DENVER – Denver’s auditor says the Denver Sheriff’s Department has made significant progress in reforming the embattled department, but more work needs to be done to keep deputies and inmates safe.

The assessment ordered by Auditor Timothy O’Brien of Denver jail operations also found no decrease in the number of inmate-related use-of-force incidents from 2014 to 2016, despite ongoing reform efforts.

“I would prefer not have any violence,” Denver Sheriff Patrick Firman said. “We’re looking at it, and it’s a concern that we need to take steps to address it.”

The latest report comes two years after the city vowed to make changes to the troubled department following a rash of excessive force cases.

The auditor hired BGD, LLP, Enterprise Risk Services to review the implementation of recommendations from a previous assessment by consulting firm Hillard Heintze in 2015. O’Brien said he hired the outside agency because of its expertise in the Public Safety area.

According to the assessment, one area in need of improvement involves the jail intake process where there is still an average of 286 excessive force cases per year.

To lower that number, the original report from Hillard Heintze, two years ago, recommended inmates be assessed within "24 to 36 hours of arriving at the jail.

The audit assessment found "it can be close to a week" before that happens.

“The ‘Denver Jail needs to improve its process of moving offenders into their long-term cells to help protect staff and reassure the public that deputies are properly trained to handle inmates safely and with fairness,” O’Brien said.

“We’re working on changing a culture, we’re working on changing things that have been in place for many, many years and that’s hard,” Firman said.

Both the auditor and Firman said a new jail management system should help fix some of the issues with moving offenders into their long-term cells more quickly.

The new system will allow the department to better track data, and use that information to make smarter decisions – but it won’t be implemented until 2019.

BGD’s review looked at 27 recommendations about the intake and classification process and jail safety out of 270 total recommendations from Hillard Heintze.

Seven of the recommendations were completed. BGD found sight of the recommendations were mostly completed and nine were partially completed. Three of the recommendations were not completed.

Overall, the assessment finds more could be done to improve the efficiency and transparency of the intake and classification process. More training and review could help improve safety, efficiency and transparency.

“This is something where we will get these recommendations completed and we’re going to continue to work on them,” Firman said.