Ms. Bell: I'd like to bring a motion regarding contracting of legal services.

Chair: Contracting of legal services. We're getting a big list here but I was hoping we would discuss one at a time but we'll ahead with this method.

Darlene Compton.

Ms. Compton: A letter to the Treasury Board Secretariat about requesting a briefing on current initiatives to adopt and expand open data practice. We've talked about open data and what we need to look at as government and how we use that.

Ms. Bell: I also have that on my list as well. I'd like to support that one, in particular.

Chair: Now, Mr. Clerk, are you getting these down? I mean, I was hoping to do them in the form of motions as well. But it's great to get the main points out anyhow right now just so we can have a discussion on priorities, probably, as well.

Ms. Compton: Chair, should we discuss each one as far as who we would like to talk to and who we'd like to see present to

committee, or how we're going to frame each of the requests? Do you want to do that or make the list first?

Chair: I think what I'd like to do since we're off on this tangent anyhow, on this method, is make the list ahead and then we'll discuss the priority and then we can discuss the specifics of how we'll pursue it.

Are you up to that vice-chair?

Mr. Roach: Absolutely.

Chair: Great.

Ms. Bell: I'd like to add one more to that list; that would be performance reporting –

Chair: Performance reporting.

Ms. Bell: – which connects to open data which was –

Chair: Anybody else?

Mr. McIsaac: Chair, I'll move then if you want to make the motion that we deal with the blue books.

Chair: Yeah, I wanted to add one item to the list and that's: what area is sort of responsible for overall client service with the government and then tracking and measuring client service. Like requests that are coming. I'm not sure if there is one single area that does or if every department looks after their own. Just wanted to see, because there's potentially an opportunity, again, when you talk about performance reporting and open data of tracking all the requests that come in, how long they've been open, tagging them. I want to know if maybe we already have an initiative to do that sort of thing. That was one I wanted to add to the list as well.

Ms. Compton: Also an update on RIM and records management and where we are with that. We discussed it before and if we could reach out to provincial archive staff to see if they could give us an update on where we are with records management.

Chair: Any others just before we move on?

Mr. Roach: It's a big list.

Chair: It is a big list, yes.

Ms. Casey: Chair, just to follow up on Darlene Compton's just recent request.

I thought that was a fascinating presentation by the records management team. I look forward to their next presentation. It was a keen presentation.

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct) openness, you know, MLA's.

Chair, another one which has been brought to me by members in my district; how we charge for lottery fees as a province and how we're taking a percentage now with Chase the Ace and the Deuce is Loose and how we're taking a percentage of what the earnings are, versus a flat fee. That's been brought up to me; why we do one or the other, or how that actually all works. It's not just – you don't just go to apply for a license and pay a fee, you also, depending on the earnings of the Deuce of the Loose, you pay a percentage of those earnings to the province. Just an update, maybe, how that all – the decision behind that and how it works. Anyway, it was brought up to me by a constituent a couple of times.

Chair: That's one area that's of concern to me as well, thank you.

Another one that I wanted to add to the list was basically looking at the software licenses that the province procures and I sort of – the future plan for the various types of licenses as technology changes. For example, WordPerfect at one time was the de facto standard for Word Processing, then it's the Microsoft Word. And now we're looking at, for example, Kyle Computing is becoming more and more of a standard and potential cost-savings, so I'd be interested to have someone talk about software licensing and what the plans are for the future.

We've got a great list here.

Mr. McIsaac, you had mentioned you'd like the blue books to be a priority. Maybe you'd like to just talk a little bit more about that.

Mr. McIsaac: Sure and I'd put it in the way of a motion as well, but I think that's likely one of the highest priorities of this committee in Public Accounts, is that we look at our books.

We have our budget in the spring and the blue books come out in the fall and the Auditor General goes through those and looks at – keys on certain departments at one time or another. I think that first and foremost is where we should look and put our emphasis to make sure that we're quite aware of where the dollars are spent and how they are spent.

To me, that seems to be like what should be the highest priority and I move a motion in that regard.

Chair: I mean, the blue books, I would tend to agree. I mean the budget is an estimate; the blue books are the actuals and that's really what happened. It's great to see that; maybe we're balancing budgets and the blue books will tell the tale.

Mr. McIsaac: That's the idea.

Chair: Before we make any motions, per se, what I'd like to do is go through and if people have questions about – maybe we'll read the list and then if the people have questions about any of the individual topics that have been brought up, we can discuss them. Then after that, what I'd like to do is set the priorities. You said you'd like blue books number one. Then once we've set the priorities what I'd like to do is go through and make a motion, so specifically, the action we want to take and whether we're bringing people in, whether we're writing a letter, that sort of thing.

Mr. McIsaac: (Indistinct) on the floor, that that is the priority, first priority.

Chair: What I'd like to do is in discussion to that motion; we'll talk about all the other priorities.

Mr. Roach: So I'd like to talk about what I'd like to see as priority; and that's internal trade. I think in particular at this time when we look what's taking place with trade back and forth to the US, NAFTA, I think it's important for us to understand our own internal trade as well as we can and any affects that may have.

