Report on the 2017 Westminster Workshop for Public Accounts Committees

Office of Mr Dean Nalder MLA
Member for Bateman
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Introduction

The 2017 Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Westminster Workshop for Public Accounts Committees was held in Westminster, London from the 4th of December to the 7th of December, 2017. The main aim of this workshop was to promote tax transparency, prevent tax avoidance and to examine governments spending of public money.

The 2017 Westminster Workshop followed on from a series of programs designed to strengthen Public Accounts Committees (PACs) in Commonwealth countries that aimed at examining public spending to ensure taxpayers’ money is being spent effectively and efficiently.

The 2017 Westminster Workshop brought together over 60 chairs, members and clerks of Public Accounts Committees representing Commonwealth countries from across the globe to present valuable and practical skills-based workshops aimed at further building on knowledge. Throughout the 17 structured sessions, Commonwealth Parliamentarians and committee clerks had the opportunity to hear from various distinguished speakers, while the schedule gave them opportunity to interact and network with one another so they could learn and understand firsthand how other countries were handling situations they were facing.

I believe this workshop was highly beneficial for all in attendance, and I would recommend future participation for parliamentarians wishing to further develop their knowledge and understanding of the promotion of tax transparency and strengthening tax policies and frameworks, along with further enhancing their media strategy and engagement skills.
Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

The Aims, Objectives and Outcomes of the 2017 Westminster Workshop for Public Accounts Committees was outlined by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK as follows:

**Aim**

The aim of the Workshop is to build the skills and capacity of selected Chairs, Members and Clerks of Commonwealth PACs to fulfil their remit to scrutinise the value for money of public spending and to hold governments to account for the delivery of public services.

**Objectives**

1. Provide training for Commonwealth PAC Chairs, Members and Clerks to develop key skills, knowledge and build confidence.
2. Facilitate continued peer support, knowledge exchange and learning through an active network of Commonwealth PACs and access to expert resources.
3. Grow the knowledge and expertise of parliamentarians and clerks in promoting tax transparency, preventing tax avoidance and encourage country by country reporting in all legislatures.

**Outcomes**

1. A scoping exercise with Commonwealth PACs will inform the development of the 2017 Westminster Workshop Programme.
2. The 2017 Westminster Workshop will be developed and delivered in partnership with the UK PAC and will take place over three days. It will be a targeted, interactive skills based activity, with concurrent tailored sessions for PAC Chairs, Members, Clerks and PACs in small legislatures.
3. CPA UK will partner with the OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration to deliver expert sessions for parliamentarians on tax transparency as part of the 2017 Westminster Workshop.
4. A peer support and learning network will be established at the 2017 Westminster Workshop as part of CAPAC.
5. A full project report detailing discussions and outcomes from the Workshop and other project activities will be produced and made available to all participants and more widely online following the Workshop.
Attendees

Sixty-one skilled delegates representing 21 parliaments were in attendance at the 2017 Westminster Workshop for Public Accounts Committees. This was complimented with 31 contributors who gave presentations across the workshop. Having a large, yet still intimate, gathering of so many esteemed delegates and contributors provided the opportunity to learn about different processes and hear a large number of thoughts and opinions.

The delegates from Australia included myself, as the Deputy Chair of the Public Accounts Committee; Hon Alanna Clohesy MLC, Member for East Metropolitan Region, Western Australia; Mr Tim Hughes, Principal Research Officer for the Public Accounts Committee, Western Australia; Hon Bruce Notley-Smith MP, Member for Coogee, New South Wales; Hon Greg Piper MP, Member for Lake Macquarie, New South Wales; Mr Bjarne Nordin, Clerk to the Joint Standing Committee, New South Wales.

(Please see Appendix 1 for full list of delegates and Appendix 2 for full list of contributors)
Workshop Overview

An overview of the 2017 Westminster Workshop for Public Accounts Committees has been set out below.

Day 1 – Monday, 4 December 2017
Role, Remit & Effectiveness

Welcome and Introductions

Speakers:

- Jon Davies, Chief Executive, CPA UK
- Dr Roberta Blackman-Woods MP (Lab), House of Commons, UK

This was a background introduction to the workshop hosted by the Chief Executive from the CPA UK and a MP from the House of Commons. The workshop’s structure and aims, objectives and outcomes were discussed during this introduction.

