

UKOTP OVERSIGHT OF PUBLIC FINANCES & GOVERNANCE - LONDON FORUM **2019**

Representatives from Public Accounts Committees and Auditors from Overseas Territories (OTs) met in London in December 2019, as part of their commitment to work together to improve the oversight of public finances. This was the third and final forum funded under the FCO's CSSF Programme to explore public financial oversight and good governance under the banner of the UK Overseas Territories Project.

The Forum was attended by Chairpersons of Public Accounts Committees (PAC), parliamentary clerks, and Heads of Internal and External Audit from Anguilla, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Pitcairn Islands, St Helena, Turks & Caicos Islands, the UK, and Virgin Islands (UK).

The St Helena delegation comprised PAC Chairman, Cyril Gunnell, PAC Clerk, Anita Legg, Chief Auditor, Phil Sharman, and Head of Internal Audit and Risk, Anesu Happyman Makamure.

It was a final opportunity to explore progress in OTs to date, address some of the ongoing challenges faced by PACs, Internal and External Audit agencies and identify ways in which the UK and OTs can continue to work together beyond the end of the project to ensure long-lasting impact. And it was also an opportunity for the newly established Internal and External Audit Leadership Groups to meet. This built on established relationships and encouraged continuing development.

Day One Highlights

The London Forum, which ran from 9-11 December 2019, took place in Convocation Hall, Church House. It opened Monday, 9 December, with a contribution from Rt Hon. Baroness D'Souza who stressed the importance of accountability as the bedrock of all societies. She also highlighted the role that networks - such as the UK Overseas Territories Project - have in helping create regional standards of excellence.

Delegates heard from Director of Parliamentary Relations at the UK National Audit Office (NAO), Adrian Jenner, and PAC Clerk in the National Assembly for Wales, Fay Bowen, They shared information on what makes for effective oversight of public finances.

Alec Steel from the Operations Management Team at the NAO led a session on managing organisational improvement, giving delegates an opportunity to explore challenges they face in the OTs and possible solutions.

In the afternoon delegates explored risk management and decision making with Risk & Assurance Director at the Government Finance Function, Mark Ripley. Day One ended with a workshop with Communications Specialist, Kate Faragher, on effectively communicating with colleagues and stakeholders and writing reports.

Afterwards delegates headed for the Houses of Parliament where a welcome reception was held in the CPA Room with welcome remarks by CPA UK Chief Executive, Jon Davis.



Day Two Highlights

Day Two of the Forum began with PAC members and clerks alongside external auditors exploring the relationship between parliamentary scrutiny and external audit functions. Led by Clerk to the Welsh Assembly PAC, Fay Bowen, and Clerk to the Tynwald PAC, Jo Corkish, the session was an opportunity for delegates to explore in detail how the two oversight functions collaborate.

Meanwhile, internal auditors heard from Chief Professional Practices Advisor, Liz Sandwith, at the Institute of Internal Auditors, about 'Risk in Focus' research that was identifying priority risk areas for internal audit. This was followed by a session with Diana Melville from CIPFA, who led a discussion about the recent CIPFA Statement on the Role of the Head of Internal Audit.

Senior Clerk in the House of Commons, Stephen McGinness, and PAC Chair in the Bermuda Parliament, Patricia Gordon-Pamplin MP, led parliamentary colleagues in a discussion on what makes for an effective PAC. The conversation covered challenges faced in small Territories and how to create consensus around the remit of a PAC that transcends party politics. Larry Honeysett from the House of Commons Scrutiny Unit then led a practical session on understanding financial information.

Internal auditors heard from Jim Phillips and Chris Wobschall from the GIAA about assurance mapping and the role of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee. This was

followed by a meeting of the Internal Audit Leadership Group led by its Chair, Andy Bonner, Director of Internal Audit in the Cayman Islands.

At the NAO Headquarters, external auditors looked at future auditing standard changes and implementation. There was also the meeting of the External Audit Leadership Group, which explored how to continue working together to encourage ongoing development and improvement.

Day Two ended with a session on PAC media engagement with communications specialists from CPA UK and the House of Commons, followed by a roundtable discussion on updating the Good Practice Guide for UK Overseas Territories with NAO Parliamentary Relations Manager, Linda Mills.

Day Three Highlights

Day Three saw the conclusion of the UKOTP Oversight of Public Finances & Governance - London Forum. It began with PAC members and clerks preparing for an evidence hearing, including coming up with Terms of Reference. Internal and external auditors had an opportunity to discuss challenges they face in the Overseas Territories as well as possible ways forward.

PAC members and clerks then took part in the evidence session. Drawing on a real case study of a major building project, PAC members and clerks questioned witnesses and came up with recommendations with input and assistance from external auditors.

In the afternoon, PAC members and clerks had an opportunity to hone their messaging around the outcomes of the hearing and face questions in a mock press conference. Meanwhile, external auditors discussed technical updates in performance audit with Andy Fisher and Sarah Rollinson from the NAO.

Internal auditors heard from Senior Internal Audit Manager at the GIAA, Julie Kitchin,, about annual planning, comparing methods between the UK and Overseas Territories.

A discussion followed between all delegates around the Good Practice Guide which is a resource for OTs on public financial management. Members of PAC, internal and external audit all gave their feedback around the resource and how it could be updated.

The Forum closed on Wednesday, 11 December, with further discussions around the scope for future work under the banner of the UK Overseas Territories Project led by CPA UK Chief Executive, Jon Davies, and Monitoring & Evaluations Manager, Matthew Hamilton. Delegates highlighted where the project had been effective as well as what they hoped to achieve in their oversight and scrutiny functions in the upcoming years.

Cyril Gunnell
Chairman, St Helena Public Accounts Committee
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