

Justice of the Peace, Precinct 4 Audit

December 20, 2019

Galveston County
Internal Audit
Division

Randall Rice CPA
CITP CISA CIO CBM DABFA CGMA
County Auditor

Executive Summary.....	1
Introduction	2
Details	3-9

Executive Summary

Reliability and Integrity of Information (pages 3)

- All adjustments, reversals and voids must be recorded by the Chief Deputy Court Clerk or the Senior Court Clerk. In the event one of those employees needs to reverse or void a transaction, the other must record the transaction.
- No discrepancies were noted in the review of citations recorded in Odyssey.

Safeguarding of Assets (page 4)

- Physical security over assets (collections) is adequate.
- All collections were accounted for during the surprise cash count.
- Court policy is to deposit collections daily.
- Bond account bank reconciliations are submitted to the Auditor's Office monthly.

Compliance with Statutes, Policies and Procedures (pages 5-7)

- Odyssey is not consistently assessing all of the statutorily required court costs and fees to the misdemeanor offenses. Internal Audit is working with Information Technology to correct the issue.
- No discrepancies were noted in the testing of Administrative or No-Charge Dismissals.
- No material discrepancies were noted in the court's compliance with the "Allocation Rule".
- Proper support documentation must be scanned into Odyssey for Jail Time Credits.
- No discrepancies were noted in testing the validity of Community Service and Indigent credits.
- Proper support documentation must be scanned into Odyssey for Waiver credits.
- No discrepancies were noted in the court's assessment of Time Payment fees.
- No material discrepancies were noted in the court's assessment of PC30 fees.

Statistical Analysis (pages 8-9)

- 31.6% of the cases filed were non-traffic misdemeanors. Debit claims made up 24.9% and traffic misdemeanors made up 19.5%.
- Bank deposits fluctuated from \$37,620 (December 2018) to \$58,385 (March 2019) and back down to \$49,067 (October 2019). Total collections for the audit period were \$591,030.

Introduction

The Internal Audit Division conducted an internal audit of the Justice of the Peace, Precinct 4, in accordance with Local Government Code §115. The internal audit covered the period November 1, 2018 through October 31, 2019. The audit was performed from November 4, 2019 through December 20, 2019.

The primary objectives of the internal audit are to provide reasonable assurance concerning:

- Reliability and integrity of the information.
- Safeguarding of assets.
- Compliance with laws, regulations, contracts, policies, plans and procedures.

The scope of the internal audit encompassed the financial records and administrative procedures related to the Justice of the Peace, Precinct 4. The internal audit included, but was not limited to, the books, accounts, reports, dockets and records of the Justice of the Peace, Precinct 4.

The internal audit included examining transactions on a test basis and required exercising judgment in the selection of such tests. As the internal audit was not a detailed examination of all transactions, there is a risk that errors or fraud were not detected during the internal audit. The official therefore retains the responsibility for the accuracy and completeness of the financial information.

Because of certain statutory duties required of the County Auditor, we are not independent with regard to the Galveston County Justice of the Peace, Precinct 4 as defined by the AICPA professional standards. However, our internal audit was performed with objectivity and due professional care.

Jessica Kozma, Internal Auditor I, performed the audit.

Reliability and Integrity of Information

Reliable information is accurate, timely, complete and useful. In order to achieve this, controls over record keeping and reporting must be adequate and effective.

Separation of Duties

One of the most important internal controls is to have proper separation of duties. No one person should authorize a transaction, record a transaction and have custody of the assets.

A proper separation of duties is sometimes difficult to establish due to the size of staff and budgetary constraints; however, there are compensating controls that have been implemented in different areas of the court's operations.

Adjustments, Reversals and Voids

All clerks have the ability to process adjustments, reversals and voids in Odyssey. Court policy limits the recording of reversals and voids in Odyssey to the Chief Deputy Court Clerk or the Senior Court Clerk. In the event one of those employees needs to reverse or void a transaction, the other must record the transaction. An explanation for the transaction is recorded in the 'comments' section of Odyssey and the clerk who initiated the void will immediately re-receipt the transaction, when applicable. A sample of adjustments, reversals and voids was tested for compliance with court policy.

