

Thames Valley Fire Control Service



Joint Committee Performance Report (Quarter 1 2021/22)



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Introduction

The Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) performance report presents information on the performance of the joint control room.

This is to provide structure and governance that enables TVFCS to measure, monitor and manage outputs and outcomes in a timely manner, allowing us to respond and make informed decisions to ensure that our statutory and partnership obligations are successfully delivered.

The aim of this report is to share how TVFCS has performed over the previous three months, offer explanation, analysis and mitigation for target outcomes, and to suggest positive means of carrying effective performance into the future.

Key to Icons and Colours

	Target exceeded by more than 10%
	Target met or exceeded by up to 10%
	Target missed by up to 10%
	Target missed by more than 10%
	NA or data accuracy issues affect confidence in reporting

Operational Context

During the first quarter of 2021/22, the continuing focus within TVFCS has been on maintaining our service during the COVID19 pandemic and ensuring the health and wellbeing of our staff. Following on from the successful initiative to vaccinate staff during Quarter 4 2020/21, second doses were administered to 85% of TVFCS employees during Quarter 1.

Levels of sickness absence have increased slightly compared with both Q1 and Q4 2020/21. Analysis of data relating to sickness does not reveal any particular trends in relation to causes of absence

The level of demand placed on TVFCS has increased compared with Q1 2020/21, with the number of calls received and mobilisations which result from those calls now being at broadly similar pre-pandemic levels.

The first piece of Control room National Operational Guidance (NOG) was published in May 2021, which covered the approach to be taken when dealing with incidents involving persons trapped in a building by fire. All TVFCS policy and procedure which relates to this topic has been reviewed and refreshed and new training for TVFCS staff is being designed. It is expected that all TVFCS Control room staff will have received the required training by the end of 2021.

The TVFCS Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) and the management team continue to plan for a number of anticipated changes that will impact on TVFCS over the coming months. Further NOG for Control rooms is planned for release at regular intervals over the next 2-3 years. The anticipated workload associated with the implementation of NOG and the other significant changes which have been identified are captured within Service planning activity to ensure effective resourcing and prioritisation of tasks.

Resourcing

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The TVFCS staff pool has remained stable during Q1, with no staff turnover being experienced. The early planning of recruitment to address the staffing requirements resulting from maternity leave has meant that these staff extractions have had no impact on crewing.

Sickness levels have increased compared with both the previous quarter and the equivalent period in 2020/21, with both the May and June figures being higher than would normally be expected for the time of year. This coincides with the lifting of a number of national Governmental restrictions on social contact. We are also supporting a small number of TVFCS personnel who are currently experiencing complex medical issues. Due to the pressures placed on the NHS, diagnosis and treatment are taking longer to access than would have been expected before the pandemic, leading to longer periods of staff absence in this group.

Measure	April 2021	May 2021	June 2021
Short-term Sickness Episodes	6	7	7
Long-term Sickness Episodes*	1	1	2
Total Days lost to Sickness	31	51	42
Average days lost per FTE	0.72	1.27	1.05

*A sickness episode is considered to be 'long-term' once the individual has been absent for more than 28 days. Maternity leave is not recorded as sickness and is not included in these figures.

Staff Development

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The progress of staff through their development programmes continues following transition to the new Development and Assessment pathways for Control staff. Feedback on the content of the new pathways is positive, with staff feeling that they are better prepared to meet the requirements of their roles as a result. A number of our Crew Managers are expected to complete their programmes before the end of 2021

Development status

Role	Current staff	Number who have completed role Development pathway	Number in Development	% of Current Staff in Development
Group Manager	1	1	0	0%
Control Manager	1	1	0	0%
Control Training Manager	1	0	1	100%
Watch Manager	4	4	0	0%
Crew Manager	12	4	8	67%
Fire Fighter	23	16	7	30%
TOTAL	42	26	13	32%

The information provided in the table shown above relates to those who have successfully completed the development pathway associated with their substantive role, which qualifies the individual to receive the 'competent' rate of pay for that role. All TVFCS staff are assessed for their ability to perform safely in a role before being considered for promotion to that role.

