



Performance Audit Annual Report, 2010

Under the County Charter, the Pierce County Council conducts an ongoing program of performance audits. By ordinance, the Rules and Operations Committee is the focal point of audit activities. For the Charter and Code provisions, [click here](#). Audit reports are posted on the county website at www.piercecountywa.org/performance-audit.

2010 Projects

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2010 Performance Audit Committee

Councilmember Dick Muri, Chair
Councilmember Shawn Bunney
Councilmember Tim Farrell
Patrick Kenney, Director, Budget and Finance
Rob Orton, citizen
Kevin Phelps, Deputy County Executive
Andrew Tedesco, citizen

Peer Review

The County Charter specifies that performance audits shall be conducted in accordance with *Government Auditing Standards*, published by the Government Accountability Office. To ensure compliance with the standards, audit offices are required to have a peer review once every three years performed by reviewers independent of the audit organization under review.

We are pleased to report that in October 2010, reviewers lead by the Director of the Idaho Legislative Office of Performance Evaluations concluded that the Performance Audit Office was in general compliance with the *Government Auditing Standards*.

To conduct the peer review, the reviewers interviewed councilmembers, members of the performance audit committee, officials of agencies audited by the office, and performance audit staff. They also reviewed the office's policy and procedures, work programs, and meeting minutes, and examined reports and work papers for work completed between 2007 and 2010.

In addition to noting compliance with *Government Auditing Standards*, the peer review report made recommendations to enhance the value of the performance audit function.

For the full report, [click here](#).

Chronic Minor Offenders

As part of the 2010 work program, performance audit staff conducted a study to analyze the impact of chronic minor offenders on unincorporated Pierce County.

In 2009, the Criminal Justice Task Force developed the term “chronic minor offenders” to describe individuals who are repeatedly arrested and jailed for minor offenses, are often homeless, and are likely to have substance abuse or mental health issues. According to the task force, chronic minor offenders consume inordinate public resources for a small public safety benefit.

The analysis found that between 2006 and 2009, the Pierce County Sheriff’s Department made 245 arrests of 60 individuals who fit the definition of chronic minor offender used in the report. These individuals spent 6,379 days in jail, and 75% of them had a history of homelessness.

The estimate to the county of repeatedly arresting and jailing these individuals was \$394,132, in addition to court, prosecution, assigned counsel, and mental health treatment costs.

For the report, [click here](#).

Breaking the Cycle Follow-Up Report

This report examined the progress made in implementing the recommendations in the 2009 performance audit titled *Process Evaluation of Breaking the Cycle*. Breaking the Cycle, now called “Alternative Confinement,” is an alternative to confinement designed to provide drug treatment for individuals sentenced to the County jail.

The follow-up report found that most recommendations had been implemented. The main changes since the report was issued include a reassignment of contracting authority from Superior Court to Human Services, a stronger emphasis on drug treatment of clients, and the changing of the program name. As a result, there has been an increase in the percentage of clients receiving drug treatment, an increase in matching federal funds received for the program, and better tracking of clients.

For the report, [click here](#).

Public Defense Recoupment

The 2010 work program included updating the 2003 analysis of public defense recoupment ordered by the courts at the time of sentencing. This requires analyzing costs in the Department of Assigned Counsel to provide a basis for recommending new standard recoupment amounts.

Performance Audit staff worked briefly on this issue, but work was halted after Superior Court took action to revise the standard amounts. The Department of Assigned Counsel and the Prosecuting Attorney agreed that the new amounts are reasonable, and that it is unnecessary to conduct a cost analysis. Therefore, performance audit work on the topic has been completed.

For the report, [click here](#).

Performance Audit Planning Assessment

The Performance Audit Office contracted with IntelliBridge Partners to conduct a performance audit planning assessment, with the objective of identifying performance audit topics that could assist departments in enhancing efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery.

IntelliBridge consultants reviewed county documentation, reports, and results of prior audits for the purpose of identifying opportunities for improvement. They also interviewed county management and staff to assess specific activities in the priority areas identified by the Performance Audit Committee. These priority areas included:

- (1) the likelihood that a performance audit would find that improvement opportunities were present, and
- (2) its potential impact on cost savings and quality of services.

The results of the assessment were entered into the performance audit planning assessment model to quantitatively identify the extent that performance audit-related improvements could occur and the potential impact of those potential improvements. The 2011 Performance Audit Work Program will be based in part on the results of the planning assessment, and will be available on the performance audit website when it is approved.

Monitoring Felony Backlog

Performance audit staff continued to monitor the number of pending felony cases, also known as the felony "backlog," as a follow-up to audit work conducted in 2007. As of December 31, 2010, the backlog had declined to 1,661, a 32% decrease from the high point of 2,434 pending cases in September 2007. (The audit report appeared in October 2007.)

The trend in pending felony cases is **closely related** to changes in jail population. Pre-trial felony inmates decreased from 66% of the jail population to 54% over the same period (2007-2010), and there was a decrease in average daily jail population from 1,467 to 1,310. The decrease in inmates represents a significant cost savings to the county based on the marginal costs of incarceration.

For a recent felony backlog monitoring report, [click here](#).

Performance Audit Office Changes

After 13 years of service, Performance Audit Coordinator Matthew Temmel announced his retirement, and Performance Audit Analyst Rick Talbert was elected to the County Council. Through ordinance 2010-78s, the performance audit committee was disbanded and the Council Rules and Operations Committee was designated as the interim oversight committee for performance audit activities. During 2011, a more permanent reporting structure will be established for performance audits.

The performance audit office has moved from 955 Tacoma Avenue South to the County-City Building at 930 Tacoma Avenue South, Room 1046. To get on the mailing list for meetings, please contact Linda Medley, 253-798-3647 or lmedley@co.pierce.wa.us. Performance Audit Analyst William Vetter can be reached at 253-798-2330 or wvetter@co.pierce.wa.us.