Finding: Voided transactions were recorded in Odyssey by the same clerk initiating the transaction. No other review or approval was visible in Odyssey.

Recommendation JP4-20-01: To improve reliability and integrity of the information in Odyssey and to ensure compliance with office policy and the County Cash Handling Policy, all adjustments, reversals and voids must be recorded by the Chief Deputy Court Clerk or the Senior Court Clerk. In the event one of those employees needs to reverse or void a transaction, the other must record the transaction.

Completeness and Accuracy

Information from citations issued by the Galveston County Sheriff's Office (GCSO) is recorded in their Record Management System (RMS). The citations are turned into the related Justice Court and subsequently entered into Odyssey by the clerks. Internal Audit tested a sample of citations recorded in RMS to verify the information was completely and accurately recorded in Odyssey. No discrepancies were noted.

Safeguarding of Assets

Safeguarding of assets has three basic components: 1) physical security of the collections 2) minimal exposure to loss and 3) proper management of the collections.

Physical Security

Physical security encompasses any method to physically secure the collections from loss. Monies collected should be kept in a locked drawer or safe until they are deposited in the bank.

As part of the audit, the auditor conducted a surprise cash count at the League City office on November 4, 2019. All collections were accounted for at the time of the surprise cash count. Controls are in place to ensure the staff uses a lockable safe to secure collections until ready to be deposited. The safe remains locked when not in use.

Minimizing Exposure to Loss

Daily depositing is one of the best methods of minimizing exposure of collections to loss as well as providing the count with maximum benefit of the collections. JP4 has a policy to deposit collections daily.

Management of Collections

Properly prepared and adequately supported bank reconciliations are one of the best methods of cash management available to any official. The reconciliation process identifies any discrepancies in the bond account and assists in preventing the misuse of funds.

JP4 performs a bond account bank reconciliation each month and submits a copy to the Auditor's Office.

Compliance with Statutes, Policies and Procedures

The following areas were tested to provide reasonable assurance the court is in compliance with statutes, policies and procedures.

Court Costs, Fines and Fees

The Texas Judicial Branch publishes a 'Justice Court Convictions Court Cost Chart' every two years. The chart shows the fees to be assessed for misdemeanor offenses, including specific costs not assessed upon conviction, but assessed under appropriate circumstances. The chart also provides the statute that supports the amount of court costs, fines and fees reflected on the chart. A sample of cases was tested for compliance with the applicable statutes regarding court costs, fines and fees collected by the office. It was determined Odyssey is not consistently assessing all of the statutorily required court costs and fees to the misdemeanor offenses. Internal Audit is working with Information Technology to correct the issue.

Administrative Dismissals

Certain charges may be dismissed with an administrative fee, set by statute, when the defendant provides proof the underlying violation was resolved within the statutory time limit. When the proof is presented and the administrative fee has been paid, the clerk may dismiss the case without the consent of the Judge or the Assistant District Attorney. A sample of administrative dismissals was tested for compliance with applicable statutes. No discrepancies were noted.

CCP §32.02 Dismissal by State's Attorney

CCP §32.02 Dismissal By State's Attorney states "The attorney representing the State may, by permission of the court, dismiss a criminal action at any time upon filing a written statement with the papers in the case setting out his reasons for such dismissal, which shall be incorporated in the judgment of dismissal. No case shall be dismissed without the consent of the presiding judge." A sample of no-charge dismissals was tested for compliance with CCP §32.02. No discrepancies were noted.