Prevention and Protection

TVFCS staff have contributed to prevention activity during the quarter through the identification and referral of 24 residents of the Thames Valley with defective smoke alarms in their homes and through the handling of 37 safeguarding notifications. Most issues with defective domestic smoke alarms are as a result of the device's battery becoming flat, causing it to sound. This is often a cause of real concern for our most vulnerable residents, unable to access the device, or unsure what the noise they are hearing is indicating. In these cases, TVFCS will pass the information onto the relevant Fire and Rescue Service (FRS) to facilitate an urgent 'safe and well' visit for the occupant to replace the faulty alarm and provide other safety advice. Safeguarding issues can either be identified by TVFCS when dealing with callers or following attendance at an address where crews will notify TVFCS that a safeguarding issue has been identified. All TVFCS staff receive regular mandatory training relating to the safeguarding of both adults and children to assist them with this aspect of their work.

TVFCS also deal with notifications from partner agencies, primarily Thames Valley Police, when a credible threat of arson has been received against a person or premises and action needs to be urgently taken. The notifications are then passed to the relevant FRS to be dealt with in line with their respective procedures. TVFCS received 10 urgent notifications during Q1. TVFCS were also notified of threats against 20 other addresses during the period which have been passed via other routes. Once suitable inspections have been carried out at a premises where an arson threat has been received and appropriate measures applied to the premises, TVFCS will normally be asked to take additional actions should a call to the address be received. This may involve increasing the number of fire resources sent to the address or making urgent contact with the Police and other agencies.

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Response

Measure		April 2021	May 2021	June 2021	Reporting period average	Q1 2020/21 average	Rolling 12 month average
1	Total Emergency calls answered	2989	2889	3089	2989	2724	2770
2	Number of Mobilisations	1708	1663	1772	1714	1653	1528

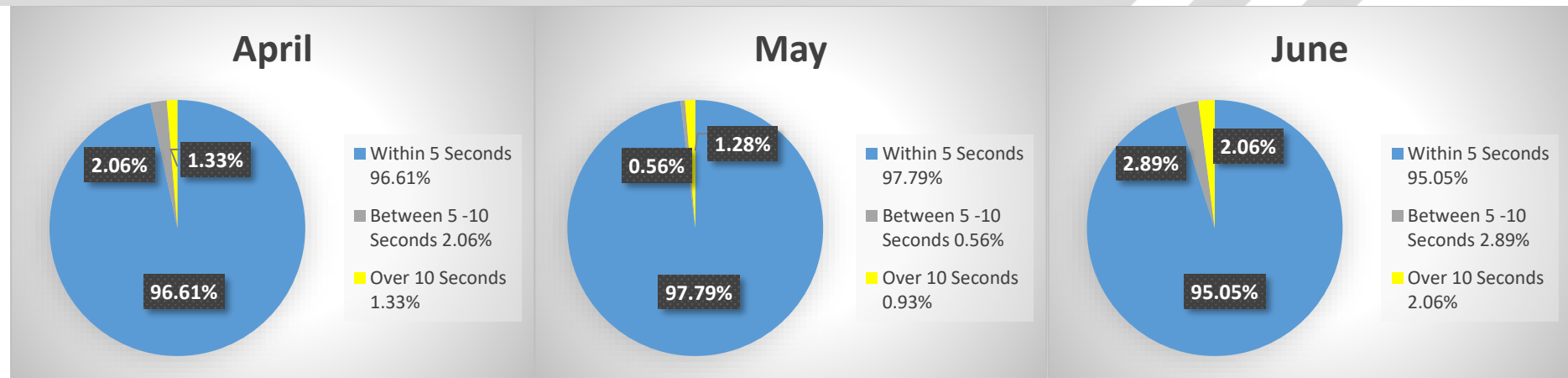
*Definitions are available in appendix A

Demand on the Service has seen a gradual increase as pandemic restrictions have lifted, with the number of incoming emergency calls received being 9.7% higher than in Q1 2020/21 and only 4.2% lower than Q1 2019/20. A similar pattern can also be seen in the number of mobilisations resulting from the calls received.