I think we look at what's taking place now between British Columbia and Alberta, that's very disconcerting in terms of internal trade. I think it's something that we, in this

province, need to watch extremely carefully. There's a lot of items that could be up – it's not necessarily wine and moving oil, but the impact of some of our internal trade between us and other provinces if something suddenly happened, we have major product from Prince Edward Island that's not moving, I think there's people I'd like to see come here who have worked on internal trade for many many years. I think we need to have a really clear understanding of the impacts that could have on our province; financially it could be crippling.

I think when you look at – was it 90, 94% of the wine, Canadian wine sold in Alberta is from British Columbia – the impact that could have if that trade –

I think it's really important for us to have a good grasp on internal trade and to have experts come here who can – from within government – who can talk about that.

Mr. McIsaac: I fully agree with that because I think that should be the next priority for sure.

(Indistinct) misunderstanding some of the internal trade agreements that we have; it's been brought up in the House several times. But like Mr. Roach has said, trade is one of the biggest issues right now. We're in the NAFTA talks. We just completed the CETA ones, the TPP; even though the United States backed out of that we still have a TPP going forward, possibly with 11 provinces. Let's note the TPP was (Indistinct), CETA is pretty well finished and we've got that sorted out but TPP now, with the States dropping out, we dropped from 12 to 11 countries that are dealing with that.

But the big issue still, is we don't understand ourselves all the (Indistinct) of internal trade. They've just had big discussions among the provinces with regards to that and a lot of issues being dealt with there. Like I say, questions have come up on the floor of the Legislature; a lot of misunderstanding about that, so let's get some people in and straighten out the facts on that whole thing and see why we can or cannot trade internally on some commodities.

Chair: Great. Any other comments on that?

I would then like to speak to – I'll read the items that are on the list: obviously blue books; internal trade between provinces; there was the request for IIDI to come in to talk about information that's not necessarily available right now through our general accounting and audit reviews; there was looking at the AG report on housing and update on it based on any recent developments; there was contracting of legal services and any information surrounding that; open data practices and I guess it would be the status of what's going on with open data in the province, where we're moving, what the plans are; there was performance reporting, so this is looking at any initiatives that are happening in the province or just services that are offered and how you evaluate the performance of those services, key performance indicators, that sort of thing I assume.

Then there was request tracking. So this is: How do we track requests coming in to the various departments, is there a central place to do that and how do you measure client service kind of related to that performance reporting as well? Then there was the RIM, records management, an update on that based on the recommendations that were made.

Then there were the lottery fees and the percentage of the amount that is taken in as a license fee versus a flat fee and that sort of thing, or just the approach to that.

Then there was talking about software licensing and where we're going with that and how we migrate from one piece of software that's serving an area to another, and what the plans are there.

That said, we've talked about blue books and trade between provinces. Are there any other topics?

Kathleen Casey.

Ms. Casey: Sorry, Mr. Chair.

It's not another topic, but I would make a motion that we put housing as our next priority. It's a hot topic these days with regards to the federal housing strategy and an upcoming provincial housing strategy, and we've talked about accessibility standards.

I did notice that there was a letter on our desk today; a letter that was sent to the hon. Tina Mundy, Minister of Family and Human Services, with regards to accessibility with the new housing stock that's coming up. I would like to continue our conversation to make sure that people who need affordable and accessible housing actually have that.

I'm talking about accessibility standards, what the waitlists are, and how often is the rent ceiling increased? Rents are going up, but monies that are given to people who need affordable housing hasn't necessarily increased with the rent. There are lots of questions I have around housing and I would hope that that would be a priority of this committee.

Chair: Thank you, and as opposed – we already have a motion on the floor. This is all discussion about blue books as the number one priority, but bringing up your case for the housing update as a priority –

Ms. Casey: Has the question been called?

Chair: No.

As part of discussion on this motion, I want to talk about the priorities of the other items. Then, we can move forward and vote on the blue books and then we can hopefully have the other priorities already set in our minds.

Ms. Casey: Okay.

Ms. Bell: Chair?

Chair: Yes.

Ms. Bell: To that end, speaking about the importance of the blue books, and I absolutely agree with that, but I would also argue that performance reporting and client services, those two things together, are another part of that story about not only, how are we following up on the expenditures and the budget commitments, but what is the impact of those expenditures and impact?

When we talk about – you mentioned tracking client services and tracking those requests and then being able to report on how effective they were. Were those expenditures that we made impactful? That's the piece that we're missing right

now, and so it may also connect even to open data, but certainly the performance reporting and client service piece is another part of the story in terms of managing our fiscal envelope and ensuring that we are actually getting value for taxpayer funds.

If we could bring that, potentially, as another priority – and I do see those two things potentially being connected and then as much of a priority as looking just at the numbers, but looking at the stories that go with those numbers. That would be the performance reporting and, potentially, our client service and request tracking.

Chair: Would you see those as higher priorities than looking at the blue books or in (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: No. I see them as complementary.

Chair: Complementary? Okay. Perhaps, in the details of who we call in we could ask them to talk about blue books –

Ms. Bell: That's right.

Chair: – along with performance reporting.

Ms. Bell: And perhaps look for recommendations in terms of, sort of, how we can fill in some of that information that we gather and report on so that we get a more rounded set of information to make more effective decisions.

