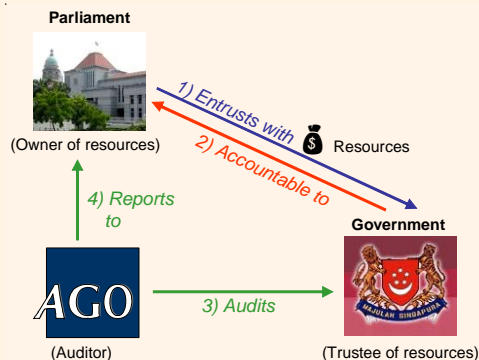


Public Accountability - The Principle -

"The Cabinet is accountable to Parliament, it is accountable to all Singaporeans."

Prime Minister, Mr Lee Hsien Loong
Parliament debate on Civil Service salary revisions, 11 Apr 2007

When a person is entrusted to hold, use or dispose off resources not belonging to him, he must be held fully answerable to the owner of the resources for what he does with them. This is the principle of accountability. To help in the accountability process, the owner of the resources will often appoint auditors to check and report on how the resources are accounted for and used. In line with this principle, the Government is accountable for the billions of dollars of public funds it has been entrusted with by Parliament who represents the people of Singapore.



The Government, as trustee, has to show the people that it has accounted for the funds and resources properly, and has used them in accordance with the wishes of Parliament, efficiently and effectively, without wastage or extravagance. The Auditor-General in Singapore audits the Government ministries and statutory boards, and reports to Parliament through the President.

Public Accountability - The Key Institutions -

PARLIAMENT

Parliament which is elected by the people plays the key role in getting the Government to account.

They can do this at every sitting of Parliament, but it is during the budget debates before the beginning of each financial year when the most attention is focused on the Government's accountability for public funds.

During these sessions, Government's broad policies and proposals to tax and spend are questioned. The Government is compelled to account as, otherwise, its proposed budget will not be approved.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

At the end of the financial year, the scrutiny of the audited Government Financial Statements (GFS) is delegated by Parliament to a small Parliamentary Committee called the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Its duties are to:

- examine the GFS and accounts of other public bodies laid before Parliament;
- review the report of the AG;
- conduct inquiries into selected issues; and
- report to Parliament its findings, conclusions and recommendations.

"The PAC stands ever prepared to question and probe Ministries and Statutory Boards on internal controls, processes and outcomes because of our firm conviction that the government, as steward, owes a responsibility to ensure that public funds are put to good use at all times."

PAC Chairman, Mr Cedric Foo, 11th Parliament

THE AUDITOR-GENERAL



To help the Parliament in calling the Government to account, the Auditor-General (AG) will audit ministries and statutory boards to ensure that (a) public funds are accounted for and used effectively, efficiently and economically; and (b) all related laws are complied with.

At the end of the audit, the AG will report on the GFS and his observations on the internal controls and areas where due regard is not given by ministries and statutory boards.

This report is submitted to Parliament through the President. The report will be made public once it is tabled in Parliament and will be deliberated by the PAC.

To ensure that the AG can carry out his audits without fear or favour, there are provisions in the Constitution which protect his independence. His duties and responsibilities (including the audit scope and coverage) are also spelt out in the Constitution and the Audit Act.

"The Government relies on audits that are regularly and properly carried out to identify shortcomings and areas for improvement while heads of agencies have clear responsibilities to see through follow-up actions... The public can be reassured that the Auditor-General's findings, in this and previous years, are carefully reviewed and acted upon."

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Finance,
Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Parliament reply on addressing lapses in the Auditor-General's Report, 4 Aug 2014

Public Accountability - The Full Cycle -

The Government is called to account to Parliament before, during and after each financial year.

Before the Financial Year

- The Government presents its proposed budget to Parliament for approval. Parliament uses these Budget sessions to question the Government on its proposals and get it to account for its work.



During the Financial Year

- Parliament uses Parliamentary sittings during the year to call the Government to account when it seeks parliamentary approval to increase the Budget.
- The AG conducts his audit on the Government.



After the Financial Year

- The Government (including statutory boards) presents its financial statements showing the results of its financial operations in the preceding year.
- The AG also submits his audit report on these financial statements and other findings to Parliament through the President.
- The documents are referred to the PAC for closer examination.
- The PAC submits its report to Parliament on its deliberations and recommendations.

"...the Cabinet shall have the general direction and control of the Government and shall be collectively responsible to Parliament."

Article 24(2) of the Constitution of the Republic of Singapore



Public Accountability



Auditor-General's Office
Singapore

Auditing for the Nation