Denver auditor says sheriff could do more to reduce downtown jail

The recommendations involve waiting in "the pit" and how deputies decide who.

The Denver Sheriff Department could reduce violence in the Downtown Detention Center’s holding area if it improves its procedures for determining whether inmates can be housed, the auditor’s report found.

For the past three years, the sheriff department has had an average of 280 use of force incidents in the holding area, according to the report released last week by Denver Auditor minority Offices. That number could be reduced if more people spent less time waiting in the area, which is commonly referred to as "the pit."

In the past year, deputies have complained about dangerous conditions inside the jail.

Office hired a private firm, HLM, to measure how the sheriff department was implementing some of the 371 recommendations from a 2013 report issued by the consulting firm Rollin Dillard and Rollin’s HLM Group.

The new audit looked specifically at the intake and classification processes, which help deputies make decisions on where to house inmates. It found the knee amount of discipline and gather information on inmates that deputies can use when determining them on a daily basis.

The sheriff department disagreed with 15 of the 27 findings in the report. In several instances, the department said it had implemented a recommendation before the time the auditors finished their review in October and submitted the report in January.

For example, auditors found that the department had not started identifying all staff who interacted with inmates face to face and had not made sure the deputies were adequately trained to do so. The department disagreed, saying it had identified the staff and trained them.

The department, however, disagreed with the finding, stating it had fully implemented the recommendations as of Nov. 13.

In an emailed statement from the Denver Department of Public Safety, the sheriff department said: “We appreciate the efforts reflected in the HLM report and the acknowledgment of our success un the areas highlighted by the sheriff department thus far. We remain committed to the reformed effort and progress continues to be made in the intake and classification areas.”

All but three of the recommendations in the audit have been completed, the statement said. Those should be in place by May.

The department is pursuing a computerized jail management system that should improve its intake and classification processes. The auditor recommended the department provide formal training for deputies assigned to the intake classification unit while making that year experience to determine where an inmate should be housed.

The auditors also suggested the department improve its review keeping so deputies have more specific guidelines for what procedures generally have been housed at the order of the sheriff’s two jails. The department said the jail management system should help with that.

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