



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 29th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Legislative Offices

Wednesday, February 24, 2016
9 a.m.

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Standing Committee on Legislative Offices

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Ellis, Mike, Calgary-West (PC)*
Cooper, Nathan, Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills (W)
Horne, Trevor A.R., Spruce Grove-St. Albert (ND)
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Nixon, Jason, Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre (W)
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van Dijken, Glenn, Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock (W)
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Legislative Officers

Jill Clayton	Information and Privacy Commissioner
Del Graff	Child and Youth Advocate
Peter Hourihan	Ombudsman, Public Interest Commissioner
Glen Resler	Chief Electoral Officer
Merwan Saher	Auditor General
Marguerite Trussler, QC	Ethics Commissioner

Office of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner Participants

Joe Loran	Deputy Ombudsman
Ted Miles	Director, Office of the Public Interest Commissioner
Suzanne Richford	Director, Corporate Services

Support Staff

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Robert H. Reynolds, QC	Law Clerk/Director of Interparliamentary Relations
Shannon Dean	Senior Parliamentary Counsel/ Director of House Services
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Jody Rempel	Committee Clerk
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Tracey Sales	Communications Consultant
Janet Schwegel	Managing Editor of <i>Alberta Hansard</i>

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[Cortes-Vargas in the chair]

The Chair: Okay. I'd like to welcome members, staff, and guests to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices.

I am Estefania Cortes-Vargas, MLA for Strathcona-Sherwood Park and the chair of the committee. I'd like to ask that the members joining the committee at the table introduce themselves for the record, and I will call on the member on the phone line to introduce himself for the record.

Ms Sweet: Good morning. Heather Sweet, MLA for Edmonton-Manning, deputy chair.

Mr. Nixon: Good morning. Jason Nixon, MLA for Rimbey-Rocky Mountain House-Sundre.

Mr. Cooper: Good morning. Nathan Cooper, MLA for the outstanding constituency of Olds-Didsbury-Three Hills.

Mr. van Dijken: Glenn van Dijken, MLA for Barrhead-Morinville-Westlock.

Mr. Ellis: Mike Ellis, MLA for Calgary-West and wearing a pink shirt.

Mr. Loran: Joe Loran. I'm the Deputy Ombudsman.

Mr. Hourihan: Peter Hourihan, Ombudsman.

Ms Richford: Suzanne Richford, director of corporate services.

Mr. Miles: Ted Miles. I'm the director for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner.

Ms Woollard: Denise Woollard, MLA, Edmonton-Mill Creek.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Jamie Kleinsteuber, MLA, Calgary-Northern Hills.

Mr. Shepherd: David Shepherd, MLA, Edmonton-Centre.

Mr. Connolly: Michael Connolly, MLA for Calgary-Hawkwood.

Mrs. Sawchuk: Karen Sawchuk, committee clerk.

The Chair: On the phone?

Mr. Horne: Trevor Horne, MLA for the wonderfully diverse constituency of Spruce Grove-St. Albert.

The Chair: For the record I would like to also note the following substitution: Mr. Ellis for Mr. Bhullar.

The meeting documents were posted on the committee's internal website, but if anyone requires copies of these documents, please let our committee clerk know.

Before we turn to the business at hand, a few operational items. The microphone consoles are operated by *Hansard* staff. Please keep all cellphones and BlackBerrys on silent and off the tables as these can interfere with the audiofeed. Audio of the committee proceeding is streamed live on the Internet and recorded by *Alberta Hansard*. Audio access and meeting transcripts are obtained via the Legislative Assembly website.

On to our agenda. Would a member move a motion to approve today's meeting agenda, please?

Ms Sweet: I'll move the agenda.

The Chair: MLA Sweet. All in favour? On the phones? Opposed? The motion is carried.

The committee is completing the review of the 2016-17 submissions of the officers of the Legislature today. I'd like to welcome Peter Hourihan and his staff from the offices of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner.

If you would like to keep your presentations to 20 to 25 minutes for each of your offices, that will leave sufficient time for questions. You can do those together. However you'd like to organize that, that's okay.

Mr. Hourihan: Okay.

The Chair: Just leave some time for questions at the end. Please begin.

Office of the Ombudsman and Public Interest Commissioner

Mr. Hourihan: Thank you. I can do it either way. If you have questions at the end of the Ombudsman one, which I'll do first, we can go there, and then I can go or wait till after. It makes no difference to me, so we can go from there.

I'd like to begin by providing you just a very brief history of our budget as it's important to demonstrate our current approach and provide some rationale and perspective to how we do things.

The Ombudsman's office budget is results based. We determine our priorities and focus our energy on meeting the goals and, correspondingly, requests for funding. Our activities are reviewed annually to ensure that they're in support of our strategic business plan priorities. We consider the pressures in the larger financial situation as well.

In 2013-14 fiscal year we sought and received a budget totalling \$3,359,000.

In '14-15 we sought and received a budget of \$3,349,000. During that year we did have two short- to medium-term personnel vacancies, which placed some pressure on our operational work; however, they resulted in a spending reduction. With the flexibility we were able to achieve some of our goals by increasing in other budget areas, and we were able to come in \$133,000 under budget.

For the '15-16 fiscal year, the current year, through the normal process we presented an initial budget seeking \$3.593 million. This would have been a 7.28 per cent increase of \$244,000. It included an adjustment of the 2 per cent cost of living from the previous year plus the 2.25 per cent planned increase also across the board. The rationale for the requested increase over and above the 7.25 included a plan that we had to do 12 community outreach visits with corresponding mobile complaint intake days, which require significant travel and advertising; an increase in required professional development; a client satisfaction survey; and planned expenditures for our relatively new case-management system to ensure the required modifications were funded. The request was not approved.

The committee subsequently approved a budget reduction of 2 per cent less than the 2014-15 budget. We're required to fund the cumulative cost-of-living increases, which was done. In simple terms it was a reduction for us of about 6.25 per cent. I just want to emphasize here that although the financial implications facing Alberta at that particular time were not particularly negative, there were some indications that it was starting to get strained, with the price of oil starting to fall. It was very shortly thereafter when the economy began to decline more rapidly, and certainly we recognize the economic situation Alberta is currently in.