Allocation Rule

A defendant may be awarded Jail Time Credit (JTC) or Community Service in lieu of paying the court costs, fees and fine. If the amount of JTC or Community Service awarded is not enough to satisfy all charges, the court must follow the "Allocation Rule". Attorney General Opinion GA-147 and the 'Justice Courts - Court Costs and Fees Handbook' define the "Allocation Rule" as the practice of applying credits to the fine first and then to court costs and fees. If the monies received do not cover all of the court costs, then the monies must be allocated to court costs on a pro-rata basis. A sample of cases was tested for compliance with the "Allocation Rule". No material discrepancies were noted.

Compliance with Statutes, Policies and Procedures (cont.)

Jail Time Credit

CCP §45.048 Discharged From Jail states a defendant placed in jail shall be discharged by showing the defendant is too poor to pay the fine and costs or has remained in jail a sufficient length of time to satisfy the charges. Per court policy, the defendant must provide proof of time served. All Jail Time Credit awarded must be approved by the Judge. A sample of cases was tested for compliance with CCP §45.048 and court policy.

Finding: Proper support documentation was not consistently scanned for Jail Time Credits into Odyssey.

Recommendation JP4-20-02: To remain in compliance with court policy, proper support documentation must be scanned into Odyssey.

Community Service Credit

CCP §45.049 Community Service in Satisfaction of Fine or Costs states a justice or judge may require a defendant who fails to pay a previously assessed fine or costs, or who is determined by the court to have insufficient resources or income to pay a fine or costs, to discharge all or part of the fine or costs by performing community service. All Community Service credit awarded must be approved by the Judge. A sample of cases was tested for compliance with CCP §45.049 and court policy. No discrepancies were noted.

Indigent and Waiver Credits

CCP §45.0491 Waiver of Payment of Fines and Costs for Certain Defendants and for Children states a justice court may waive payment of a fine or costs imposed on a defendant who defaults in payment if the court determines that the defendant is indigent and discharging the fine and costs would impose an undue hardship on the defendant. All Indigent and Waiver credits awarded must be approved by the Judge. A sample of cases was tested for compliance with CCP §45.0491 and court policy. No discrepancies were noted for Indigent credits.

Finding: Proper support documentation was not consistently scanned for Waiver credits into Odyssey.

Recommendation JP4-20-02: To remain in compliance with court policy, proper support documentation must be scanned into Odyssey.

Time Payment Fee

LGC §133.103 states "(a) A person convicted of an offense shall pay, in addition to all other costs, a fee of \$25 if the person: (1) has been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor; and (2) pays any part of a fine, court costs or restitution on or after the 31st day after the date on which a judgment is entered assessing the fine, court costs, or restitution". A sample of cases was tested for compliance with LGC §133.103. No discrepancies were noted.

Compliance with Statutes, Policies and Procedures (cont.)

