TO: Metropolitan King County Councilmembers

FROM: Cheryle A. Broom, County Auditor

SUBJECT: Review of DAJD Evaluation of Intake, Transfer and Release Operations

This memorandum provides the results of our review of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention’s (DAJD) response to a 2011 budget proviso directing the department to conduct a review of its intake, transfer and release (ITR) operation.

Synopsis:

This management letter acknowledges the value of the work performed by DAJD and consultants from the National Institute of Corrections to evaluate the Intake, Transfer and Release function in King County’s adult detention facilities. This letter further suggests that the County Executive and DAJD consider applying Lean principles and practices as part of a review of potential process improvements in ITR. Such an effort could leverage the process mapping work that has already been done, and might identify worthwhile changes to current manual practices before a new system is designed and implemented to automate the process.

Background:

In the 2011 adopted operating budget ordinance, for the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention (DAJD), the County Council included a proviso requiring a report on an independent analysis and business process mapping of the Intake, Transfer and Release (ITR) functions at the County’s two adult detention facilities. Expenditure of $250,000 was restricted until the requirements of the proviso were satisfied. The proviso further called for a review of the report by the King County Auditor.

Context:

Our performance audit of jail planning and operations (September 2010) noted a significant decline in ITR workload over the past three years, with booking and releases having declined by 20 percent and inmate transfers by 32 percent. Meanwhile, there was little change in the operating budget for ITR. The audit also found that ITR processes were paper driven and required layers of staff review, and that key workload data was not routinely monitored or accessible. Consequently, the audit recommended that the County Council call for an independent analysis of ITR, and the Council responded with the budget proviso.
DAJD Response:

The review, undertaken by DAJD, consisted of the following elements:

- A three-day site visit by two consultants from the National Institute of Corrections (NIC);
- Convening a work group to review ITR process maps and identify duplication of efforts, barriers to efficiency, and opportunities for improvement;
- Compilation and analysis of workload and staffing data to identify base staffing and variables that affect the workload in ITR;
- Identification of five performance indicators, and development of the associated reports, to monitor the effectiveness of the ITR operation; and
- Identification of ongoing processes and mechanisms so that workload data can inform facility utilization and operations planning, budget development, contract fee setting, and contract revenue projections.

As reported by DAJD, the review took hundreds of hours of staff time, resulted in the development of new reports and monitoring capability, and generated several conclusions and recommendations for improvement.

The following is a list of primary conclusions of the ITR review, as summarized by DAJD:

- Workload in the ITR is less efficient because of the department’s antiquated data systems. DAJD staff, business partners, and internal and external consultants all conclude that the ITR operation would be made more effective through the implementation of a modern data system to automate manual processes and improve the efficiency of ITR work flow.
- NIC consultants concluded that DAJD is operating two well managed facilities with very limited resources. Recommendations for improvement to ITR are suggested “tune-ups” for the jail system to assist with efficiency and cost effectiveness.
- Review of process maps indicated that while there are opportunities for improvement, the ITR operation does not have significant options for improving efficiency absent the implementation of new technologies.
- Although the total number of bookings has declined over time, this has only a marginal impact on workload by shift. The workload in ITR has grown due to a more complex population, increased reporting requirements, and increased documentation of incidents.
- ITR staffing at King County Correction Facility and Maleng Regional Justice Center (MRJC) is comparable (after the reduction in staffing and costs at MRJC that were implemented earlier in 2011), and reflects a base level of staffing that is appropriate to the workload of the operation.

Detailed recommendations made by the NIC consultants are included on pages 9-11 of the DAJD report. On pages 13-15 of the report, areas of duplication and barriers to efficiency gleaned from process mapping are delineated, along with ideas and next steps for resolving problem areas.

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1 King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention, Intake, Transfer and Release Review, A Report to the King County Council, September 2011
Auditor's Comments:

We appreciate the diligence and work of DAJD in conducting their own internal review of ITR operations, and of the valuable assistance provided by the NIC team.

We also note that workload in ITR continues to decline, at least as indicated by the number of bookings. According to the Detention and Alternatives Report for September 2011, the average number of bookings is down 16.2 percent from the forecasted average for the year. This decline in bookings is also reflected in Average Daily Population, which is lower now than when we published our audit report in 2010. The result, as previously discussed in the 2010 performance audit, is that unit costs increase when workload declines without a concomitant decrease in spending. Given the fact that DAJD has set its city contract rates to be competitive with other jurisdictions; the agency has limited ability to address a revenue shortfall caused by a declining population.

One additional step before implementing a new data system to automate process and improve efficiency may be to consider applying the Lean principles and practices that are part of the Executive’s new initiative aimed at building capacity and increasing value. Lean focuses on eliminating waste and non-value added activities in all areas of business, including the provision of services. ITR might be a particularly good process improvement candidate because the County could leverage the process mapping that has already occurred. As indicated by the NIC consultants, a modern jail management system could automate work that is currently performed manually. The application of Lean principles and practices might identify those current practices that should be modified before designing and implementing a new jail management system.

Bob Thomas, Senior Principal Management Auditor, conducted this management review. Please contact Bob Thomas at 296-0375 or me at 296-1655 if you have any questions about the issues discussed in this letter.

CB:BT:jl

cc: Dow Constantine, County Executive
Fred Jarrett, Deputy County Executive
Rhonda Berry, Assistant Deputy County Executive
Claudia Balducci, Director, Department of Adult & Juvenile Detention
Dwight Dively, Director, Office of Performance, Strategy & Budget
Caroline McShane, Deputy Finance Director, Finance & Business Operations Division
Clif Curry, Policy Staff, King County Council
Jenny Giambattista, Policy Staff, King County Council