

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

**FOLLOW-UP AUDIT OF THE PROCESS FOR RESPONDING TO
PARLIAMENTARY ORDER PAPER QUESTIONS**

AUDIT AND EVALUATION

PROJECT 2007-102

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

SEPTEMBER 24, 2008

Executive Summary

Audit Objective

The objective of this internal audit was to assess the extent to which the Privy Council Office (PCO) has implemented administrative reforms introduced by the government and recommendations made by the Auditor General of Canada for responding to parliamentary written questions appearing on the *Order Paper*.

Audit Conclusion

PCO has taken effective action to fully implement the administrative reforms introduced by the government and recommendations from the Auditor General for responding to parliamentary order paper questions, with limited exceptions being noted in the summary of findings and recommendations. These exceptions do not represent significant risks to PCO and can be corrected through appropriate management action.

Statement of Assurance

In my professional judgment as Chief Audit Executive, sufficient and appropriate audit procedures have been conducted and evidence gathered to support the accuracy of the conclusion provided and contained in this report. The conclusion is based on a comparison of the conditions, as they existed at the time, against pre-established audit criteria that were agreed with management. The conclusion is applicable only to the entity examined. The evidence was gathered in compliance with Treasury Board policy, directives, and standards on internal audit.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

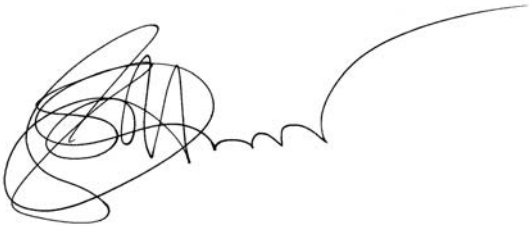
Notable achievements have been made in response to the government administrative reforms and the Auditor General's recommendations for responding to parliamentary order paper questions. We found that PCO has successfully developed and implemented procedures to: limit the potential of inaccurate or incomplete responses for complex questions, provide parliamentarians with contextual and summary information to help them interpret responses, and automate the process to track response development to improve efficiency. PCO has also taken the initiative to draft a procedures document titled the *Guide to Producing Parliamentary Returns* to improve the process for responding to parliamentary order paper questions.

Our audit recommendations are detailed in section 2.3 of this report. In summary, we recommend that PCO finalize and communicate the glossary of terms document for use by parliamentarians as well as the *Guide to Producing*

Parliamentary Returns for use by all employees involved in producing parliamentary returns. We also recommend that PCO, in its coordinating role, take the initiative to provide additional guidance and support to government organizations in order to strengthen their Statements of Completeness to demonstrate their oversight of responses to order paper questions.

Management Response

The Office for the Coordination of Parliamentary Returns, Legislation and House Planning Secretariat, agrees with the auditors' recommendations. We are pleased to note the conclusion that, with limited exceptions, the Office has fully implemented administrative reforms and recommendations with respect to the process for responding to parliamentary order paper questions, and has also taken additional initiatives to enhance efficiency and expand knowledge of the process. The Office will implement the attached action plan to improve the process further for ministers, public servants and parliamentarians.



SIGNATURE OF CHIEF AUDIT EXECUTIVE

JIM HAMER
DIRECTOR, AUDIT AND EVALUATION

Management Response and Action Plan

Follow-up Audit of the Process for Responding to Parliamentary Order Paper Questions

The Deputy Secretary to the Cabinet (Legislation and House Planning, and Machinery of Government) and Counsel to the Clerk of the Privy Council has overall responsibility for the Action Plan.

Recommendation	Response and Action Plan	Responsibility	Target Date
<p>1. <i>In the context of PCO's existing coordinator role, provide guidance and support to responding government organizations to strengthen the use of Statements of Completeness. This should involve:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reinforcing the importance of these documents as a means to support their Ministers and to demonstrate appropriate organizational oversight of responses to order paper questions;</i> • <i>Providing additional guidance as to what should be included in the description of the research made, i.e.: a best practices model; and</i> • <i>Modifying the assertion statement provided in the Statements of Completeness to also provide assurance, for</i> 	<p><i>Management agrees with this recommendation and will take the following actions to implement it:</i></p> <p>(a) <i>Provide additional written advice to departments on the purpose and content of the Statement of Completeness that senior designated officials sign to advise Ministers on the research conducted to produce a proposed government response</i></p> <p>(b) <i>Revise the PCO template for Statements of Completeness as a best practices model to assist departments to provide a better description to Ministers of the scope of research conducted, including where appropriate a review of publicly available financial documents, and any limitations encountered in producing government responses</i></p>	<p><i>Director, Parliamentary Returns</i></p>	<p><i>October 31, 2008</i></p>

Follow-up Audit of the Process for Responding to Parliamentary Order Paper Questions

Recommendation	Response and Action Plan	Responsibility	Target Date
<p><i>financially oriented questions, that the work carried out included a review of all publicly available financial documents for relevant information where appropriate.</i></p>	<p><i>(c) Brief Directors of Parliamentary Affairs on actions required to strengthen Statements of Completeness, and</i></p> <p><i>(d) Brief Coordinators of Access to Information on their role in providing advice on proposed government responses that would be incorporated in Statements of Completeness</i></p>		
<p>2. Specify a date by which the following will be completed, finalized and issued:</p> <p><i>(a) glossary of terms for use by parliamentarians in writing their order paper questions (as was recommended by the Auditor General in November 2004), and</i></p> <p><i>(b) Guide to Producing Parliamentary Returns intended for use by all individuals involved in producing responses to order paper questions.</i></p>	<p><i>Management agrees with these recommendations and will:</i></p> <p><i>(a) Finalize and post the glossary of terms on the PCO website, and</i></p> <p><i>(b) Complete the PCO initiative to draft and issue to departments a revised Guide to Producing Parliamentary Returns</i></p>	<p><i>Director, Parliamentary Returns</i></p>	<p><i>October 31, 2008</i></p>