Chair: Thanks for that feedback as we consider our approach, for sure.

Darlene Compton.

Ms. Compton: Just a bit of housekeeping.

I know in the fall sitting, we tabled our report about the AG's 2015 report and how some of the departments were still outstanding with their action plans and recommendations that she had made. I'm just wondering if we could send letters to the departments that have outstanding reports and to find out where they're at, the reason for the delay, and how they're going to move forward.

If we're going to have the AG in and get her to report, we should follow up on the

recommendations and why those departments are not –

Chair: Vice-chair, did you have a –

Mr. Roach: I think that on the any outstanding; I think each department is required to report anything outstanding to the AG. I would just recommend that when we call the AG, that we advise the AG that we're also going to be asking her for updates because I don't want to take her – start stepping on the role of the AG. That is her role, and I know that departments do send her updates on anything that's outstanding.

I'm just suggesting that that may be the appropriate way, and to bring it in when the AG is here with the blue books.

Chair: Darlene Compton.

Ms. Compton: We can go through the AG if that's the way you want to do it, but it would just be good to know that the recommendations she's making are being followed through. We found out over and over again in committee that that's not necessarily the case.

Mr. Roach: But, I guess what I'm saying is the requirement is there. When the AG sends a report to each department, if there's anything outstanding they're required – they have a diary date where they have to respond to the AG and tell the AG: This is where we're at. We've finished the last two. We're waiting for information on this.

But, I think it's appropriate – it's more appropriate because that belongs to the AG, to ask the AG for it. That's her job.

Ms. Compton: Fair enough.

I don't care who we go to, but it would be good to get an update and do we have to wait til the next time the AG reports on the next AG report? We're talking about 2015. Just to get an update.

Chair: I wanted to interject.

In terms of setting priorities here, if there are cases where the action we want to take is sending letters, I'm thinking maybe, perhaps, that can happen in conjunction with whatever priorities we set. I'd like to put the

requests for actions where we're sending the letters for updates on sort of a different list than the ones where we're actually getting presenters in because I think that can happen in conjunction and am I correct in saying that?

Clerk Assistant: Sure, whatever the committee decides it wants to do. It should decide if it wants to bring someone in or decide if it wants to send a letter.

Chair: Yes.

Mr. Roach: But, I guess, and I'll go back Chair.

The owner of those recommendations is the Auditor General and I just feel it would be appropriate if we were going to send a letter, send the letter to the AG. That's all I'm saying. She's the owner of it.

Ms. Compton: That's what I agreed upon. I don't care where the letter goes; it's just to – an update on it.

Mr. Roach: Then, if the letter says: We're going to be calling you for the blue books, could you bring that information with you when you come? That's all – I just wanted to point that out.

Chair: Thank you.

Just to continue along with our discussion on priorities, with the motion, the blue books being the number one priority, are there any other topics that people want to speak to at this point?

What I'll do is call for a vote on the motion that blue books and some sort of action on the work plan be put there for review and blue books be the number one priority.

All in favour, just please say 'aye.'

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against, please say 'nay.'

That motion is carried and we'll have blue books as our number one priority.

Now, in the discussion on blue books it came up that performance reporting and potentially even going into open data

practices be part of the action plan related to blue books. So, why don't we look at putting forward an exact motion on the actions we want to take as part of our work plan surrounding to looking at the blue books?

Are there particular presenters that we bring in? Are there letters we need to send; these sorts of things.

Mr. McIsaac, since you've been advocating for the number one priority, it was your item, would you like to make some suggestions.

Mr. McIsaac: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to see the Auditor General come in and do a review. We have no idea what may come up out of that. There may be these topics, there may be other topics come up as well that we may want to search afterwards. I'd like to go through the blue books, see exactly what they do say.

It always comes up: Yeah, you put through a budget and you're promoting a positive piece on this, but, the blue books actually tell the tale. I thought we would focus on that. From that, I think a lot of these topics may get covered indirectly. At that point, we may decide; hey yeah, because of that topic coming up, we'll write a letter and invite so and so to come to the committee. It's hard to know that at the present time, but I think we should start with the Auditor General, see where that goes. There could be a dozen people we want to come in after that that are spinoffs from that.

Some of these others thing that we've discussed already may get put in place. There may be more added to it. But, generally what I was thinking of was get the Auditor General in, have a good look at the blue books so we all understand what the situation is and the government is held to account because of those blue books and the Auditor General's report.

To me, that's first and foremost what we should do.

Chair: Vice-chair?

Mr. Roach: I think with that, and I'll go back to what Hannah Bell had said earlier

when she was talking about the value for the dollar – that maybe a good starting point is with the AG and her bluebook report. That financial audit, which is the final of it, I think that would be a great – because I know that that department does do value-for-dollar audits and the value of what you're getting. I know that she has done that in the past.

Chair: Just to be clear, are you saying we have the AG present a report on the blue books? Or we just have her in, we run through the blue books section by section, line by line, whatever we deem appropriate, and then if we have any questions we can ask her? Is that –

Mr. McIsaac: That's right.

From that, we may draw other people that we want to have in as follow-up.

Chair: Okay.

