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Why We Did This Audit

The public is interested in the conduct of elected officials, and media reporting has raised questions about whether City Council committees use their resources purely for committee business. We sought to determine whether Council committees comply with the municipal code requirements for employee recordkeeping, and with the provisions in the City's annual appropriations ordinance for committee expenditures and use of committee staff.

Background

Council creates committees to handle legislative and administrative business relating to their subject matter areas. Committee chairs are responsible for calling and presiding over committee meetings, preparing committee reports, and presenting those reports during Council meetings.

We thank committee chairs and staff, Department of Finance management and staff, Office of Budget and Management staff, and City Council's sergeant-at-arms for their cooperation during the audit.



City of Chicago
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AUDIT OF CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE SPENDING AND EMPLOYEE ADMINISTRATION

Some City Council committees have not maintained complete employee records in accord with the records retention requirements of MCC § 2-8-071 and the Illinois Local Records Act. In addition, some committee personnel perform non-committee duties. Regarding committee spending, Council and the Department of Finance have implemented improved processes to effectively mitigate the risk of payments for non-committee purposes.

Findings

OIG requested 16 months of employee records, randomly selected from June 2015 through March 2020, from five committees. Four of the five committees were unable to provide all requested records. In addition, seven committee chairs directed or allowed committee employees to work on non-committee matters, which created inequalities between the wards of chairs and those of aldermen who do not chair committees. Lastly, regarding non-personnel committee spending, we identified 29 payments for non-committee purposes between January 2015 and July 2019. However, by July 2019, Council and the Department of Finance had improved their processes to prevent payments unrelated to committee purposes.

Recommendations

OIG recommends that Council require all committees to use an electronic timekeeping system, as well as develop a transition process for committee chairs. Council should comply with all record retention requirements and notify the Local Records Commission of its past failure to retain employee attendance documentation. Council should ensure that those committee chairs directing or allowing staff to work on non-committee business develop and implement a strategy to transition away from the practice. Council should analyze the personnel needs of each committee and allocate resources accordingly. Council should also consider undertaking an analysis to determine the personnel needs for ward offices and consider retaining a dedicated administrative officer for these purposes.

City Council Response

In response to our audit findings and recommendations, Council representatives stated that Council will not implement an electronic timekeeping system but will develop a uniform system of paper recordkeeping. Council representatives declined to comment on the missing records of prior chairs, but stated that committee chairs will seek assistance to comply with the Local Records Act from the president pro tempore. Council representatives declined to conduct a staffing analysis or to ensure the duties of committee staff are limited to committee work.