Keynote Address: The Learning Committee

Speaker:

- Rt Hon Dame Margaret Hodge MP (Lab), House of Commons, UK

The keynote address by the former Chair of the UK PAC, the Rt Hon Dame Margaret Hodge, was very insightful. She spoke about her former role and the reforms she instituted, as well as expressing the importance of PACs for overseeing the correct appropriation of public finances. Her address was summarised by reminding all the delegates in attendance to never ‘underestimate the power you have on a PAC’.

Session 1: What makes an Effective PAC?

Speakers:

- Helen Foster, Lecturer in Accounting, Ulster University
- Tim Bowden, Media Officer, Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, UK
- Hon Wavel Ramkalawan MP, Leader of the Opposition and Chair, Finance & Public Accounts Committee, Seychelles

This session gave an overview of what characterised an effective PAC, and how that was most beneficial. We heard from speakers about different topics, such as using social media to spread messages and information regarding committee’s work to the community, and how important bipartisanship is in being an effective committee. Ms Foster also gave a very interesting briefing on her research regarding the functionality of PACs.
Session 2: Committee Governance and Structure

Speakers:
- Paul Evans, Clerk of Committees, House of Commons, UK
- Steven McGinness, Clerk, Journal Office, House of Commons, UK
- Hon Akierra Missick MP, Chair, Public Accounts Committee, Turks and Caicos Island

This main focus of this session was on the frameworks and structures that underpin Public Accounts Committees. The speakers discussed the importance of collaborations within PACs and there was also an insightful look at holding Government to account through the use of PAC.

Session 3: Case Study – Commonwealth PACs in Action

Speakers:
- Hon Kevin Sorenson MP, Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Canada
- Hon Kofi Okyere Agyekum MP, Ranking Member, Public Accounts Committee, Ghana
- Hon Dr Muhiuddin Khan Alamgir MP, Chair, Public Accounts Committee, Bangladesh

The three speakers, representing PACs from Canada, Ghana and Bangladesh, gave excellent accounts of their experiences on PACs in their respective countries. They spoke about inquiries they had covered and gave examples of innovations that they had learnt along the way. This gave all the delegates in attendance the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences in their PACs and see if there were best practice principles they could adopt in their own committees.

Session 4: Conversation – Allies and Partners – The Supreme Audit Institution (SAI)

Facilitator:
- Shabana Mahmood MP (Lab), Member, UK Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, UK

Speakers:
- Linda Mills, Parliamentary Relations Manager, National Audit Office, UK
- Karen McConnell, Comptroller and Auditor General, Jersey Audit Office

The final session for the day, facilitated by Shabana Mahmood MP, was very informative in explaining the work of the Supreme Audit Institution and how it worked with PACs. A very interesting presentation was delivered by the two guest speakers from their experiences in the positions they hold.
Day 2 – Tuesday, 5 December 2017
Inquiries, Independence & Transparency

Session 5: Working Cross-Party
Speakers:
- Richard Bacon MP, (Con), Public Accounts Commission, UK
- Rt Hon Caroline Flint MP, (Lab), Member, Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, UK

The first session of Day two was an in depth discussion relating to the pressures faced by PACs. The esteemed speakers spoke about working cross-party and all the benefits that surrounded it. The obvious consensus among the delegates was that working cross-party, and working with consensus, delivers stronger reports.

Training Session 6: Effective Questions
Facilitator:
- Kate Faragher, BeSpoke Skills

The Effective Questions session was an interactive session that gave PAC chairs and members the opportunity to further enhance their questioning skills used in committees, when questioning witnesses, to achieve more useful and effective responses. This session was a hands on session that also further helped members hone their communication skills effectively to deliver their message. It was very worthwhile and came highly recommended.