Just turning to the overview of our '15-16 fiscal year, the current year, faced with a reduced budget, we significantly re-evaluated our

priorities and our approach for the current year. We were required to reduce expenditures to \$3.282 million. We made a number of adjustments at the beginning of the year to ensure that we could meet those targets. We also committed to seek opportunities throughout the year to minimize costs wherever possible.

During this current fiscal year we've been able to adjust and reduce our costs with a multifaceted approach. We've focused most on reducing personnel costs as well as supply and services costs wherever possible. This approach is resulting in significant savings during this current year over and above our reduced budget.

I should just pause here for a second. On your screen in the upper-left corner you'll see the sheet that you have in front of you, that you can't particularly read on the screen. It's not meant to be read on the screen; it's just to give you an idea that what is on the major part of the screen is the focus for what I'm talking about.

We're forecasting a reduction in salaries of \$203,000, from \$2.54 million to \$2.337 million. This is attributed to some vacancies and long-term absences that we've had during this current year. First, we've had a senior-level investigator vacancy, which we chose to keep vacant for a few months in order to achieve financial goals. When we did fill the position, we did so at a reduced classification level. Second, we had four long-term absences. We did not backfill the positions, which reduced our costs. These absences have not all been for the entire year; however, they have been significant durations of time throughout the year. There have been cost as this limits our operational capabilities and ability to do things, our proactive work, and that sort of thing.

The remaining savings in personnel costs are minor adjustments to employer contributions and professional development. This was required to ensure that we are accurately capturing our exact costs, which enhances our forecasting for our year-end.

What's not shown on the documents that you have are the adjustments we made prior to the beginning of the year. We reduced our anticipated spend on professional development by about half, from \$40,000 to \$20,000, and we expect to come in just under budget. This includes mandatory professional and accounting fees.

As you can see, this results in a forecast of \$2.88 million in personnel costs, \$210,000 under budget, which is 6.8 per cent.

Now turning to the costs of supply and services, we forecasted a significant reduction here as well. The actual forecasted travel expenses are \$25,000 under budget, from \$45,000 to \$20,000.

I would like to note that this was drastically reduced from '14-15 by over half, from \$95,000 to \$45,000, and we attributed this to three significant adjustments that we made. First, we reduced our outreach tours across Alberta from 12 to six. Those are expensive in terms of travel and advertising. Second, our reduced ability to travel, with the long-term absences and vacancies, generated further savings that we hadn't planned on. Third, we've reduced travel between Edmonton and Calgary as a result of not using the government plane, the plane not being accessible, and our increased use of Skype and video conferencing.

We've managed within our budgets for advertising, insurance, courier and postage, and repair and maintenance. These are smaller line items, and they're fairly consistent year over year.

9:10

We've reduced telecommunications by 50 per cent. It's not a big savings – it's just from \$3,000 down to \$1,500 – but it's pretty significant in terms of what we were spending to what we are now, due to a new contract.

We reduced contract services by \$31,000, or 19 per cent. This is partially due to contracted legal and human resource services being all but eliminated. We do that in-house. We have legal counsel, and we've not required any independent legal opinion, which can occur

from time to time if there are any conflicts. We've managed all of our human resource recruiting and hiring matters internally.

The majority of our contracting costs are the sharing of personnel costs with the Public Interest Commissioner because we are two separate offices. The communications and one administrative positions make up approximately \$91,000 of this value. There are Public Interest office positions that the Ombudsman pays for service. The communications position is split at 50-50 between the two offices, and the corporate position is split 75-25 in favour of the Ombudsman's office. The remainder is made up of contracting for design and development of our annual report, shredding, and those kinds of things.

Prior to the beginning of the fiscal year we reduced our materials and supplies budget down approximately 23 per cent, to \$46,000. However, we did choose later in this year to forecast some overspending by \$29,000 to purchase some needed furniture, that we're going to need in the very near future for our move.

You can see at the line on the paper titled Recovery for Shared Services – I mentioned earlier, when I spoke of our contracted service costs, that some of this was attributed to purchasing or sharing Public Interest's costs. We also provide services to the Public Interest office at our executive, legal, corporate, and administrative positions at a rate of 25 per cent. This 25 per cent – we've arrived at that in a pro-rated fashion – share of all employees within both the Ombudsman and Public Interest offices: our forecast this year is \$247,000. This amount is netted out or subtracted from our overall costs, bringing our forecast in at a total spend of \$3,046,000, or \$236,000 under budget for the fiscal year, which is a savings of 7.19 per cent.

Just in terms of perspective, our forecasted supplies and services costs of \$413,000 make up 12 and a quarter per cent of our overall budget. These costs include a variety of fixed costs, leaving us quite limited in our discretionary spending. Indeed, without the vacancies and absences that we've had, we would have found it extremely difficult to come under budget. We have been able to offset this, however, with the sharing of services between the two offices.

There are a few noteworthy items which are not reflected in our budget, and they were removed prior to the new year, as I sort of alluded to earlier. One of the things that we've eliminated this year was international travel. I did allude to this also in the orientation and mandate session before this committee in December.

Our office holds two international memberships. One is in the IOI, or the International Ombudsman Institute, and one is in the USOA, or the United States Ombudsman Association. The IOI was founded in Alberta in 1978 and headquartered here till 2009, when it was moved to Vienna. Throughout the history of the IOI Alberta has played a key role and held board member positions for many of those years. I'm currently a board member, and I'm the president of the North American region. There are six regions within the IOI. Board meetings are held once annually, in-person meetings. Otherwise, business is done via e-mail, Skype, et cetera.

The commitment requires that I travel to the meeting each year. Because of the nature of an international relationship, this requires travel to one of the other five regions or hosting the meeting here in North America, which can also include travel because it won't necessarily be in Edmonton. The average cost to travel to a meeting – I have been to Vienna twice in my tenure – is approximately \$3,500 to \$4,000 in total costs, which include flights, accommodations, and meals for the three-day meeting. In the case of when we host a meeting, those costs go up a little bit. It's approximately \$10,000 to host a meeting, which is split between the three board members from North America. Then add the travel, and it probably costs about \$6,500 to \$7,500 for that particular year.

The benefits of the IOI are much like the benefits of any international organization. While nothing is binding on Alberta, it does permit us to learn and keep current on best practices and processes, to research and debate topics, and to share reports and information. Further, it exposes Alberta to the rest of the global network. In this vein, we are attractive to other countries and regions who want to better understand our role. For example, in 2014 we had an ombudsman employee from Kyrgyzstan spend three months as an intern in our office, learning about how we do things, and she took those back to her country. We've kept in some contact since then.

