

2.1 Accountability and the Role of the Legislative Auditor

The way Government spends public money is very important to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

Control of the public purse is carried out on behalf of the people by their elected representatives, the Members of House of Assembly. While it is up to Government to draft budgets and spending estimates, it cannot collect or spend taxpayers' money without the approval of the House of Assembly. After Government spends the money entrusted to it, there is an obligation to report back to the House of Assembly on how the money was used. This, the obligation to answer for actions taken, is the basis of the accountability relationship that exists between Government and the House of Assembly.

As the governing body in this accountability relationship, the House of Assembly is responsible for (1) overseeing the activities of Government and (2) holding Government accountable for its handling of public money. To assist this process, the Government provides information about how it used the public funds entrusted to it.

But what assurance do Members of the House of Assembly have that this information is appropriate, credible and complete? How can Members know that the information they receive accurately reflects the results of the activities of Government?

The House of Assembly in this Province, as in Legislative Assemblies in other jurisdictions in Canada, uses the services of an Auditor General to assist it in carrying out its oversight responsibilities. Historically, the Assemblies have understood well the need for an independent Legislative Auditor and recognized the position's unique contributions to the public accountability process.

From the view of legislators, the value of Legislative Auditors has not simply been in their technical expertise, it has also been in their ability to conduct audits that may not please those being examined, and to report their findings publicly. This has made their roles indispensable. They have subjected the operations of the public sector as a whole to regular, independent examinations, acting first and foremost in the public interest, as acknowledged champions of open and transparent government.

Defining the unique and vital role of Legislative Auditors in the public accountability process revolves around four key points: their independence; their mandate; their reporting obligations; and their expertise in public sector matters.