LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
Vicki Dunne MLA (Chair), Tara Cheyne MLA (Deputy Chair)
Nicole Lawder MLA, Bec Cody MLA

Statement to the Assembly under Standing Order 246A

Madam Speaker, I rise today to respond on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to Recommendation 2 of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure's Report No 16, Inquiry into the *Review of The Performance of the Three Branches of Government In the Australian Capital Territory Against Latimer House Principles—9th Assembly.*

The Recommendation is:

> that the matters raised in the Review in relation to the role and operation of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts be brought to the attention of Standing Committee and that the Committee be invited to respond to the Assembly on why so few reports on Auditor-General's reports had been presented. That Committee is also invited to provide its views on its preferred form, structure, membership and terms of reference for any future public accounts committee for the Assembly.[1]

The Committee considered the Recommendation in its private meeting of 6 May 2020.

The Committee notes that the *Review of The Performance of the Three Branches of Government In the Australian Capital Territory Against Latimer House Principles* only reported on one metric number of Auditor-General reports reported on. It did note in passing that, at the time of reporting, the Public Accounts Committee met more frequently and longer than other committees and had held more public hearings. Neither the Review nor the subsequent report of the Standing Committee on Administration & Procedure considered what was in the pipeline at the time. One simple metric could be the number of active reports listed on the Committees website.

In this Assembly the Committee has inquired into three very substantial Auditor-General's reports, one of which has been tabled, one is soon to be tabled, and the third will be tabled in or by August. In addition, the Committee has reported on two references from the Assembly, on residential and commercial rates, and another Auditor-General's report, on WorkSafe ACT's management of Mr Fluffy demolitions. Since the Review report the

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[1] Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure, Report No 16, *Review of the Performance of the Three Branches of Government in the Australian Capital Territory against Latimer House Principles-9th Assembly,* February 2020, Recommendation 2, p.14.

Committee has also conducted an inquiry into Supplementary Appropriation as well as the usual committee business of inquiring into annual reports.

The Committee is quite aware that it undertakes inquiries according to the resources available. It is axiomatic that if there were more resources there would be more inquiries.

In considering a possible model for future public accounts committees of the Assembly, the Committee recommends that membership be greater, allowing sub-committees to be formed to undertake more inquiries which could run simultaneously. The main Committee could inquire into larger matters of note while sub-committees could inquire into matters which were more routine. In this model the position of Deputy Chair would be given greater responsibility (to chair sub-committee inquiries) and should be remunerated for that role. This would align more closely to the structure and operation of public accounts committees across the Commonwealth. As far as the Committee is aware, thus far the ACT Standing Committee on Public Accounts has the smallest membership of any such committee in Australian, and this has had a limiting effect on what it has been able to do in any one Assembly.

The Committee also discussed whether, in its extended form, the Public Accounts Committee should also take on the role of the estimates committee but there was no real consensus on this point.

Other correspondence from you, Madam Speaker, received by the Committee, has asked for its view on whether Bills should be referred to committees of the Assembly more often than has been the case. The Committee agreed that it was in favour of more frequent referrals of Bills so long as committees retained a discretion whether to inquire further or not, as is the current arrangement under which all reports of the Auditor-General are referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The Committee also noted that such referrals would be resource intensive and there would need to be an appetite to resource the Committee Office appropriately.

[End]