Mr. McIsaac: We may find something in agriculture, hey, that we want a little explanation on. Could be the AIT, that might spin off from that as well, but we'll see.

We're going to open up a lot of things I think here when you look at it. A lot of these topics that we've talked about already may actually go right back to that. We may find some others as well, but I think to have the Auditor General in and go through it and get our questions answered and understand that piece first, from that we can build upon what the rest of our agenda may want to be or need to be for the committee.

Chair: That sounds like a reasonable approach to me; any discussion on that approach?

Would you mind putting that forward, Mr. McIsaac, in the form of a motion? I know our clerk's very good at coming up with the exact plans, but it'd be nice, I think, just for the committee as a whole, just to –

Mr. McIsaac: Well, I move that we have the Auditor General in to do a complete review of the blue books, put that as our first priority, and that's my motion, knowing that there will be other topics come out of that discussion and other topics here that may be related that we will build upon for the rest of

our workload; but the motion is basically have the Auditor General in, do a complete review of the blue books.

Chair: Another question I have on that was –

Some hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Chair: – how far back do you want to go with the blue books? Where did you want to start? Just start with the last available set, or do you want to go back –

Mr. Roach: Just the last set that came in the fall.

Mr. McIsaac: Yep.

Chair: And just to be clear again, the Auditor General's not going to be required to do additional work other than show up and answer questions and be well-versed (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: (Indistinct)

Mr. McIsaac: We may not get through it all in one meeting.

Chair: No, no.

Mr. McIsaac: We may send her back with our stuff, but first off, let's have her in, start the process and build upon from there.

Chair: But you're not expecting her to identify any areas of interest or anything like that. It's just here are the blue books, you guys go through, ask questions.

Mr. McIsaac: That's exactly right.

Chair: Okay, I just wanted to be clear.

One thing I found in the past at various committees is sometimes it's not entirely clear what the action is on the work plan. That's one thing I wanted to bring was that we really nail down exactly what it is we want to do so that it's clear to the presenters coming in and whoever may be coming in.

Okay, so all in favour – I don't know, does everybody have an understanding of the motion? Would you like to –

Mr. Roach: No, I would just ask that –

Chair: Yes.

Mr. Roach: – if anybody else has anyone they would like to bring in with respect to the Auditor General's report. I don't –

Mr. McIsaac: I think we've built (Indistinct) –

Mr. Roach: Alan McIsaac said that but –

Some hon. Members: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: Yeah.

An hon. Member: Yeah.

Chair: Yes.

Mr. Roach: Okay, all right, I'm good with it.

Chair: Yeah, I think as we move forward reviewing the blue books, like –

Mr. Roach: All right.

Chair: – like Alan said –

Ms. Casey: I'll call the question on the motion.

Chair: All right, question.

All in favour, say 'aye.'

Some hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against?

Very good.

Mr. Roach: Okay, I'll make the motion as I did with internal trade.

Chair: Great.

Mr. Roach: Would that be the second priority, and rather than go through everything I said before that Alan said, I'll let that stand and we can go with questions from there perhaps or –

Chair: All right.

Mr. Roach: – or observations.

Chair: Any discussion on the motion that internal trade between provinces be the second priority?

Ms. Compton: Who –

Chair: Darlene?

Ms. Compton: – are you anticipating bringing in to speak to us on internal trade?

Mr. Roach: Well, I think that there's a – I guess, do we go with that as part of the motion, or do we discuss that?

Chair: We'll put a –

Ms. Compton: (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: I would recommend – I know that there's an individual who's been working on that internal trade file for probably eight years, and that same individual has been on the trade file for CETA. That same individual's on the trade file for TPP, so we have somebody who has a wealth of knowledge and the person is in economic development, Kal Whitnell.

Chair: Yeah.

Mr. Roach: I know he's very knowledgeable. That's his job is to kind of represent the province at some of the earlier meetings. Of course, the ministers would be there for the meetings, but certainly I think he would be the one to start the questions with, and then we could, possibly after that, depending what he says, then we could get somebody from our procurement services that would then come in to talk directly about when they procure stuff and when stuff goes out of the province; and the rules around all of that, I think that's important.

Chair: All right. All in favour of having internal trade between provinces as the second priority, say 'aye.'

Some hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against, say 'nay'.

All right.

Ms. Casey: Mr. Chair, I think I was third on that list for housing –

Chair: Yes, yes.

Ms. Casey: – so I would make that recommendation that our third priority be housing, and invite the Minister of Family and Human Services and whoever she might deem their expert on housing from their department to come in and talk to us and give us an update on the housing file for the province with regards to wait lists, how often the rent ceiling is increased, accessibility standards, and just maybe where the provincial housing strategy stands in lieu of the announcement of the federal housing strategy and the money that's coming down federally for affordable and accessible housing.

Chair: Any discussion?

Hannah Bell.

Ms. Bell: (Indistinct) there's a lot of community discussion happening around this as well, and it would be interesting to consider bringing in somebody who's from outside the government spectrum. I know there's a forum happening this week that's being hosted by the City of Charlottetown around the needs for affordable housing within the municipality.

I'm not quite sure right now who that may be, but I'd like just to sort of – it would be good to get a position from external and maybe perhaps more of a client-centered focus rather than a government-centered focus, so that would be something that I'd like to see us do, considering as we consider who we call for witnesses.

