

# Criminal Background Check Process: Refinements needed to further reduce risks

## Why this audit is important

Background checks are used by employers to get information about candidates for job openings. The scope of what is searched can vary, but generally background checks include information about a candidate's education and work history, at a minimum. References from previous colleagues and criminal records searches are other common types of background information employers may use to inform their hiring decisions.

This audit focused on Metro's criminal background check process. The objective was to determine if the process provided sufficient and appropriate information to ensure consistent hiring decisions.

All candidates that have been given a conditional offer of employment by Metro are required to complete a criminal background check. The purpose of the check is to protect the wellbeing of its employees and the public, and safeguard agency assets. The source of the criminal information and thoroughness of the searches depends on the position and its responsibilities. For example, positions that work with children are required to have a more comprehensive criminal background search compared to positions that do not work with children.

## What we found

We found Metro's criminal background check process was more consistent than several other local governments in the region because it covered all employees. Consistency made it more likely that appropriate criminal background information was considered when making hiring decisions. However, there were some weaknesses that made it less likely that sufficient criminal background information would be available.

Until March 2019, criminal records from federal courts were not included in most background searches. Metro believed those records were part of its contract with one of the external providers, but they were not. In addition, implementation of some parts of Metro's background check policy were underdeveloped. This increased the chance that some senior-level positions and some volunteers were not checked as thoroughly as allowed by policy.

Formally designating the type of criminal background check required for each position would reduce the risk of insufficient or inappropriate checks. We also found clearer roles and responsibilities were needed to control who has access to criminal background information and ensure it was kept up-to-date.

## Criminal background checks are intended to balance safety and security considerations with fairness to job applicants



## What we recommend

The audit included six recommendations to:

- Reduce the risk of insufficient or inappropriate criminal background searches.
- Ensure consistent reviews of criminal background information.
- Safeguard criminal background information.
- Reduce the chances an employee or volunteer will be allowed to work prior to completing the criminal background check process.