Currently we have a member of the South Korean Ombudsman's office who is in a two-year fellowship studying the Ombudsman's office and system here and learning about the Alberta approach and doing a comparative study. Neither of these has cost our office any money. It was funded wholly by the visiting jurisdiction. We do, however, gain significantly in terms of networking and learning opportunities. The fellowship agreement with the South Korean office requires South Korea to pay our office \$20,000 over the two-year period. These funds are deposited into the government of Alberta's general revenue fund.

Further, as a board member I take part in the activities globally to seek to have jurisdictions embrace the role of ombudsman. We help countries meet the standards, and we ensure that standards are kept. That's just to give you a little perspective on why we're members of that international community.

I would like to elaborate a bit on the reduction of our outreach plans, which were cut in half, as I mentioned, reducing travel and advertising costs. As I said, we had initially planned to conduct 12 outreach business plans across Alberta in '15-16. With the cut to the budget this was reduced to six, reducing our travel requirements and eliminating a significant amount of advertising costs. Our approach in these visits is to plan a date or dates where we can go to a few communities at a time all across the province, where we can minimize travel. We advertise through interviews over the radio, television, and newspapers. We also advertise our attendance where necessary to reach out to Albertans. We set up interviews with investigators and seek opportunities to offer presentations.

They've been very well received. We've been doing these for about two and a half years now, and over the past year we've had many people voice how beneficial it is to meet in their home community. Many ask when we will be back. Most notably, in the Lethbridge and Medicine Hat region we've been asked several times why we don't have an office there. We do try to get there, you know, as often as we can, work it into our work and travel schedules.

Further, in '15-16 we scrapped our plans for a client satisfaction survey. This saved an anticipated \$10,000. Initially we felt that this would be beneficial to have. I hold a lot of stock in attempting to ensure we're meeting the needs of the people and the government entities that we serve. We strive to improve where possible, and client surveys can provide insight. That said, they can be costly, so in respect of economic times we shelved the initiative, and we'll continue to address this in an ad hoc fashion through feedback from entities as well as citizens.

Also, we released our annual report for '14-15 electronically only this year. Normally we attempt to provide a hard copy; however, we felt it was an opportune time to release one via our website. In situations where a hard copy is needed, we print one. This has been positive, and we haven't received any negative feedback on this approach. We'll continue it this year coming up. It's also saved us in the range of \$15,000 in printing and design costs. There still are some costs, but the savings are significant.

So to close off the '15-16 budget, the current year, we forecast a surplus of \$236,000: \$210,000 from personnel, \$29,000 from supplies and services, with a minor recovery of some shared services of \$3,000.

Now I'd like to turn to the budget request for '16-17. Before I get into the numbers, I just want to mention that this portion of the presentation has two components. I'm just going to present first on our operating expense requirements for '16-17 as well as a one-time, extraordinary request to fund a required relocation of our office, which is set to occur in November this year, as a result of our nonrenewable lease in our current location.

I'll speak first to the normal year-over-year request. We're requesting an operating budget that is slightly less than last year's by 0.88 per cent. I'd like to speak to the implication of this as it will impact our personnel and operations. However, with the current fiscal and economic state we can manage with these implications. I would ask for consideration in the future of a request for an increase to get us back on track in future years.

To accomplish this, we'll be required to closely monitor and manage a communications position and a pending retirement by not filling these until later in the fiscal year when it will be more manageable to do so. This will enable us to minimize our request to a small decrease. I'll explain the rationale for this. Our salaries and wages costs, with all positions filled, are anticipated to increase moderately, by 0.63 per cent, from \$2.54 million to \$2.556 million. This is a result of our reduction in the vacancies that we've had over our long-term absences in the current year. As I noted earlier, our current year savings were \$203,000, just to keep it in perspective.

We've calculated employer contributions at 23 and a half per cent, which is an increase from our current year cost of \$530,000 to \$599,000. This is an increase of \$69,000, or 13 per cent. The rationale here is a more refined calculation of the actual costs of employer contributions. As you see, our estimate of \$530,000, considering salaries of \$2.54 million, was 20.9 per cent. This is due to a variety of variables as to whether or not a person is in a pension plan or what benefits are actually chosen by personnel, and with the number of personnel we have that can make a difference. Further, in '15-16 we intentionally dropped the figure down to meet the budgetary requirements we were subjected to at the beginning of the year. The actual cost is 23.5 per cent, and that's what we're applying to our anticipated salary costs.

We're not seeking any increase in professional development. This is manageable. We have a good mix of experience, expertise, and diversity in our office, which helps us to keep this at a minimum. So overall our needs would contemplate an increase in personnel costs of \$85,000, or 2.75 per cent.

9:20

Now, in respect of supplies and services, we searched for opportunities to minimize our costs, and we feel that we can reduce these by \$57,000, or 12.9 per cent. We'll reduce our travel from \$45,000 to \$30,000. We're confident we can maximize our efforts on a minimal travel budget. We'll continue to do outreach on a reduced scale, and we'll continue to use teleconferencing to minimize administrative travel. We will reduce advertising from \$16,000 to \$7,500; this is a reduction of over 50 per cent. This can be achieved by relying on public service interviews at no- or low-cost advertising. The majority of this is for our outreach, so the reductions there contribute as well.

We'll reduce our contract services from the Public Interest Commissioner office by \$14,000, anticipating fewer needs in this respect. This is due to the reduced classification of the communications position for which we contract services.

We'll reduce our materials and supplies by \$16,000, from \$46,000 to \$30,000. This can be accomplished as we reduce requirement for furnishings and similar items in this category.

As you can see there is a significant change in the amount of shared services, totalling \$57,000, from \$250,000 to \$307,000. This is an overall decrease to the Ombudsman office. This is due to the increased salary costs for the Ombudsman position shared with the Public Interest Commissioner's office. When we combine the personnel costs and supplies and services, we can manage to continue with a small decrease of \$29,000, or 0.88 per cent, from the current budget year. We feel this will enable us to meet our mandate, albeit quite tightly. However, again, we recognize the financial situation here in Alberta.