Measure*		2021/22 Target	April 2021	May 2021	June 2021	Reporting period average	Q1 2020/21 Average	Rolling 12 month average
3	Emergency calls answered within 5 seconds	92%	96.61%	97.79%	95.05%	96.48%	96.22%	96.77%
4	Emergency calls answered within 10 seconds	97%	98.67%	99.07%	97.94%	98.56%	98.11%	98.50%

*Definitions are available in appendix A

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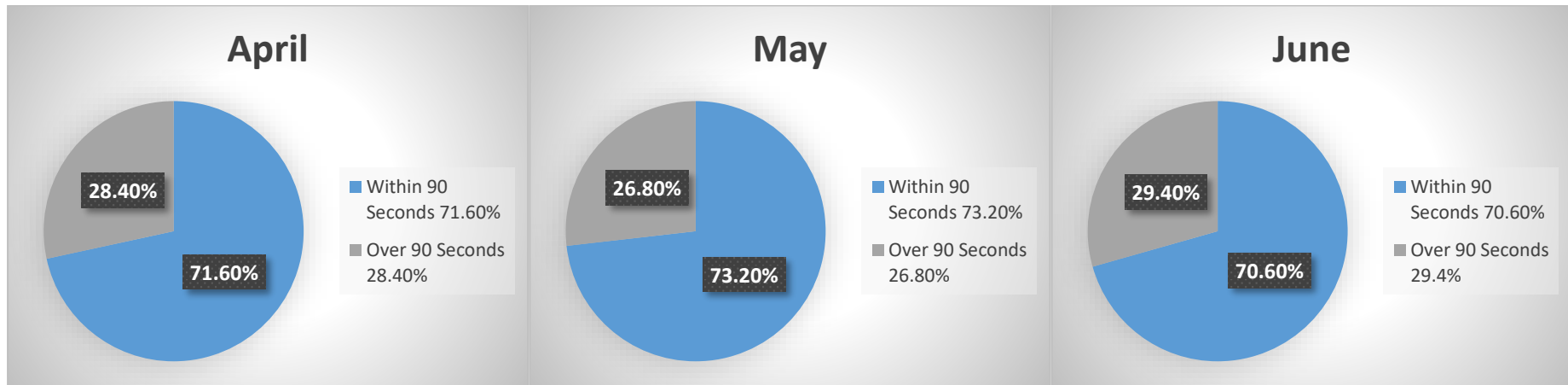


This measure examines call waiting times by looking at the performance of TVFCS staff when answering emergency calls. It sets two targets for how quickly control operators should pick up an emergency call when it comes into the control room. We measure whether a call is picked up within 5 or 10 seconds and the expected performance is that this will be done on 92% or 97% of occasions respectively. Performance against these targets is very good and the targets are routinely exceeded. In reality this means that the majority (97% or more) of all emergency calls that come into TVFCS will be picked in 10 seconds or less. The actual figures for Q4 show that, on average, control operators picked up 96.48% of all emergency call within 5 seconds and 98.56% of all emergency calls within 10 seconds.

The small number of occasions where these times are exceeded are associated with periods of higher demand where a number of calls are received simultaneously, this can be as a result of a large number of calls being received in a relatively short period of time, either as a result of single incident which is visible to a large number of people (for example, a fire involving grass on the side of a major road) or as a result of environmental conditions affecting large numbers of people simultaneously, such as exceptionally heavy rainfall causing flooding.

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Measure*		2021/22 Target	April 2021	May 2021	June 2021	Reporting Period Average	Q1 2020/21 Average	Rolling 12 Month Average
5	% occasions where time to alert station is within 90 seconds of the emergency call being answered.	80%	71.60%	73.24%	70.60%	71.81%	72.01%	71.02%



We have seen small variations in performance against this measure during Q1 with slightly lower performance than in Q4, which is consistent with normal seasonal variations. During warmer, drier weather more calls tend to be received to outdoor locations. These calls can be more difficult to locate and require longer call handling times. Some issues relating to the pandemic persist in relation to call challenging automatic fire alarm activations in commercial premises.

