



CITY OF ATLANTA

City Auditor's Office
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Performance Audit:

Police Department Sworn Staffing

What We Found

The city is making progress in reaching its goal of 2,000 police officers, but faces constraints that hinder its ability to increase the number of officers on the streets. The city has authorized an additional 204 sworn positions in the Police Department since 2003. However, actual sworn staff has grown more slowly, partially due to drops in recruitment in 2005 and 2006. The department had, on average, 201 fewer police officers than authorized each month between 2004 and 2007. About half of the vacant officer positions have been filled by recruits and some others by civilian assistants. The department's vacancy reports do not identify where in the department the sworn vacancies are actually carried.

Part of the department's difficulty in filling sworn positions arises from increased employee turnover. Police management and the officers we talked to believe that attrition in the department is a problem. While some level of attrition is normal, we were unable to find a benchmark. Management's expectation of attrition of 3% or less may be unrealistic. The department's attrition increased from 4.6% in 2004 to 6.2% in 2007. Exit interviews are inconclusive about the primary reasons why officers left the force, but the largest category of non-retirement separations occurred within the first year of service, suggesting problems with recruitment and hiring. Impending retirements by department veterans will also put pressure to fill vacancies. One third (33%) of officers on the force as of December 2007 had 15 or more years of service, while 18% had 20 or more years of service.

Data inconsistencies between the city and the police department, as well as within the department's personnel database, make it difficult to track vacancies and know where officers are actually deployed.

By December 2007, the police department had about 140 more officers than in early 2004. However, the proportion of officers with patrol duties in the city's 6 zones hasn't increased. We analyzed police rosters for one day in August 2007. About 75% of officers scheduled for patrol were available, but each of the six zones had at least one beat uncovered during a shift. The chief contends that other divisions augment gaps in patrol, but analysis of 911 calls shows that these divisions are rarely dispatched. Gaps in patrol coverage could be caused by the department's failure to use its workload analysis to allocate officers within the zones.

Why We Did This Audit

The Atlanta Police Department has a high public profile and comprises about 30% of the general fund budget. Vacancies and attrition have hindered the department's ability to reach its goal of 2,000 sworn officers. Problems with its system to track the allocation of personnel could also limit the department's ability to make the best use of available staff.

What We Recommended

Our recommendations are intended to clarify the allocation of police officers and aid the department's retention efforts.

The Chief of Police should:

- Budget separately for sworn officers, recruits, and civilian assistants.
- Focus retention efforts on personnel with 5 years or less experience through the use of information collected from restructured exit interviews.
- Update the personnel database on a regular basis to reflect actual officer locations, including officers on temporary assignments.
- Use the workload analysis to make staffing decisions as required by police standard operating procedures.
- Link budgeted cost centers to actual activities to identify where vacancies are and what areas may be underserved

For more information regarding this report, please contact Eric Palmer at 404.330.6455 or epalmer@atlantaga.gov.