I want to add that we have been doing what we can to minimize our costs. All of the things that I mentioned have also considered an absorption of the 2 per cent and the 2.25 per cent cost-of-living increase that we've had over the years, which is an accumulation of 4.3 per cent. When you factor in the personnel or the employer contributions, that pushes it up to a little over 5.3 per cent. So we are trying to do our best within that. We continue to manage in this way, and we'll be able to do so, as I said.

In respect of capital, there is no requirement for a capital budget for us this year, which is generally the case for our office.

Now I want to turn to the extraordinary expense that we have coming up. Unfortunately, our lease will not be renewed at the Canadian Western Bank building this year. We will be relocating to a building on 109th Street, where several other offices of the Legislature are located. We have to be out by November 16. Alberta Infrastructure is going to manage the relocation, and they're paying for the move per se. We do require, however, approximately \$100,000 for the relocation of both offices. The Ombudsman component is \$75,000. The remaining \$25,000 is attributed to the Public Interest office per our normal pro rata distribution.

Infrastructure will handle all the move and the renovations and those things, but there are a few things that we have to pay for. Infrastructure does not cover the IT requirements to move servers, inclusive of the dismantling and set-up, movement of the lines, and related expenditures. We've received an anticipatory estimate from our service provider of \$50,000. So our contribution from the Ombudsman office would be \$37,500. We also require phones and their required set-up. We'll require new video conferencing equipment as our current system is old and requires replacement. This will also enable us to set up in the new location in this respect. There are a few furniture items that we do require, some of which we've been able to purchase this fiscal year, knowing we needed it, and get it in, but there are a few items that we do have to provide that Infrastructure won't provide. The total of those costs will be about \$50,000, and again the Ombudsman's share would be \$37,500.

I seek approval for this extraordinary increase of a one-time cost of \$75,000. I commit to minimizing this as much as possible and within our existing budget, and I'll keep the committee apprised of the potential in this respect. However, given that we're only asking for what we will spend in personnel and supply and services fairly tightly, I do not feel comfortable advising that I can set up the new location without some funding.

In summary, then, with all the extraordinary and the year-over-year our total request for the budget is \$3.328 million, which is an increase of \$46,000 and solely due to part of the one-time, unavoidable, extraordinary cost.

That concludes the Ombudsman side. Would you like me to pause for questions at this point?

The Chair: Yes, let's pause for questions.
Ms Woollard.

Ms Woollard: Should I start? All right.

Well, thank you very much for your presentation. I'd also really like to thank you for providing the committee with such a scaled-back budget already. It sounds, you know, like you've cut back quite a bit. We know that we're in challenging economic times and that every penny saved will go a considerable distance. Are there any other costs which might be reduced without seriously affecting the outcomes of the complaints resolution process?

Mr. Hourihan: I don't feel at this time that there's anything else. We kind of keep our eye on that ball all the time and try and minimize where we can. Like I say, our discretionary areas of spending are minimal from the supply and services costs side of things, down to 12 and a quarter per cent. The other cost savings would be in personnel costs, and we have been able to manage those through long-term absences, which are not particularly effective in terms of accomplishing our operational goals of service as well as proactive work. We have been able to maintain a good, solid approach to our work, you know, and we've sought efficiencies and that sort of thing, so that's worked out okay. Any other savings that we have: we can do those a little bit through the planned filling of vacancies and timing them such that if we delay a little bit, it doesn't impact significantly on our operations, but it can make an adjustment financially a little bit month over month or week over week, so we will have a little bit of opportunity there.

With what I've provided today, like I said, for the year-over-year budget we think we can come in under what we were last year, which is a significant cut, if you will, with the raises and whatnot that were in the past and, of course, don't affect us in the future right now. It's that extraordinary expense right now, just the one-time cost, that I'm nervous about in terms of our ability to get the move in place without some sort of assistance there.

Ms Woollard: All right. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Mr. van Dijken.

Mr. van Dijken: Thank you, Chair. Thank you for your presentation this morning. You talked earlier about how you're a results-based organization, and then we also learned that we have a client satisfaction survey that's been postponed at this time. Will that affect your ability to actually measure the ongoing effectiveness of your office?

Mr. Hourihan: Well, no, I don't feel it will. We were looking at kind of trying to do a more robust survey, but they are hard to do, and they're expensive. We still feel that we can get feedback. We can certainly get feedback from the government authorities that are under our jurisdiction, get feedback from them on a reach-out and ad hoc basis, as we can as well from our clients and complainants that call us through just personal interaction and questions and answers and those sorts of things. We are looking at trying to standardize something there that we can maybe handle in-house, on our own, that's of literally no expense. We just have to explore that a little bit more.

Mr. van Dijken: Okay.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you very much for your presentation, and thank you for the fiscal restraint that you are doing. You mentioned a senior investigator whose role was not currently being filled. My question: has that meant that there's been more work for other staff members, or has there been an increased backlog as a result of that position not being filled?

Mr. Hourihan: Yes, to some extent, not anything critical. What happened was that we just had a person that retired, a senior person, and rather than fill it right away, we just left a little time gap in there to sort of manage our financial implications. Now, there were other absences that came in, unplanned absences, that affected us more adversely than that. That was just a few months where we planned so that we would have some financial stability to make sure that we could do it, understanding that we had to make sure that we kept our operations to the extent possible.

We've been streamlining over the last four years significantly in how we do our investigations and the expertise and the approach that we have, so we've been able to maintain and improve and enhance those capacities, which has served us well during these times of absences. Some of our proactive work has been reduced. Had we been able to go ahead this year with the 12 tours that we wanted to do, we wouldn't have been able to do it with this personnel. So it was sort of a planned yet forced reduction in that proactive work as well.

Mr. Ellis: Excellent. I'm all about efficiencies.

A second question, if you don't mind, Chair. You mentioned the nonrenewable lease, which is requiring you to move to another facility. I'm sorry; you might have mentioned this. The new lease or the new facility required: is it at a rate that is cheaper than where you were before, costwise?

Mr. Hourihan: You know, I'd have to defer to Infrastructure to answer that question. We actually have a meeting with some folks in that area this afternoon. I believe it is, but I can't state that unequivocally. Just thinking of from where it is to where it is, yeah, I would believe so.

9:30

Mr. Ellis: Yeah. I only say that – obviously, given where we are and availability, usually leases are cheaper, thus lease costs could save you guys some money. I was just curious.