Session 7: Tax Transparency Workshop
Speakers:
- Joseph Stead, Senior Policy Analyst, Tax and Development, OECD
- Laura Stefanelli, Advisor, BEPS and Developing Countries, OECD
- Jason Braganza, Deputy Executive Director, Tax Justice Network, Africa

The three speakers, two representing the OECD and one from the Tax Justice Network, spoke on a number of issues regarding tax transparency and why it mattered, especially on an international level. This session also included discussions around tax evasion and tax avoidance. The speakers also discussed how members could hold governments to account on tax evasion and avoidance to help create a better international tax system.
Session 8: Tax Incentives

Speakers:
- Joseph Stead, Senior Policy Analyst, Tax and Development, OECD
- Jason Braganza, Deputy Executive Director, Tax Justice Network, Africa

Delegates were then split into two sessions to look at the next steps in implementing the tax transparency agenda. A very interesting presentation by Joseph Stead, from the OECD, and Jason Braganza, from the Tax Justice Network, saw delegates look at the challenges that PACs face, and approaches they can take, to improve tax incentives in their respective countries.

Session 9: Tax Transparency – Call to Action

Speakers:
- Joseph Stead, Senior Policy Analyst, Tax and Development, OECD
- Laura Stefanelli, Advisor, BEPS and Developing Countries, OECD
- Jason Braganza, Deputy Executive Director, Tax Justice Network, Africa
- Duncan Onduru, Executive Director, Commonwealth Association of Tax Administrators

The four respected speakers gave a very practical and insightful presentation on how PACs can engage on tax, while also making a meaningful contribution. They also discussed the potential impacts on the role of national parliaments. It was then great to then receive information on international initiatives and resources available to support PACs in this area.

Session 10: Ask an Expert

The final session of the day gave delegates the opportunity to discuss OECD transparency frameworks in more detail, with experts from the OECD Centre for Tax Policy. I believe this session was highly beneficial to all the delegates that attended.
Session 11: Using Social Media

Speakers:

- Alanah Donnell, Deputy Director, Communications and Engagement at the Government Digital Service, UK

The first half of the final day of the Westminster Workshop for Public Accounts Committees was about media engagement training. This had a focus on both traditional media engagement and social media engagement. This first session of the day was excellent in assisting delegates with social media engagement for PACs. It offered delegates practical advice and guidelines to enhance their interactions with the public through social media.

Session 12: Media Training – Chairs and Members

Speakers:

- Tim Bowden, Media Officer, Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, UK

Tim Bowden spoke extensively during this session on his experiences as the Media Officer for the UK PAC. Through this we were given practical guidance on responding to the media, preparing for interviews and promoting PAC reports.

Session 13: Case Study – PACs in the Press

Speakers:

- Tim Bowden, Media Officer, Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, UK

As a continuation from the previous session, the speaker presented a practical example of effective media strategy. The case study used was of the UK PACs St Helena Airport inquiry. It was very interesting to see how another PAC from a different country interacted with the media effectively. There were points discussed that I am keen to see implemented in Western Australia.

Session 14: PACs and the Sustainable Development Goals

Speakers:

- Hon Aseri Radrodro MP, Member, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Parliament of the Republic of Fiji
- Mateo Lagimiri, Committee Clerk, Standing Committee on Public Accounts, Parliament of the Republic of Fiji
This session looked at how Sustainable Development Goals are met and what role PACs play in ensuring that they are. The speakers from the Republic of Fiji shared their experiences and facilitated discussions around how PACs can hold Governments to account to ensure Sustainable Development Goals are indeed met.

**Session 15: Engaging the Public**

Speakers:

- Robert Baldry, *Senior Engagement Officer (Select Committees), House of Commons, UK*
- Clare Cozens, *Second Clerk, Exiting the EU Committee, House of Commons, UK*

Both key speakers, from the House of Commons, spoke about the different methods they use to engage with the public. Examples of this included making visits to UK regions to promote political engagement with students and highlighting significant events held by PACs. The common consensus amongst the delegates in attendance was that the most effective PACs were ones that were open and transparent as they promoted public trust.

**Session 16: UK Public Accounts Committee Hearing**

The workshop concluded with the opportunity to observe a UK Public Accounts Committee evidence session. Delegates then had unique access to meet and engage with the PAC Chair and Members following the session.

