

DOING THE BEST WE CAN, WITH WHAT WE GOT

A Report on the Willits Police Department

March 31, 2011

Summary

The City of Willits Police facility is located in a County owned building. The roof has leaked since the building was first occupied in 1988. Annual repairs by General Services have not corrected the problem. The sign, indicating the location of the facility, is still missing.

The City of Willits budget cuts resulted in the Willits Police Department (WPD) being short-staffed, increasing overtime costs. One vacant officer position remains unfilled.

An officer must be on the premises at all times when detainees are in holding cells. To save time and cost, detainees are taken directly to Mendocino County Jail to be booked. The cost of transporting detainees from WPD to Mendocino County Jail is an additional financial burden on the WPD.

Methods

The Grand Jury (GJ) conducted a site visit of the WPD on August 19, 2010 and inspected the facilities, including the holding cells. WPD officers and staff were interviewed.

The following documents were collected and reviewed: Annual Budget Report, Complaint Investigation Procedure, Employee Feature Tracking Summary, Background Instructions for Applicants, Pre-investigative Questionnaire, California Personal History Statement for Peace Officer and for Public Safety Dispatcher and Applicant Screening Examination, Polygraph Pre-test Questionnaire, Request for Pre-employment Credit Report, Code of Ethics, and a copy of the COPS grant application.

Background

The California Penal Code §919(b) states: "...the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county". The 2010-11 GJ complied with the State mandate by inspecting the WPD facility.

Findings

1. At the time of the GJ visit, the WPD staff consisted of one Chief of Police, four Sergeants, and seven Officers. There is one Reserve Officer, one Community Service Officer, four full time and one part-time Dispatchers who also maintain records. One officer is qualified to be on the SWAT (Special Weapon and Tactic)

team when needed; one Officer position is vacant.

2. WPD dispatchers are receiving more cellular 911 calls each year due to the accessibility of cell phones.
3. WPD currently does not contribute an officer to the Task Force.
4. The WPD does not have a K-9 Unit, due to budget constraints. The K-9 unit was discontinued in 1996.
5. At the time of the GJ visit, no officers had been hired in the last sixteen months.
6. Two officers are bi-lingual. *RosettaStone* software is available to help officers become bilingual.
7. Officers work 12 hour shifts, four days per week, resulting in overtime.
8. The Chief of Police is required to do routine patrol when multiple incidents occur simultaneously, even though off duty.
9. Current applicants for officer positions must be experienced, since officers in field training are not allowed to work without supervision. Patrol cars are currently staffed by one officer.
10. Individuals detained under Penal Code §5150 (danger to themselves or others) are taken to the local hospital. The officer remains with the detainee at the hospital until a mental health worker arrives and determines the status of the detainee.
11. Gang activity exists in Willits; gangs are multi-racial.
12. Persons who commit minor offenses may be cited and released. Others, who commit more serious offenses, are taken into custody and transported to Mendocino County Jail.
13. An officer is required to remain in the building when a prisoner is held in one of the four holding cells.
14. To save time and cost, prisoners are taken directly to Mendocino County Jail for booking.
15. Transporting prisoners to the Mendocino County Jail is costly, often requiring overtime, affecting WPD staffing.
16. Since the closure of the Willits branch of the Mendocino County Superior Court, Officers must travel to Ukiah or Fort Bragg to testify, leaving WPD short staffed.
17. Officer testimony can create overtime cost. There is a minimum of three hours pay when an off duty officer is called to testify.
18. At the time of the GJ visit no complaints have been filed against WPD.
19. The shooting range for the City of Willits' is located the watershed property and is used for gun training. Lead-free frangible ammunition is used for training. Lead ammunition is only fired into the bullet-trap. Lead-free bullets are used for pop-up target training or off-trap training.
20. The sign, directing the public to the WPD facility, is missing and currently stored at the Willits Department of Public Works.
21. General Services maintains WPD's emergency generator.
22. The WPD uses County IT and shares information with the Sheriff's Office using the *Report Management System* program.

23. The WPD current budget includes additional funding of \$100,000 from the State COPS (Citizens Options for Police Services) Grant. The goals of the grant are:

- bring Willits Justice Center temporary holding facility into compliance with State laws, rules and regulations,
- to relieve field operation officer of the booking, processing, and transporting of arrestees,
- learn the evidence functions of the Willits Police Department,
- ensure a safe and humane environment for arrestees, as well as for officers and the general public,
- continue parking enforcement and administration program.

24. Asset forfeiture (AF) funds may be used to support anti-gang and training programs, equipment, and officer overtime expenses.

25. Law Enforcement Administrators Association (LEAA) funds are a portion of AF distribution used for the sole purpose of funding programs to combat drug use, anti-gang programs, and for educator/parent/community organizations, and local businesses to involve their interest in the programs.

26. The WPD disbursed \$33,200 of LEAA funds between March 2010 and August 2010 to local middle and high schools for youth, sports, and after school programs with primary emphasis on drug and gang prevention. Also, receiving funds were Youth Based Emergency Services Summer Camp (YES Camp), Alcohol and Other Drug Programs (AODP) and Gang Resistance is Paramount (GRIP).

27. WPD is located in a County owned building. The roof has leaked every year since 1988 when the building was first occupied. Repeated repairs by General Services have not been successful. Leaks are known to cause structural damage and mold.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. City of Willits provide funding for the vacant officer position. (Findings 1, 5, 8-9)
2. Willits City Council approve the hiring of a retired officer for a part time position to augment the current police force. (Findings 1, 5, 8-9)
3. City of Willits Public Works Department re-install the sign identifying the location of the WPD, (Finding 20)
4. General Services consult an outside engineer to determine if the leaking roof has caused structural damage, including mold; and to recommend a solution. (Findings 21, 27)

Discussion

In light of the drastically reduced budget, the WPD continues to operate efficiently, regarding public safety as their foremost priority.

Required Responses

City of Willits, City Council (All Findings; All Recommendations)

City of Willits, Chief of Police (All Findings; All Recommendations)

City of Willits Public Works Department (Finding 20; Recommendation 3)

Mendocino County General Services Director (Findings 21, 27; Recommendation 4)

Requested Responses

CAL-OSHA (Finding 27)