Mr. Hourihan: Yeah. That doesn't come out of our budget, our lease costs, so that's why I can't really answer that too much. I don't see those costs.

Mr. Ellis: Okay. Thank you very much.

Ms Richford: It's our understanding that it is cheaper just because we were the only government agency in the Canadian Western Bank building. The rent cost was what it was, and now we're going into the other building, which is less space. So I think there will be some reduced costs there.

Mr. Ellis: Well, thank you.

Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Ms Woollard.

Ms Woollard: Okay. Thank you. I was looking at the budget, and I see that you've reduced your advertising budget by over 50 per cent. What I'd like to know is: how will you decrease the advertising costs while ensuring that government agencies and the public are still kept well informed as to what your office does? How do you balance that?

Mr. Hourihan: The significant portion of the advertising where we're going to reduce is in the advertising that we do when we do our tours to rural Alberta, rural being anywhere in Alberta. Where we can reduce those is that we can do our best to try and get interviews with local newspapers, radio, television stations. Those

are public service announcements and that sort of thing. We've had some success with that, where we can get all of the advertising that we need to get out there through that means. As well, we can do it through the government departments internally. So we can reduce that way. It's not ideal; sometimes we do have to advertise in a newspaper to get it out so that people can focus on that and can call us for interviews and that sort of thing, but in most areas we can do without. I believe we can manage quite well in that regard.

Ms Woollard: Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Are there any other questions?

Ms Woollard: Absolutely, if I can go ahead.

The Chair: Ms Woollard.

Ms Woollard: All right. Many of our constituents are having to make the same decisions that the government has to when considering budget priorities, as you know, and how to balance wants and needs with the fiscal reality that our province is currently in. You've talked about the reduction in the mobile intake tours, but what we're wondering is: given the reduction in the budget and the fewer tours that you are doing, how much do you expect that to affect the mobile intake tours and the presentations that you do for interested groups in communities? Like, how much of an effect is that likely going to be having? What's the anticipated effect?

Mr. Hourihan: When we go and do these tours – it's interesting – normally speaking, after a tour our intake will increase somewhat. That lasts for a very little period of time, and then it goes back to normal. The difficulty in that, though, is kind of understanding what a peak is and what normal is because in a lot of the areas they won't have a lot of complaints per se. We don't have areas in the province where all of a sudden there's a particular problem in this jurisdiction or that, where we can go in and kind of address it. That would be different. It's more of a cross-section of complaints about a variety of different government services, but there's no real spike and no real trend other than that they have them. So we try and watch those, and we try and see where things trend up or trend down.

Now, we get more of that in places like Medicine Hat, Lethbridge, Red Deer area, where it's a bit bigger in terms of volume, but we don't have that many spikes. So I can't answer that particularly well. Our statistics don't show a large number of spikes. Where we think we can do a bit better job there in terms of financial implications is making sure that we can minimize our travel. We can try and do it in a very cost-effective way: minimized hotel rooms, minimized hours out, and that sort of thing. We think we can do that. Certainly, doing six of them instead of 12 has an impact on 50 per cent of the amount of places that we would like to go. Our main focus is investigation of individual complaints. That's our major focus. The other proactive work that we do, we do it as we can, and as we find efficiencies in the way we do things, we can increase the number of tours and that sort of thing and just keep being mindful of the costs. We think we can manage that, and we don't think it's going to be a large detraction from what we're doing; however, saying that, if I had the flexibility, I would do more.

Ms Woollard: Thank you.

The Chair: Seeing no more questions.

Thank you very much for your first presentation and members for your questions. Please proceed to the second one.

Mr. Hourihan: Okay. I'll turn over to the Public Interest Commissioner budget. This is going to be a very similar budget albeit shorter than the other one. I'm just going to start with a brief history of this office. The budget process for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner is also results based and is done with the Ombudsman budget to ensure consistency and efficiencies between the offices.

In 2013-14 we were given an annual budget of \$1.46 million, which contemplated eight employees. Six of those positions were to be operational – the office was just starting – and two were administrative and support. The Ombudsman office was expected to provide common services. In the first year we set up the office, and we hired eight personnel. We came under budget by \$302,000. Mind you, our year was only 10 months, and the budget was contemplated to be those 10 months, but we weren't sure where we would be. It wasn't particularly troublesome because we were just trying to establish ourselves and be mindful of what our benchmarks financially were.

In '14-15 we requested a reduced budget of \$1.274 million, or 12.7 per cent less than the year before. This was based on our estimates and complementary to our operational priorities. We managed well that year, and we came in \$84,000 under budget for the year.

In '15-16 we requested an operating budget of \$1.359 million, or an increase of \$85,000 over that '14-15 year. This was based on our projected needs and the increase that was anticipated, the 2 per cent and the 2.25 per cent across the board. The budget was not approved, and we received a budget of 2 per cent less than the '14-15, consistent with our other office and all the other offices. We received \$1.249 million for a budget.

Now just turning to an overview of the '15-16 year, the current year. What's not shown in the documents are the adjustments we made prior to the start of the fiscal year. Of course, facing a reduced budget, we looked at where we could reduce before we put something together. As a result of the review of our priorities and line items and making adjustments at the beginning of the year, we reduced professional development by 75 per cent, from \$15,000 down to \$3,000. We reduced travel from \$50,000 to \$10,000. We reduced our materials and supplies from \$60,000 to \$35,000.

From there we managed now throughout the year with a focus on reducing where possible, again, given the economic conditions here in Alberta. This included a reduction in salaries from \$796,000 to \$666,000. This was achieved as a result of a long-term absence as well as a communications vacancy, both without corresponding backfills.

With respect to supply and services we reduced the travel budget down from \$10,000 to \$5,000. This was possible as we contained the lion's share of our awareness activities to entities within Edmonton and Calgary, which is where the lion's share of the employees are that are under the jurisdiction of the Public Interest Commissioner. Fortunately, I guess, we didn't have any significant investigations that required travel outside of Calgary or Edmonton throughout this fiscal year.

We reduced advertising, insurance, and telephone and communications minimally. They are fairly consistent.

We reduced our contract services from \$273,000 to \$265,000.

We reduced the cost of technology services from \$60,000 to \$52,000 due to decreased costs in our case management system.

