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Office of the Auditor General

Nova Scotia

AUDITOR GENERAL--Performance Audit Report Released

Auditor General Michael Pickup issued his 2018 performance audit report today, May 29. The report contains three chapters of audit results.

Chapter one: Grant Programs: The auditor general examined management of approximately \$45 million in various grant programs at the departments of Agriculture, Communities, Culture and Heritage and Natural Resources. The key conclusions are:

- overall, the departments followed their policies in the awarding and payment of grants
- the departments have work to do to better manage risks to operating effective programs including how grants are designed and set up
- the departments need to better set expectations to be clear on what programs are meant to achieve and then measure actual results against those plans

“While controls over the \$45 million in grants operated reasonably well, departments need to better outline what these expenditures are meant to achieve. This will allow a meaningful comparison of results for money spent against expectations,” said Mr. Pickup.

Chapter two: Correctional Facilities: This audit examined how the Department of Justice manages risks to safety and security of around 500 offenders and nearly 600 staff in the four adult correctional facilities. The key conclusions are:

- the department does not have a comprehensive risk management approach to managing safety and security risks to those living in, working at, or visiting the four adult correctional facilities
- at times, the department’s policies and practices were not followed. For example, approvals for close confinement were not always in offender files-
- there were weaknesses in both the hiring processes and with ongoing training. For example, staff were hired without criminal record checks and required training such as Understanding and Responding to Mental Illness was not always taken.

“Nova Scotians count on the Department of Justice to appropriately manage safety and security risks at the four adult correctional facilities,” said Mr. Pickup. “This audit found the department has work to do to demonstrate it is doing that. It should act quickly to address the shortcomings in key areas including its staffing practices.”

Chapter three: Maintenance Enforcement Program: This audit examined whether court orders for spousal and child support payments, including almost \$55 million collected in 2017-18 and over \$60 million in unpaid amounts which have accrued over the lifetime of the program, are monitored and enforced adequately. The key conclusions are:

- the program’s move to New Waterford in 2013 caused serious staffing losses and challenges, including a reduction in overall enforcement efforts in the years following the move



--the program did not enforce court orders as it should. Weaknesses include taking too long to act and failing to take additional enforcement actions which were available
-- the program had weaknesses in human resources practices. This included no standard orientation process for new staff, no training plan to guide staff in fulfilling their duties, and no annual performance plans or evaluations.

“The Maintenance Enforcement Program has faced significant challenges in collecting amounts owed and in 2017 over \$60 million remained unpaid from court ordered payments,” said Mr. Pickup.
“Weaknesses noted in our audit should be addressed quickly as the program strives to more effectively manage getting money in the hands of recipients as ordered by the courts.”

The report contains a total of 24 recommendations which have all been accepted by government.

The full report, along with a short summary and two-minute video for each of the three chapters, is available at www.oag-ns.ca.

FOR BROADCAST USE:

Auditor General Michael Pickup reported today (May 29th) on his performance audit work with three separate chapters on grant programs, correctional facilities and the maintenance enforcement program.

In the report, he says although the departments of Agriculture, Communities, Culture and Heritage; and Natural Resources awarded grants properly they did not set up their grant programs to clearly see if the money spent had successful results. Overall, he found key elements in the design of grant programs were lacking.

Mr. Pickup found the Department of Justice’s management of risks to safety and security in adult correctional facilities had significant weaknesses, such as lack of a comprehensive risk-based approach, policies and procedures not always followed and staff training not completed or up-to-date.

He also found that the Maintenance Enforcement Program was not adequately monitoring and enforcing court orders, taking too long between enforcement actions or not taking other steps when initial efforts were unsuccessful.

The full report and videos are available on the auditor general’s website.

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