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City audit finds Long Beach Police Department on right track

BY JOSEPH SERNA
Staff Writer

In November 2006, the Long Beach city auditor's office tapped Public Financial Management (PFM) to assess the Police Department and recommend ways to improve its efficiency and fiscal conservancy. Last week, City Auditor Laura Doud announced the report's conclusions.

"We have a really solid Police Department," Doud

told the City Council at their July 17 meeting. Unlike a scathing report against the former city auditor's office made public earlier this year, PFM's findings showed the Police Department was doing most things right. The company was left to only suggest some general rearrangements and policy changes.

PFM suggested the department expand its civilianization efforts—replacing sworn officers with qualified civilian

personnel—to increase the number of officers on patrol. The report found 23 positions that could be potentially filled by trained personnel, including areas in community relations, information technology and management of criminal investigations.

On line with the entire report, PFM's civilianization recommendation simply outlines areas the department could address. If and how they choose to implement any of the

suggestions is up to the department in conjunction with Long Beach Police Officers Association and city management.

"Several of these recommendations are what I call 'front-loaded,'" said acting Chief of Police Robert Luna. "You need more money up front to make them work."

However, that statement is not a critique Luna is raising with the report, rather a fact that the city is going to have to address when trying to turn

these suggestions into action. "None of these initiatives are unique to the Police Department. There's nothing here we can do by ourselves," said Braden Phillips, the administration bureau chief. "This is not a unique action item for just the Police Department. There's

going to be a large collaborative effort on each of these initiatives that will involve multiple departments."

Within the civilianization initiative

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tative is a suggestion of using trained civilians for Priority 3, or calls not requiring an immediate response by a sworn officer. Such calls include: missing persons, phone harassment, stolen license plates and noise complaints.

However, the city will meet opposition with one redeployment suggestion by PFM: cycling non-patrol officers through patrol, specifically, putting investigating officers on patrol for specific periods of time to reduce call-back overtime associated with police divisions meeting minimum staffing levels.

Already short of detectives, the department's official response said cycling overloaded investigators off of their cases would "simply exacerbate an already

difficult situation."

PFM also focused on technology and fine enforcement adjustments to generate revenue and, more importantly, Doud said, put more officers on patrol, which was the main objective of PFM's audit.

"We'll look at all [the recommendations] and whichever ones require just rolling up your sleeves and working to implement, we'll do first," Luna said.

Unanimously approved at the Council meeting, the recommendations will now be reviewed by the Police Department and acting City Manager Tony Batts (the former police chief). Recommendations from PFM's reporter are due at 90 days, six months and one year from the Tuesday meeting.