Ms. Casey: I totally agree with that.

Chair: All right.

So, any further discussion that we set that as our third priority?

Ms. Casey: I'll call the question on the motion.

Chair: All in favour, say 'aye.'

Some hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against, say 'nay'.

Carried.

Now, before we move on – yes, sorry.

Clerk Assistant: I just need some verification. So we're inviting the minister and external (Indistinct) –

Chair: Well, what I'd like to do is go back to our second priority, and just make sure we've nailed down exactly what action we're taking. I mean, we were talking about the priority, now let's talk about the action for internal trade between provinces.

You'd mentioned bringing in Kal Whitnell, who's been working at economic development for a number of years. Would you like to put that forward as an actual motion so that we all agree, the clerk is very clear, everybody knows –

Mr. Roach: That Kal Whitnell be brought in?

Chair: Yes, exactly what action we're going to take on our work plan to examine internal trade between provinces.

Mr. Roach: Sure, then I put the motion forward that Kal Whitnell be brought in because of his expertise and the length of time that he's been involved, in, not only internal trade, but external trade, and for us to delve into the intricacies of internal trade, what we can do, what we cannot do, why sometimes we're cornered in products that have to go across Atlantic Canada or across Canada in terms of trade and those sorts of things.

Chair: Okay, thank you.

Mr. Roach: Yeah.

Chair: All right. Any discussion on this motion? Is that the action we'd like to take then?

All in favour of this motion, say 'aye.'

Some hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against, say 'nay'.

Thank you.

Now moving on to our third priority, which we decided on was the report on housing. Can you just summarize again, exactly what

action you want to see taken on the work plan?

Ms. Casey: Sure.

Chair: As a motion.

Ms. Casey: Mr. Chair, I would move that we invite the Minister of Family and Human Services and whoever she deems appropriate to come with her. As well, as somebody to be determined from the community to talk about, as Hannah Bell had suggested, somebody from the community that we'll deem, we'll figure out who that's going to be, to come in and present as well to the committee on housing.

Chair: Any discussion on the motion?

Mr. McIsaac: I have a question.

Chair: Yes, Alan McIsaac.

Mr. McIsaac: We're talking about the first meeting of each of those. We're having the Auditor General in, we're having Kal Whitnell in, we're having someone from –

Ms. Casey: (Indistinct)

Mr. McIsaac: – the department minister's office. Do they not spin off later? We already talked about if we have the Auditor General in we may want to come back from something like this. The same thing we have Kal Whitnell in. We may want to have somebody from agriculture in. We may want to have somebody from trade in, whatever; and the third motion on housing. I could see us having in perhaps somebody from the feds, somebody from the community, like that.

Are we looking for motions just to get each of these prioritized and a starting speaker? Or, are we trying to delve out more than we actually want to at this point?

Chair: What I'd like to see is we have a very clear work plan and actions that the clerk knows need to be taken, so that we can move forward. And in the future, if we're reviewing the blue books and want to have in further presenters, I would see that as an addition to the work plan through another motion and another clear action to the clerk.

It's just one of the things that I've noticed in the past, is sometimes we create work plans and they're sort of loose in nature and then we meet again to discuss the work plan on another time when we already have a work plan on the floor. I think this will give us clear direction going forward and we'll know, and the clerk will know and the committee will know, exactly what we're trying to pursue.

Ms. Compton: It's also about scheduling too. Is the AG going to be available? Then okay, if she can't come right away then what's next on the list? So that we have a clear and concise okay, where do we go now?

Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Bell: Mr. Chair, I think I was next on your list.

Chair: Yes, I believe so. We voted on that motion?

Ms. Bell: No.

Chair: I think we need to vote on the motion then –

Ms. Casey: On the housing motion.

Chair: The housing motion.

All in favour, say 'aye.'

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against, 'nay.'

All right, Hannah Bell.

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

The motion for this case would be where performance reporting refers to a system of planning and reporting oriented towards achieving outcomes and it is recognized as an important element of sound fiscal management, as well as public accountability and transparency. Effective planning, open government, good governance; that I would move that the committee explore the potential benefits of performance reporting and the possibility of including performance reporting in future fiscal planning.

I would also ask that we consider calling Robert Hughes who is the CAO of the town of Stratford who has implemented a results-based budgeting and performance measurement process to share his experiences over the last few years of implementing that process with the committee.

Chair: Just to be clear, your motion is that our fourth priority be looking at performance reporting, as you stated, and maybe we'll just vote on that as the priority first.

Ms. Bell: Sure.

Chair: Then you can make a motion on the exact actions you would like to see taken on the work plan.

Ms. Bell: Okay.

Chair: That's the way I like to do things. I know – that Mr. Perry, I don't know if you have any comments to add. You're shaking your head over there a little bit.

Mr. Perry: Nope.

Chair: Okay, great.

All in favour that this be the – yes, someone to speak to the motion.

Mr. Roach: In terms of the performance reporting, at what level are you talking about?

Ms. Bell: Well I mean that would be, I think, determined by our discussions but that there are many different levels of performance reporting and obviously at this point, I think it's for us to have an idea about what value that could bring to our fiscal management processes and to the commitment for open governance and open government and transparency.