We reduced supplies from \$35,000 to \$17,000, and this is largely attributable to the elimination of a hard-copy annual report.

At this point I just want to explain why the amount in the contract services line is as high as it is. As I've described, we receive services from the Ombudsman office in the area of myself, corporate services, legal, and administrative positions. Similarly,

we provide services in the way of communications and one administrative position. I know it's all kind of confusing because we go back and forth with both offices, and I'm trying to explain both here today in reverse. Sorry. In the case of the services provided by the Ombudsman, this is shown as a contract service cost. This is why we have a high contract service budget of \$273,000. It's the pro-rated amount of 25 per cent for most positions shared, determined because 25 per cent of the total number of employees are in the Public Interest Commissioner office and 75 per cent are in the Ombudsman office.

The one exception is the legal position, which is split 50-50 with the Ombudsman office. The reason there is that the time our counsel spends on either office is equal. Although the Public Interest Commissioner office is smaller, it's newer, and there are many more legal implications of that act than there are with the Ombudsman Act, that has been in place for 48 and counting years. I'm sure that what's going on now with the Public Interest office isn't dissimilar to what was going on back then with lots of questions and legal inquiries and that sort of thing.

9:40

Similarly, where the communications and administrative costs are provided to the Ombudsman, these are shown as a recovery for shared services in this budget. In this case 15 per cent of our communications is shared with the Ombudsman office, and 75 per cent of one administrative position is paid by the Ombudsman office. This is done to accurately reflect what's occurring as compared to merely showing all these costs as salaried personnel costs. The Auditor General has approved the approach.

To summarize this current budget year and forecast, we're anticipating ending the year \$135,000 under budget in personnel costs and \$42,000 under budget in supply and services. This is offset by \$28,000 because of the reduced recovery in services as a result of the vacancies mentioned, so the overall result is a forecast of \$149,000 under budget.

Now turning to our budget request for the fiscal year '16-17, our estimates, I would turn now – again, this has two components, the year-over-year request and the one-time extraordinary expense of our forced relocation. Year over year we are requesting an overall budget of \$1.231 million, or \$18,000 less than last year, which is a reduction of 1.44 per cent. Some explanation is required. Overall personnel costs are anticipated to be 3 per cent lower, from \$987,000 to \$957,000. This takes into account the filling of the communications vacancy at a lower classification than was previously the case. You can see that we've also adjusted the employer contributions upward by \$9,000, from \$188,000 to \$197,000, and kept the professional development at \$3,000.

On the supply and services side of things we'll increase from \$383,000 to \$387,000, or just over 1 per cent. This does contemplate a reduction in travel of \$5,000, or 50 per cent, and the elimination of advertising for \$1,000.

Our insurance costs will be lower by half as will our telephone costs with the new contract, as I mentioned earlier.

There is an increase in contract services of \$34,000, from \$273,000 to \$307,000, due to the change from the legal costs being split at 50-50 instead of 75-25. As I said, the whistle-blower legislation being newer requires this focus from a legal perspective.

We'll decrease our spending substantially on materials and supplies, which we feel is accurate, from \$35,000 to \$13,000, or 63 per cent. We had a lot more front-end coverage in the first two years with different things like posters and brochures and that sort of thing that we've kind of levelled off now that give us a confidence in this area.

Also with the Public Interest office with respect to a capital budget, there's no need for one this year, which is also common.

Then turning finally to the extraordinary operating expense for our relocation, of the pro-rated amount of the \$100,000 that I mentioned in the Ombudsman presentation, 25 per cent would be borne by the Public Interest Commissioner office, or \$25,000. We've looked at our budget, and we believe that we can probably manage this within our budget as it exists and as I've presented right now, so we're not seeking \$25,000 extra for this but wanted to make sure that we're clear that the cost is probably somewhere in the range of \$100,000, and that's pro-rated between the two offices. So we do feel that it's there, but we feel that we can manage it within our budget request, as I've mentioned.

Overall, our request is for \$1.231 million, a reduction of \$18,000 from the current fiscal year.

That concludes that presentation, and with that I'm open to questions in respect of this office.

The Chair: Thank you. I will now open the floor to questions from the committee.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Good morning. I'm sure I speak for everybody on the committee when I say that I really appreciate the efforts that you have made to dramatically reduce the estimates for travel, advertising, and professional development in this year's budget. I was wondering if you could speak to any reallocation of priorities that you had to make in order to reduce potential costs to some of these.

Mr. Hourihan: We haven't had to reallocate any of our priorities, particularly on the Public Interest side. We thought we would be required to do more travel around the province and to some of the outlying areas where there are government entities, and that hasn't shown itself to be an issue. We can still certainly manage any presentation requests or investigation requests that we have outside the province at this time. We don't feel that that impacts – Ted, any comment on that?

Mr. Miles: I think the only real risk in the travel budget that we've had to put a lot of thought into is that if we had a significant investigation that occurred outside of Edmonton or Calgary, say in Fort McMurray or Medicine Hat, the \$5,000 – we would hard-pressed to meet that budget line with a significant event in one of those other outlying communities. To this point in time we have not had one of those significant events outside of Edmonton or Calgary that we've looked into.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Okay. Thanks.

The Chair: Any other questions?

Mr. van Dijken: Not necessarily a question but just a comment with regard to budgeting a relocation and handling that through the existing budget. I question the merit of that. What it might say to me is that the other line items aren't accurate. It makes me nervous when I look at a budget and there's going to be an impending cost and we don't have room for it necessarily. It's probably just the business in me that says: if there's going to be a cost, we should actually have a budget estimate there. Hopefully, it all works out well in that things fall into place for your office, but just from my standpoint I would encourage that if there's going to be an expense in a line item, it is actually expensed in that line item.

Mr. Hourihan: I appreciate that. What we're trying to do this year is to make sure that we're doing what we can to meet our mandate

and our priorities as well as this anticipated move. We've got some months ahead to be able to try and plan. We are trying to minimize whatever we can before year-end, but that's extremely difficult given that our needs are not going to be completely known. We do have extremely limited flexibility. I certainly appreciate what you're saying; however, that said, we looked at it and, under the current economic situation, felt that we'd be best off trying to do what we can to minimize that to the extent possible and probably would have removed it from a request in the sense that I could have taken that \$25,000 out and not discussed it. But I didn't want it to appear that the Ombudsman's office was going to be picking up a hundred per cent of the cost of the move.

