

CITY OF WILLITS POLICE DEPARTMENT & HOLDING CELLS

March 22, 2007

Summary

The Grand Jury conducted its annual mandated visit to the Willits Police Department (WPD) to inspect its operations, holding cells, evidence room, and the facility in general.

The Grand Jury was disappointed to find the following issues are still unresolved: rainwater continues to leak into the WPD offices, and the rear security gate is still malfunctioning.

Background

California Penal Code §919(b) states that “the Grand Jury shall inquire into the condition and management of the public prisons within the county”. The 2006/2007 Mendocino County Grand Jury undertook their charge with a visit to the City of Willits Police Department and their Holding Cells.

Methods

The Grand Jury visited the WPD facilities, interviewed various personnel regarding operations of the Holding Cells, the Booking Area, Evidence Rooms, and the Parking Area. The Grand Jury also reviewed documents, including the current budget and the facility diagram.

Findings

1. The staff consists of the Chief of Police, three sergeants, nine officers, five dispatchers (of which three are part time), and a Community Service Officer who also serves as an Evidence Clerk. One officer's position is unfilled, and two officers are seeking employment elsewhere.
2. The building occupied by the WPD is owned by Mendocino County. A portion is leased by the City of Willits for the WPD.
3. Rainwater leaks into the WPD's office making it necessary to cover records and electronic equipment with plastic tarps. This condition has persisted since the building was constructed in 1988.
4. The annual budget for the police department is inconsistent.
5. The County General Services Agency, under agreement with the WPD, provides computer technical support. These services have improved over prior years.
6. The WPD computer system is integrated into the County Sheriff's system; not all information in the Sheriff's system is accessible to WPD.
7. Higher pay in neighboring counties, is one of many issues making recruitment and retention of officers difficult.
8. The WPD's security gate is malfunctioning. It has caused damage to vehicles by unexpectedly closing.
9. There is no countywide prisoner transport system.

10. Most calls for service are complaints about transients who are homeless and may be under the influence of a substance, a misdemeanor offense.
11. Misdemeanor arrests are kept to a minimum due to the need to supervise or transport arrestees to the County jail. Citations may be issued instead.

Recommendations

The Grand Jury recommends that:

1. vacant staff position be filled. (Finding 1)
2. the cause of the rainwater leakage be determined and corrected. (Finding 2, 3)
3. the security gate needs to be repaired or replaced. (Finding 8)
4. a countywide prisoner transport system be implemented. (Finding 9-11)

Comments

The Holding Cells located in the City of Willits Police Department are clean and the facility runs smoothly.

Staffing shortages are handled by a “Different Hats” approach; where an employee knows and can perform another employee’s job.

A solution to the transportation difficulties would be for the County to provide a 24/7 prisoner transport service, thus allowing the Officers and Deputies to remain in their communities and perform their assigned duties, as required.

Responses Required

City of Willits Police Department (Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8; Recommendations 1, 2, 3, and 4)

Mendocino County Board of Supervisors (Finding 8; Recommendation 4)

Mendocino County Sheriff (Finding 8; Recommendation 4)

City of Willits City Council (Findings 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8; Recommendations 1, 2, 3 and 4)

Mendocino County General Services (Findings 2, 5, 7; Recommendations 2 and 3)