

Police Oversight Follow-Up



Objective

The objective of this special report was to follow up on actions taken by the City related to recommendations from several police oversight audits our office issued from 2016 to 2019. The following audits were included in this project:

- Austin Police Department's Handling of Complaints, September 2016
- Effectiveness of Citizen Police Oversight, June 2018
- Austin Police Department's Response to Mental Health-Related Incidents, September 2018
- Austin Police Department Body-Worn Cameras, June 2019

Background

We focused on these four topics because they were important to community discussions at the time and could have significant impact if not working well.

We identified several areas of needed improvement in these audits. Some common areas of concern included a need for increased transparency and police accountability, more focus on improving outcomes, and increased effectiveness of police oversight.

What We Found

The City has taken many actions to address recommendations from past police oversight audits, including actions to improve transparency, accountability, and oversight. Of the 20 recommendations we issued in these audits, we verified the City implemented 14 and 6 are underway.

● Implemented ● Underway

Handling of Complaints



Effectiveness of Citizen Oversight



Response to Mental Health-Related Incidents



Body-Worn Cameras



The City improved processes for handling complaints and established a new citizen oversight body. The City engaged community stakeholders to determine how to improve responses to mental health-related incidents and is working to implement those improvements. The City also implemented supervisory review of body-worn camera videos.

The underway recommendations center on (1) ensuring the integrity of data in APD's complaint database, (2) ensuring the revised citizen oversight process is useful and transparent, (3) implementing consultant recommendations to improve responses to mental health-related incidents, and (4) establishing oversight of the body-worn camera program. The implementation of these remaining recommendations is important as the City continues to reimagine public safety. More detail on the underway recommendations is included on page 2.

Police Oversight Follow-Up

Summary of Underway Recommendations

Austin Police Department's Handling of Complaints, September 2016	
Recommendation	Progress Made
Ensure that data in the complaint database is accurate, complete, and consistent.	APD is working on a new system for tracking complaints that is expected to be implemented in early 2022. Staff report the new system will help address existing data inconsistencies. Once the system is in place, we will test whether controls in the system address the issues identified in the audit.

Effectiveness of Citizen Police Oversight, June 2018	
Recommendation	Progress Made
Pursue opportunities in future labor agreements with the Austin Police Association to improve the effectiveness of citizen oversight of APD.	<p>The current labor agreement between the City and the Austin Police Association included revisions to the process for citizen oversight. For example, the agreement requires recommendations issued by a citizen oversight body, as well as responses by APD, be made public.</p> <p>After the new labor agreement was approved, the City Manager established the City's current citizen oversight body, known as the Community Police Review Commission (CPRC). The CPRC held their first meeting in October 2020. The City is currently working to develop standard operating procedures for the CPRC.</p> <p>Once these standard operating procedures are finalized and the CPRC has been operating for a period of time, we will test to determine whether the changes made improved the issues identified in the audit.</p>
Ensure administrative procedures governing the citizen oversight process are aligned with the new labor agreement.	
Proactively release memos issued by a citizen oversight body to the public, as well as any responses produced by APD.	

Austin Police Department's Response to Mental Health-Related Incidents, September 2018	
Recommendation	Progress Made
Implement workable solutions identified from feedback from people most informed and affected by mental health-related issues.	APD has made progress on implementing recommendations made by the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute for Texas. In October 2020, Council approved a contract with Meadows to oversee full implementation of these recommendations. Staff reported this work is currently in progress and indicated that regular status updates will be provided to Mayor and Council. We will test implementation of this recommendation when this work is complete.

Austin Police Department Body-Worn Cameras, June 2019	
Recommendation	Progress Made
Designate an individual to oversee the body-worn camera program.	Currently, the Police Technology Unit is testing a new tool which will allow APD to track metrics such as whether calls for service have body-worn camera footage and whether body-worn camera videos are categorized appropriately for record-keeping purposes. APD is piloting the software and indicated they are setting up policies and procedures to guide its use. Once APD implements this new tool and assigns responsibility for oversight of the body-worn camera program, we will test to verify whether these changes address the issues identified in the audit.