I think it also connects to some of the things that Brad had raised regarding client service, for example, but in the same way that we're going into the detail with the blue books, we've got something in front of us. With performance reporting we don't, so we need to have conversations about what could that look like –

Mr. Roach: About where that accountability lies.

Ms. Bell: Exactly.

Mr. Roach: At what level.

Ms. Bell: Exactly, yeah.

Mr. Roach: That was really my question.

Ms. Bell: And often when you're bringing in something new, then I think we need to start right at the beginning.

Mr. Roach: Great.

Chair: Any other discussion on this motion?

All in favour that performance reporting, as indicated by Hannah Bell, be the fourth priority, say 'aye.'

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against, say 'nay.'

Motion carried.

Now, would you like to put forward your motion on the action to take place?

Ms. Bell: Okay, so my recommended is that we start by calling, as I mentioned, Robert Hughes, CAO of the town of Stratford, to present the process that they have implemented and how that reflects, and at what level, for performance-based budgeting and reporting. As I said, he will be able to share their experiences.

Obviously it's on a municipal basis, but it is still something that kind of gives us an idea or starting point to have that informed conversation.

Chair: Any discussion on the motion?

All in favour, say 'aye.'

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against, 'nay.'

Ms. Bell: Thank you.

Chair: Thank you.

We do have four priorities set and as I mentioned earlier, I want to make sure that on the work plan, and as mentioned by Darlene Compton, if for example we have trouble scheduling our first priority we can move to the second priority. If we have trouble scheduling our second, we can move to our third and fourth et cetera.

I think probably those four priorities will give us enough at this time. Did anyone want to put forward another topic as a fifth priority just in case or are we – yes.

Darlene Compton.

Ms. Compton: I'd like it to be IIDI to come in to report to us about – because a lot of times it's outside of budget estimates. We don't really know the operating. We're talking about high-risk loans. They're involved now with immigration. They also own assets now for the province and so just if we could get someone in from IIDI; I would like that to be fifth on the list (Indistinct)

Chair: Thanks.

We have a motion on the floor then that IIDI be fifth on the list in priorities to have them in to discuss details about that Crown Corporation.

Anybody that wants – oh, Alan McIsaac, yes?

Mr. McIsaac: I'm a little concerned with the (Indistinct) what if something pops up that we really want to discuss but we have already set five priorities? We only have a certain timeframe to work in. Like, what happens in a case like that? We'll say: No, hold it. We have set our priorities, there's an issue that is really of concern to all of us, but we set the priorities –

Ms. Casey: How flexible (Indistinct)

Mr. McIsaac: Yeah, how flexible – we already put it in a motion and I'm not against this issue here. I'm just saying how many do we want in the timeframe we have? Are we closing the door to something that might come up that we want to discuss?

Chair: I think, as a committee, we're in complete control of who we bring in and

when. These motions are set forward so that we're all very clear about what our work plan is. If we decide to change our work plan at any point in the future, all it requires is another motion to change the work plan.

Mr. Roach: But, I think it's important to maintain the remainder of things that are on this list and if we get through the entire list, that's where we go next unless, as Alan McIsaac said, unless something comes up that's of a major priority. But, I don't want to see us throw the list away because there are other things in there I want to hear about too.

Chair: Excellent point.

I would encourage all members during the new business section of any Public Accounts meeting, or by letter or email, to raise topics at any time that they would like to see added to our work plan for discussion. I would like to see you do that even if it's by email or letter, in a motion, so that all members – and we can continue to move forward and work because I believe Public Accounts is a very important committee and I think we can accomplish a lot. So, let's make sure that we have an ongoing list of work plan items so we can continue to make progress.

Yes.

Mr. McIsaac: Mr. Chair, I have no plans to cancel the list.

I'm just saying if we're going to firm things up – that was my concern.

Chair: Yeah.

Mr. McIsaac: If we tighten this thing up too tight, how do we deal with it, okay? I have nothing against anything else on the list.

Chair: Again, Alan, I think as a committee we have complete control. So, if at some point in the future a topic comes up that requires more scrutiny, like let's say; the ferry, for example, decided it's very timely and needs to come up. Then perhaps, Darlene might want to make a motion to say we need to have someone in to talk about –

Mr. Roach: Right away.

Chair: – the ferry next week and we need to move off and set that at higher priority, then the committee can consider that at that time and decide whether that's appropriate. That is an example.

Great, thank you.

We do have some clear actions on the work plan. I think that having people in to present is just one part of what we can do in the Public Accounts. I think sending letters or possibly even sending questions to people and asking for responses is something else we can do in order to make progress in the interim.

So, if we did have topics that sending a letter might be a way we can make progress, I would invite people to make those motions as well, that perhaps we – if there were even items lower down on the list, for example, contracting of legal services. If we wanted to send a letter for a written update or if there were particular questions that we wanted to ask, I'd invite you to submit them and I think we can ask those of the departments. We don't have to wait until we get a presenter in on every topic.

I would like to open – yes, go ahead.

Clerk Assistant: We didn't vote on that last fifth priority.

Chair: Oh, thank you, Ryan, yes.