I just wanted to make clear that we can manage some things within, with your point taken, and we've just got to make sure. That's why we try with our forecasting to make sure that, you know – well, I mean, we always try – our numbers are exact and revisited on a regular and ongoing basis throughout the year so we can minimize where possible.

The Chair: Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Thank you, Chair. Sort of following on from Mr. Ellis's comments with respect to savings and rent: do your rent costs currently get paid by Infrastructure?

Ms Richford: Yes.

Mr. Cooper: Okay. If that's the case and in the next year they're going to save 60,000 bucks in rent costs – or maybe it's 10,000, whatever the number is – particularly because they're forcing you to move, is there any reason why they wouldn't then be responsible for some of the additional costs of the move?

Mr. Hourihan: They're responsible for a significant amount of the cost for the move. For the most part they're paying for the move. They're going to pay for, like, any new cubicles. For example, we're moving from offices to cubicles in large part, so a lot of the furniture won't fit because it's not configured correctly. Any of the purchases they have to do there and any of the surplussing of what we have: they're responsible for all of those costs as well as all of the disposal and whatever it is they all do over there with that stuff. So they're responsible for that.

Like I said, the items that we have to pay for are the IT move – that's not included – which is about \$50,000 from what we anticipate, and then there are some purchases. I mentioned our video conferencing equipment. We're exploring that to make sure that we can get the most financially feasible system and one that works for what we do because we do have increased use of that area as well. So those are the costs that they don't cover, and we understand if there's no flexibility there.

Ms Richford: That's correct. Going forward in the next budget process, one thing that we will probably notice is a savings in our technology because the building that we're moving into is where all of our shared IT servers are, all of the hardware equipment is. We share our IT with the OCYA and with Ethics. So all we need to really have is just a very tiny server room with one piece of equipment, and we'll be able take advantage of the synergies of that. The majority of the cost that we have to pick up is truly just getting – Infrastructure will bring the cabling to the roof, and then there's all that work that has to be done to get it in there to the computers, et cetera.

9:50

Mr. Cooper: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Even though the Ombudsman and the Public Interest Commissioner are moving in together, into the space there, the entire remaining cost of the move is located in the Ombudsman's estimate. Could you please let us know the reason for allocating the cost of the upcoming office relocation entirely to the Ombudsman's budget rather than it being split or shared between the Ombudsman's and the Public Interest Commissioner's budgets separately?

Mr. Hourihan: It is split, and that's why I say – I was trying to demonstrate that. We split it 75-25, so really the cut there is that there are 33 people. A quarter of that is Public Interest Commissioner positions – those are eight – and the rest are Ombudsman. So 25-75 is the split for everything we do. We've discussed this at length with the Auditor General and their staff, and it's what makes the most sense. We've done that, and we've done the same thing for the cost of the relocation, our portion of the hundred thousand: 75 per cent to the Ombudsman; 25 per cent to the Public Interest Commissioner. Those are hard numbers. It's just that we feel that we can – of that hundred thousand, I guess, what we're saying is that about, whatever the number was, \$46,000 is the request on the Ombudsman side. The rest we can absorb within our budget.

Ms Richford: One of the reasons that – to the point about budgeting, if there's enough flex in our Public Interest Commissioner budget to absorb this \$25,000, we do have a couple of vacancies right now in the Public Interest Commissioner's office, so as Peter had mentioned before, if we delay the hiring of those positions, we certainly will have the dollars to cover the relocation.

Mr. Hourihan: That's true. One thing about that: when we say, "delay the hiring," sometimes that is by choice, and sometimes that's not particularly by choice; it's just by design. It takes a while to get people on staff and get them in place, and of course every month that we do that, we're talking about numbers here in the, you know, \$5,000, \$10,000 ranges. They can make significant differences with those vacancies. So we can manage fairly well there, and we want to paint a picture where we're doing the level best we can with the minimal amount of money that we have to manage affairs within but without compromising on our mandate and our priorities.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Okay. Thank you.

Ms Woollard: Okay. On page 5 of the strategic plan desired outcome 2 reads: "Enhanced Awareness of the Act and the Public Interest Commissioner." I'm just wondering: how does the budget support this goal, support helping the public be more aware, you know, enhancing the awareness of the act, and how do you plan to measure performance achievements of outcome 2? I just have some questions around that.

Mr. Hourihan: Do you want to talk about that, Ted?

Mr. Miles: I'll talk about that. One of the things is that our act does not apply to the general public. It applies to employees of the government, members of Alberta Health Services, and those type of entities, so the awareness is more contained in what we're trying to establish. We're working with our partners at AHS and within the government, the individual departments, to help raise awareness internally, so the costs are dramatically reduced in those kinds of circumstances.

As far as measuring if we're doing that, because we're such a very new office, when I'm out to make presentations to offices, one of the first things we do when we meet with employees is to determine how many people were really aware of the act prior to us advertising for the presentation. So we're doing sort of an independent audit at the front end of all these to determine the number of employees that are cognizant of the act. I think that eventually, down the road, as we move forward, we'd like to conduct some informal surveying of departments of the government and all those employees that the act involves as part of measuring that awareness component.

Ms Woollard: Okay. All right. Thank you. That wasn't really a budget question. I appreciate you answering it.

Mr. Hourihan: Just another aspect to that, too, is that because we deal with the government authorities that are under our jurisdiction – and there is an obligation on the authorities to make employees aware of the act and the processes and procedures that they have in place – we're working in that regard with designated officers as well to make sure that they get out there and do that awareness themselves. So it's sort of a double-edged approach to it, if you will.

Ms Woollard: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Hourihan, for your presentation and to your staff for coming in and answering our questions. For your information the committee's decisions on the office's budget will be sent out by the end of the week.

Mr. Hourihan: Thank you.

The Chair: And we'll take a five-minute break before we move on to our next topic.

[The committee adjourned from 9:56 a.m. to 10:01 a.m.]

The Chair: I've asked the committee clerk to provide some suggested draft motions for the committee's use during its deliberations to ensure that the committee has the correct wording and numbers for each budget estimate under consideration. The draft motions are on a separate document, which has been distributed to the members and sent to the member teleconferencing.