CCP §103.0031 Collection Contracts

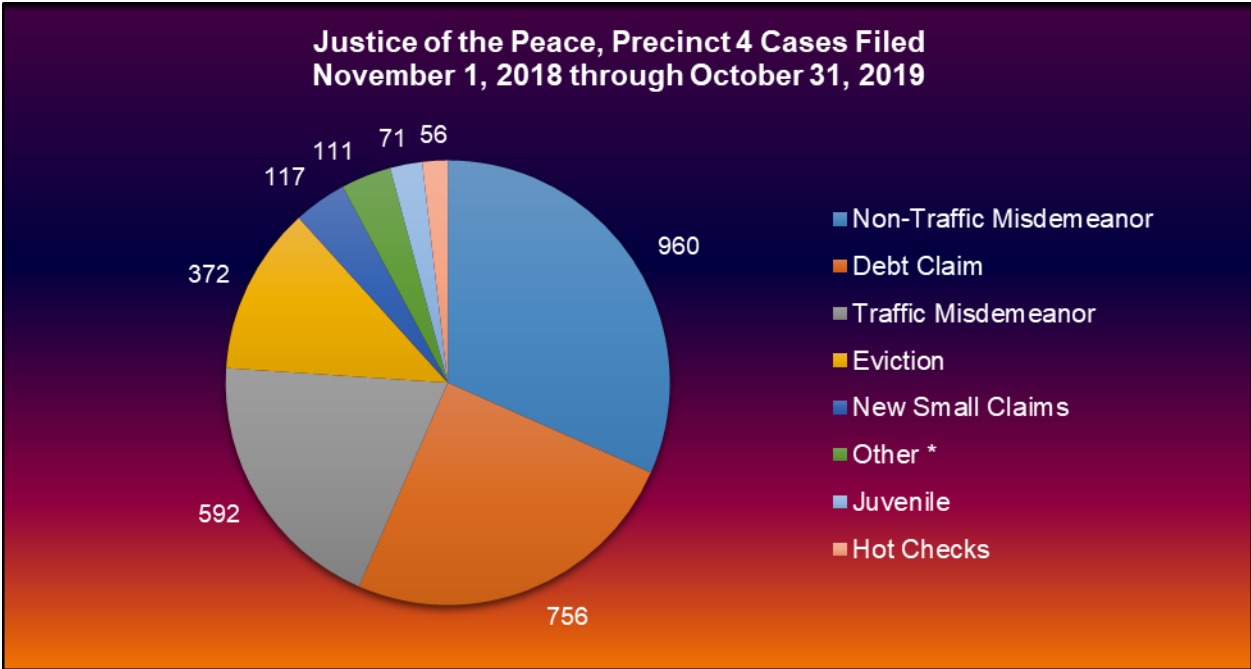
CCP §103.0031 states the commissioners court of a county may enter into a contract with a private attorney or a public or private vendor for the provision of collection services for debts and accounts receivable such as unpaid fines, fees, court costs, forfeited bonds, and restitution. A commissioners court that enters into a contract with a private attorney or private vendor under this article may authorize the addition of a collection fee in the amount of 30 percent of the outstanding balance that is more than 60 days past due and has been referred to the attorney or vendor for collection. A sample of cases was tested for compliance with CCP §103.0031. No material discrepancies were noted.

Statistical Analysis

A statistical analysis was performed on the cases filed through JP4 during the audit period. The data for the analysis was obtained from the Odyssey Case Filing Statistics report. The date range used for the report was November 1, 2018 through October 31, 2019. More than a third (31.6%) of the cases filed were non-traffic misdemeanors. Debt claims made up 24.9% and traffic misdemeanors made up 19.5%.

The following reflects the number and types of cases filed during the audit period:

Non-Traffic Misdemeanor	960	31.6%
Debt Claim	756	24.9%
Traffic Misdemeanor	592	19.5%
Eviction	372	12.3%
New Small Claims	117	3.9%
Other *	111	3.7%
Juvenile	71	2.3%
Hot Checks	56	1.8%
	<hr/>	
	3,035	100.0%
Other *		
Occupational License	75	
Magistrate Duty	29	
Truancy	4	
Tow Hearings	2	
Repair & Remedy	1	
	<hr/>	
	111	3.7%



Statistical Analysis (cont.)

A statistical analysis was also performed on the bank deposits made by JP4 during the audit period. The data used in the analysis was obtained from OneSolution, the County's financial reporting system. The date range used for the report was November 1, 2018 through October 31, 2019. Bank deposits fluctuated from \$37,620 (December 2018) to \$58,385 (March 2019) and back down to \$49,067 (October 2019). Total collections for the audit period were \$591,030.

The following reflects the bank deposits made by JP4 during the audit period:

JP4 - Bank Deposits	
Nov-18	\$ 49,181
Dec-18	\$ 37,620
Jan-19	\$ 53,631
Feb-19	\$ 54,946
Mar-19	\$ 58,385
Apr-19	\$ 50,008
May-19	\$ 51,501
Jun-19	\$ 51,824
Jul-19	\$ 50,562
Aug-19	\$ 43,216
Sep-19	\$ 41,090
Oct-19	\$ 49,067
Total	\$ 591,030