The fifth priority –

Clerk Assistant: IIDI.

Chair: – was IIDI and we didn't have a vote on that.

Mr. Roach: I'd like to speak to the fifth priority.

Chair: Yes.

Mr. Roach: Okay, I'd like to see the open data be the fifth priority. I think it's been a topic of discussion. It was brought up a tremendous amount in the House last sitting. I'm not sure who put number five on the list, but I would recommend that that be the fifth priority.

Clerk Assistant: The proper way to do that would be to vote against the IIDI (Indistinct)

Chair: Well thank you. That's a great discussion on the IIDI motion.

Any further discussion on that topic?

Ms. Compton: That's fair. I had open data on my list as well.

Mr. Roach: Oh, okay.

Chair: So, let's have a vote on the IIDI motion and if we decide to vote that down then we can put another motion forward to put –

Mr. McIsaac: (Indistinct) are you withdrawing your motion or do you want to vote it down to put open data on?

Ms. Compton: I'm willing to withdraw it, but I still want it on the list.

Mr. Roach: It doesn't go away.

Ms. Compton: Open data, is that if you want that to be the fifth priority that's fine with me too. It's another one that I have on my list.

Chair: Thank you, Darlene.

Darlene, you're withdrawing your motion for IIDI to be the fifth priority?

Ms. Compton: Yeah.

Mr. Roach: I think as you suggested it originally, I'll defer to you to make the motion on open data.

Ms. Compton: I'm not sure who we should have in, but I move that we explore the open data. We've talked about it, as you say, a number of times in the House so I move a motion that that become the fifth priority. I guess we'll discuss afterwards.

Chair: Any discussion on that?

Question.

All in favour, say 'aye.'

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against, 'nay.'

Thank you.

Now, the exact action we want to take. We can put it forward – a motion forward now or we can wait till we start to exhaust some of our first four.

Would anyone like to make a motion now about an action to put on the work plan?

Ms. Bell: May I suggest we wait and consider with further research who we would call to support that motion?

Mr. Roach: I think of a number, but I agree, to research it and we can discuss people that we'd like to bring forward. I'd support that.

Chair: Okay, great.

I don't know if we need a motion if there's general agreement. Anyone want to speak to that?

Mr. McIsaac: Chair, are we expecting that by next week those who want to have someone come forward to speak on open data we'll put that forward at the next meeting so it's not hanging forever?

An Hon. Member: Good idea.

Mr. Roach: Yeah, I know I'll have some names.

Chair: That's excellent then. Thank you, Mr. Roach.

I don't think we need a full motion for that; you'll just come back with some names. Then at the time we want to put it on the action plan you'll make a motion –

Mr. Roach: Of the names.

Chair: – of the specific action.

Okay, would anyone else again, just to be clear, like to put anything else on the priority list at this time? Or, we'll just leave the remaining items as unprioritized?

Mr. Roach: I make a motion that we maintain the remainder of items that are on the list and that we have them there and refer to them at any point as we go forward.

Chair: Great, excellent.

Anyone want to speak to that motion?

Darlene.

Ms. Compton: I would just like it to be the sixth, if we can do it that way. Because, we are going to go down the list and if the AG can't do it, you just don't know where you're – (Indistinct) say IIDI is –

Chair: Thank you for that. Maybe we'll just call a question on the motion and (Indistinct)

A question on the motion that we leave the rest on the list; unless you want to withdraw it?

Mr. Roach: No I don't.

I think we have enough there and I think there's a big work load in front of us and I really think we need to work (Indistinct) and I have no doubt that if we get through that that will be the next one that you'll be making a motion on at a further date. But I think there's enough to work with right now.

Chair: Without any further discussion then, call on the question on that motion that we just leave the rest on un-prioritized on the list.

All in favour say 'aye.'

Some Hon. Members: Aye!

Chair: All against say, 'nay.'

It's okay, Darlene, you can vote against it if you wanted to.

Mr. Roach: We can throw open data in there.

Chair: All right, so the motion is carried.

In terms of priorities, that will close our priority discussion for today's meeting.

Are there any further actions we want to see in the work plan that don't require someone coming and present? It might be letters to be sent, these sorts of things?

Mr. Roach: Not at this point.

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct)

Chair: Okay, I just want to make sure.

Again, I think it's important that we take action as soon as possible so that we move our agenda forward. All right, if there are no future motions or discussion on the work plan, then we'll move on to the next item on the agenda.

Okay, the next item on the agenda is new business. Is there any new business people are bringing forward here?

An Hon. Member: (Indistinct) all about it –

Chair: Well, I actually have an item of new business, we'll call it. That's really just setting up scheduled meetings.

What I'd like to propose is that we just schedule in and plan to meet once a week going forward on – I think Wednesday mornings is a standard time at 10:00 a.m., because I think we have enough on our work plan that we can have presenters or move forward on a weekly basis.

That's what I'd like to do, is just schedule and just plan to meet every week going forward until the next sitting of the Legislature.

Mr. Roach: Well, that sounds like a tremendously good plan. However, I think that in order for us to move forward, for example, we have the blue books on and I think we need to send – the first thing we need to do is send a letter to the AG and ask the AG for available dates.