**Session 17: Feedback and Reflection**

Delegates reflected on their experiences over the workshop and discussed interesting things they had learnt, and what they planned to do when they returned to their Parliaments and Committees.
### Appendix 1: Delegate List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Delegate/Official</th>
<th>Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>AUSTRALIA, NEW SOUTH WALES</td>
<td>Hon. Bruce Notley-Smith MP</td>
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<td>AUSTRALIA, NEW SOUTH WALES</td>
<td>Hon. Greg Piper MP</td>
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<td>AUSTRALIA, WESTERN AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>Bjarme Nordin</td>
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<td>AUSTRALIA, WESTERN AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>Hon. Alanna Clothsey MLC</td>
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<td>AUSTRALIA, WESTERN AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>Hon. Dean Nalder MLA</td>
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<td>AUSTRALIA, WESTERN AUSTRALIA</td>
<td>Tim Hughes</td>
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<td>BANGLADESH</td>
<td>Hon. Navana Akter</td>
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<td>BANGLADESH</td>
<td>Hon. Dr Muhiddin Khan Alamgir MP</td>
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<td>Mohammad Jahirul Islam</td>
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<td>Hon. David Christopherson MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Kevin Sorenson MP</td>
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<td>Michel Marcotte</td>
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<td>Hon. Daniel McNeely MLA</td>
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<td>Hon. Kieron Testar MLA</td>
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<td>Hon. Ashneel Sudhakar MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Mohamed Irfaan Ali MP</td>
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<td>HONG KONG (SAR)</td>
<td>Hon. Tanya Chan MLC</td>
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<td>Hon. Sebastien Pillay MP</td>
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<td>Godfra Hermitte</td>
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<td>Hon. Francis Amara Konuwa MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Lahai Marah MP</td>
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<td>Hon. Cyril Gunnell MLC</td>
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<td>Hon. Mark Yon MLC</td>
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<td>Anita Legg</td>
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<td>Hon. Reece Chipman MP</td>
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<td>TURKS AND CAICOS</td>
<td>Hon. Akierra Missick MP</td>
<td>Parliamentarian</td>
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<td>ZAMBIA</td>
<td>Hon. Alexander Chiteme MP</td>
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<td>ZAMBIA</td>
<td>Christabel Tawanda Malowa</td>
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Robert Baldry
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Richard Cooke
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Jon Davies
Sarah Davies
Anneliese Dodds MP
Alanah Donnell
Paul Evans
Kate Faragher
Rt Hon. Caroline Flint MP
Helen Foster
Rt Hon. Lord Fowler
Meg Hillier MP
Rt Hon. Dame Margaret Hodge MP
Mark Jenner
Shabana Mahmood MP
Karen McConnell
Stephen McGinness
Linda Mills
Jessica Mulley
Duncan Onduru
Grace Perez-Navarro
Toby Quantrill
Joseph Stead
Laura Stefanelli
Hon. Juan Watterson SHK

Member, Public Accounts Commission, UK
Senior Engagement Officer (Select Committees), House of Commons, UK
Treasurer, CPA UK Executive Committee
Media Officer, Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, UK
Deputy Executive Director, Tax Justice Network, Africa
Member, Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, UK
Clerk, Public Accounts Committee, UK
Second Clerk, Committee for Exiting the EU, House of Commons, UK
Chief Executive, CPA UK
Principal Clerk, Committee Office, House of Commons, UK
Shadow Treasury Minister
Deputy Director, Communications & Engagement – Government Digital Service
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Lecturer in Accounting, Ulster University
Lord Speaker, House of Lords, UK
Chair, Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, UK
House of Commons, UK
Media Relations Manager, House of Commons, UK
Member, Public Accounts Committee, House of Commons, UK
Comptroller & Auditor General, Jersey Audit Office
Clerk, Journal Office, House of Commons, UK
Parliamentary Relations Manager, National Audit Office, UK
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Executive Director, Commonwealth Association of Tax Administration
Deputy Director, OECD Centre for Tax Policy and Administration
Principal Economic Justice Advisor, Christian Aid
Senior Policy Analyst, Tax and Development, OECD
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