Effectiveness of Citizen Police Oversight

Objective

Our objective was to determine whether the Austin Police Department implemented changes to policies and practices as recommended by the Citizen Review Panel.

What We Found

Citizen oversight did not create substantive change within the Austin Police Department, largely due to the effects of City procedures and police department practices. We identified five causes why oversight was not more effective, including:

- City policies prevented the CRP from communicating directly with the Chief of Police, which may have affected the integrity of the oversight;
- The City did not establish clear responsibility for maintaining CRP recommendations, which resulted in an incomplete list of recommendations and limited the CRP's ability to identify trends or review past activities;
- There was generally a significant gap between the date an incident occurred and when the CRP heard an APD presentation of the case, which limited the CRP's ability to issue effective and timely recommendations;
- Incomplete or unavailable information at CRP meetings may have affected the CRP's understanding of an incident and their recommendations; and
- The Chief of Police was not required to respond to CRP recommendations, which seems to have resulted in the CRP issuing repeat recommendations.

Additionally, information created by the Citizen Review Panel was not fully protected or retained because the City did not provide adequate resources and training to panelists.

What We Recommend

Since the CRP is currently not operating, we recommend that the City Manager pursue opportunities for citizen oversight in the future, including:

- Establishing clear responsibilities to ensure that records are maintained, cases are heard in a timely manner, and the Chief of Police responds to recommendations from a City-designated citizen oversight body;
- Ensuring that administrative procedures governing the citizen oversight process align with labor agreement provisions;
- Proactively releasing memos issued by a City-designated citizen oversight body as well as any responses produced by APD; and
- Protecting City information by providing appropriate resources and training to members of a City-designated citizen oversight body.

For the full report, visit http://www.austintexas.gov/page/audit-reports.
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Overview of Police Oversight Documents Identified

- 28 Citizen Review Panel memos were found
- 10 Written responses from the Police Dept. were found
- 54 Recommendations were made by the Citizen Review Panel
- 17 Recommendations were discussed by the Police Dept. in their responses

No Single City Department Held All the CRP Memos

- Memo held only by the Police Dept.
- Memos held by both the Police Dept. and the Office of the Police Monitor
- Memos held only by the Office of the Police Monitor

Communications Process Among Entities Involved in Police Oversight

The Citizen Review Panel did not communicate directly with the Chief of Police.

- CRP sent its memo to the OPM
- The OPM sent the final memo to APD
- APD sent its response to the OPM
- Law sent any edits and redactions to the OPM
- The Citizen Review Panel did not receive the final memo or any response from the Police Department.

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