I know that the AG has a significant schedule. I think that she's been tasked with a lot of audits going forward, and I think that would be a good starting point; would be the invitation to the Auditor General and explaining to her that the blue books are the number one priority from this committee, and simply asking the AG what dates might suit her. She could be going to Florida or whatever the case may be, or she should be available right away.

But, I think that would be a good starting point.

Chair: Thank you for that.

Mr. Roach: In other words, I'm not a believer in setting a meeting just for the sake of setting a date for a meeting.

Ms. Bell: Chair, that would include us from moving on with the other priorities while we start that process (Indistinct)

Mr. Roach: But, then you have to send letters to those (Indistinct)

Ms. Bell: That's okay.

Mr. Roach: But, I always believe it's a good start – at least a starting point to forward that invitation to the Auditor General and ask her if – she may be going away for two weeks on spring break or something and you know? I think, let's start – you have to have a starting point.

Chair: Further discussion?

Darlene.

Ms. Compton: Just on that, if the AG says: I can't come for three weeks – then –

Mr. Roach: Then we schedule her for three weeks and we see who else we can get in before that.

Ms. Compton: So again (Indistinct) I think it's a great idea because we do have a large agenda and time is of the essence. We have, I don't know, eight weeks or seven weeks before the House sits so that's the framework we're working with right now.

If we send out a letter to the AG today and she can get back to us, I don't know what plan B is, but do we go to item number two and try to schedule that? I just don't want to see us leave today and then wait for a response from the AG and she can't come for three weeks and we don't have a meeting until then.

Chair: Any other further discussion?

Hal Perry.

Mr. Perry: Again, what the vice had mentioned earlier about setting meeting dates just for the sake of having a meeting. I'm on five or six other committees, so it eats up most of my week and I want to spend time in my district. So, that's four

hours on the road. I just don't want to come down here for the sake of having a meeting.

I'd like to have things set up prior to that meeting, and I think we should move forward – have one meeting at a time and that'll dictate what time and the need for the next meeting.

Chair: Any further discussion?

Mr. McIsaac: What about the fact that we –

Chair: Alan McIsaac.

Sorry, audio visual, I'm not doing a great job of pointing people out here.

Mr. McIsaac: Why don't we agree that Wednesday morning is a good time for meetings? Let the meeting stand at the call of the Chair. You know what our priorities are, and leave it between you and our clerk to –

Ms. Casey: Check availability.

Mr. McIsaac: – check availability and get back to us what the topic might be, but give us enough time to prepare for that topic. You have our priorities. You have a time now that you want this committee to meet, and we'll leave it in your good direction and judgment to make the call for the next meeting.

Chair: All right, thank you.

Any further discussion?

Hannah Bell.

Ms. Bell: I would suggest that we do keep that slot provisionally booked from now to the sitting in the event that it's highly likely that we're going to be able to fill it with something from the priority list between now and then, and that we don't look at scheduling anything else; because this is, as everyone else has mentioned, probably one of the most important committees and we need to make that space available to have these discussions. There are a lot of really great topics here.

Chair: Thank you.

Hal Perry.

Mr. Perry: I think each – every committee is important and these times have already been slotted in the past. I know that agriculture is always booked for Fridays. So, if we have a meeting coming up, we'll schedule it for a Friday.

Wednesdays has always been for Public Accounts, but I, again, I want to say I just don't want to have a meeting for the sake of having a meeting. I think we should have something concrete first before we come down, and each week it may change a little bit, but that time has always been put aside for Public Accounts.

Chair: Vice-chair, Mr. Roach.

Mr. Roach: I tend to agree with Hal on that, because for most people in here you're probably on five committees or maybe even more. There are also other committees I know that I sit on, so that's six for me a week.

I try to keep Mondays as constituency day, and I try to keep Fridays as much as possible to stay in my constituency, so I agree that to come in here and not have a full meeting or – I like the idea of making sure that we have people here so that when we come we have time to prepare, as Alan McIsaac said, and that we're doing a great job when we get here of committee.

Chair: Any other discussion?

And thank you for that, as it was my proposal. I agree 100%. I just want to be prepared because I fully believe with the full work plan we have we will be meeting every week, so take that into account into your schedules. We definitely will not meet just for the sake of having a meeting. I think we've got so many actions and issues on the work plan that that, of course, would never happen.

It's taken probably six weeks for us just to get this work plan meeting in place, which has been a little frustrating for me, honestly, so I want to see us move forward. I want to see us make progress, and I think we can do that.

So just be prepared, because we will be meeting; and in terms of availability, I don't foresee the clerk sending out an email every

week to ask are you available on Wednesday morning for public accounts. What we're going to do is we'll schedule the meeting, and if you're not available I leave it up to you to find a replacement to come, and that's how we'll work forward as opposed to having Ryan always have to deal with this meeting scheduling process. That's the way I foresee it; and if we don't have a quorum at any given meeting, then we'll deal with that when the time comes.

Okay. Thank you. Now, any other new business that people want to discuss?

Ms. Casey: Motion for adjournment, Mr. Chair?

Chair: New business?

All right, we do have motion for adjournment.

Meeting adjourned.

Thank you.

The Committee adjourned