We're going to go in the order that it was presented to us. I'd suggest that we deal with the Chief Electoral Officer first. Would a member like to make a motion in this respect, and then I'll open up the floor to discussion.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: I'd like to make the motion, then. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2016-17 budget estimates for the office of the Chief Electoral Officer in the amount of \$5,668,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Any discussion or questions? Mr. Kleinsteuber.

Mr. Kleinsteuber: Thanks. I had a few points I would like to make here if I may. I just feel that we need to ensure that the office that oversees the monitoring of our democracy has the resources it needs to do the job well. The budget before us today I believe accomplishes that.

The Chair: I'll call the question. All in favour? On the phone? Opposed? The motion is carried unanimously.

Next are the estimates for the office of the Child and Youth Advocate. Would a member make a motion in this respect.

Mr. Connolly: I'd be happy to. Moved by myself that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2016-17 budget estimates of the office of the Child and Youth Advocate in the amount of \$13,242,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Any discussion?

Mr. Connolly: I'll say something. I just find that this budget is an excellent example of balance and restraint. They've moved around priorities and budget lines in order to ensure that the funds requested go directly back to fulfilling their mandate, supporting and advocating for Alberta's vulnerable youth. So I hope that all members of this committee will accept and support their budget.

The Chair: I'll call the question. All in favour? On the phones? The motion is carried unanimously.

Next are the estimates of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner. Would a member make a motion in this respect. MLA Sweet.

Ms Sweet: Thank you, Chair. I so move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2016-17 budget estimates of the office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner in the amount of \$6,857,391 as submitted.

To rationalize the motion, I just want to recognize that while there is a slight overall increase – the Privacy Commissioner has asked for an increase of 0.2 per cent – they've managed this increase by finding cost savings and reductions in most other areas. There is an increase in the line item for investigations and complaints. This increase means that the knowledge of the office is increasing and Albertans can be confident that their privacy and information is being well looked after. However, it is clear that efforts have been made to reduce budget estimates in areas such as travel and professional development in order to reallocate this money to areas that directly support their mandate and benefit all Albertans.

The Chair: I will call the question. All in favour? On the phone? The motion is carried unanimously.

Next are the estimates of the office of the Ethics Commissioner. Would a member like to make a motion in this respect. Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Ellis: Thank you. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2016-17 budget estimates of the office of the Ethics Commissioner in the amount of \$1,130,000 as submitted.

Thank you.

The Chair: Any discussion? Mr. Shepherd.

Mr. Shepherd: Yeah. I just want to note for the record that I think, obviously, the office of the Ethics Commissioner is vital to ensuring that our public officials are held to account, very important. We did see that she made some fantastic efforts towards savings. She's reinvesting and sort of working within her means very well. The budget we're voting on is a 2.04 per cent reduction over last year. I think they're showing great responsibility. So, yeah, I support the motion.

The Chair: I will call the question on the motion respecting the 2016-17 budget estimates of the office of the Ethics Commissioner. All in favour? On the phone? The motion is carried unanimously.

We are now on the estimates for the office of the Auditor General. Mr. Cooper.

Mr. Cooper: Yeah. Thank you, Chair. I'd like to move a motion that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2016-17 budget estimates of the office of the Auditor General in the amount of \$26,754,000 as submitted.

As we learned yesterday, the Auditor General has done a fantastic job over the last number of years in both showing restraint in the size of his office as well as working within the parameters of the budget that he has. They continue to provide a superior service, that leads much about what government does. They have found significant areas of savings both inside their office and, as a result of many of their reports, outside of their office and in other government areas. The Auditor General mentioned that expanding their budget may not be helpful as only a certain number of recommendations can be responded to, which I found quite interesting yesterday. I fully support the total sum that was requested. I think that their office and the Auditor General in particular do a fantastic job.

Mr. Shepherd: I was particularly impressed with the business plan and the budget that were brought forward by the Auditor General: the clarity, the innovation that they're showing in their office, and particularly their planning for long-term objectives. They have a great vision for the office. I was very happy that we were able to extend the term for the Auditor General. As Mr. Cooper has noted, they've shown great restraint, they've shown a strong ability to reallocate resources, to shift priorities. I think they provide great value to the people of Alberta. They're setting an excellent example. So I support this motion.

10:10

The Chair: Mr. Nixon.

Mr. Nixon: Well, thank you, Chair. Just to echo some of those comments, I think that not only the Auditor General but all our legislative officers in general came showing great restraint given the economic times, a lot of leadership in that situation to be able to get their budgets in in a manageable way while recognizing the significant economic downturn that we're facing in this province. I'd just like to say on the record that I certainly hope the government and in particular ministers are paying attention to that leadership and have the courage to follow that leadership as we go forward.

The Chair: I will call the question on the motion respecting the 2016-17 budget estimates of the office of the Auditor General. All in favour? On the phone? The motion is passed unanimously.

Next is the office of the Ombudsman. Ms Woollard.

Ms Woollard: All right. I move that the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2016-17 budget estimates of the office of the Ombudsman in the amount of \$3,328,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Any discussion?

Ms Woollard: Just to mention that while the budget before us asks for an increase of 1.4 per cent, I'm confident that the officer has taken every possible opportunity to save dollars where possible. The budget increase is directly offset by the reduction in the Public Interest Commissioner's budget decrease of the same amount, so effectively they are producing a budget estimate with a zero per cent increase over the two offices over the next year. I think it's really important that they have found the reductions that they have and have been doing the cost-cutting that they have.

The Chair: I will call the question. All in favour? On the phone? The motion is passed unanimously.

The final estimates for the committee's consideration are for the office of the Public Interest Commissioner.

Ms Woollard: That one as well goes with the Ombudsman one. I move that

the Standing Committee on Legislative Offices approve the 2016-17 budget estimates of the office of the Public Interest Commissioner in the amount of \$1,231,000 as submitted.

The Chair: Discussion?

Ms Woollard: As kind of said before with the Ombudsman's office, I'm pleased to see that they have taken every effort to find

savings in their budget. They've got the 1.144 per cent decrease over last year, and they've done a really good job of curtailing spending.

The Chair: Thank you.

All in favour? On the phone? The motion is carried unanimously. Are there any other items for discussion?

Mr. Cooper: Motion to adjourn.

The Chair: Motion to adjourn by Mr. Cooper. All in favour?

[The committee adjourned at 10:13 a.m.]