During the quarter, TVFCS successfully challenged 843 emergency calls. In addition to calls to alarms where FRS attendance is not required in Oxfordshire and Royal Berkshire, this figure also includes a large number of calls to other incident types where, through extended questioning of the caller, it is identified that an agency other than the Fire & Rescue Service is more appropriate to provide the assistance that the caller requires. Whilst this call challenge process can lead to extended call handling times, it is a vital aspect of the overall response strategy of the

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FRS as it preserves the availability of resources to attend incidents where life and property are threatened and simultaneously reduces the risk posed to the public and firefighters when responding to incidents under emergency conditions.

Measure		2021/22 Target	April 2021	May 2021	June 2021	Reporting period average	Q1 2020/21	Rolling 12 month average
6	Average time to alert station in seconds – Primary Fires	N/A	65	63	74	67	67	68
7	Average Time to alert station in seconds – Secondary Fires	N/A	86	88	81	85	72	84
9	Average time to alert station in seconds – Road Traffic Collisions	N/A	116	90	113	106	81	94

*Definitions are available in appendix A

The average time taken to alert a station following a call being answered, where a mobilisation is required, remains a useful measure to determine how effectively Control staff are able to handle calls. The incident types included in this reporting measure are those which are most often dealt with by the Control room with the potential to involve a threat to life and/or damage to property. On average, TVFCS staff take 90 seconds or less to handle these types of calls, further evidencing their role in supporting the performance of the three FRS' against their Integrated Risk Management or Public Safety Plans and in protecting communities across the Thames Valley.

Primary fires are typically incidents which pose a higher risk to life and property, as they generally relate to fires occurring within buildings. Throughout the period, TVFCS have consistently mobilised to these incidents within 90 seconds. TVFCS continue to achieve strong results when handling calls to these incidents, with the average time taken during the quarter being well within the 90 second target.

Secondary fires tend to be smaller, predominantly outdoor fires, which can often be more difficult to locate than fires involving buildings. It is therefore expected that TVFCS staff will take slightly longer to handle these calls and this is reflected in the statistics for the period. The average time taken to handle these calls has increased compared with 2020/21, but still remains within target for the quarter.

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Road traffic collisions (RTCs) typically take longer to locate than many other incident types, as callers are often not familiar with the area they are travelling in and are often only able to pinpoint their location as being between two notable points, for example roundabouts or other landmarks, which can make identifying a precise location challenging. A large number of calls to road traffic collisions are passed to TVFCS by the Police or Ambulance Service, which means that assistive technology for location identification such as BT Advanced Mobile Location cannot be used. During the quarter, a marked increase in the time taken to handle calls to RTCs has been noted. Initial investigations indicate that partners in both Ambulance and Police have slightly changed their approach and are calling the Fire Service for assistance whilst still engaged in emergency call handling with the original caller. This means that the address and other key details may not be available when TVFCS answer the call, leading to an extended call handling time in Fire Control. The TVFCS management team are currently working to understand this change and are liaising with partners to ensure that the best possible service is provided.

Resilience

During the Quarter, agreed crewing levels were maintained on 100% of occasions. Although levels of sickness absence continued to rise during the quarter, the willingness of TVFCS shift based staff to provide additional cover during the period has meant that minimal shift cover has been required of the Control room's management team at night or over weekends, allowing those staff to dedicate their time to other activities.

TVFCS plans include a quarterly full evacuation exercise, with staff relocating to the secondary control room facility at Kidlington. Due to the restrictions associated with COVID19, the physical evacuation exercises have been suspended and replaced with simulated evacuation exercises.

The exercise planned for Q1 was cancelled as a result of crewing pressures in Staffordshire & West Midlands Fire Control (S&WMFC). Future exercises have been scheduled for the remainder of the calendar year.

S&WMFC's anticipated move to the Capita Vision 4 mobilising system during Q1 2021/22 did not take place. TVFCS managers are in discussion with their counterparts in S&WMFC to determine their intentions in terms of completing this upgrade and what the implications are for moving to a more sophisticated fallback solution for TVFCS.



Data and Intelligence

During Quarter 1 2021/22, all requests for change submitted by the FRS to TVFCS were processed within 5 working days of the request being received. These included requests to amend the Pre-determined attendance of fire and rescue assets for specific locations, add or amend details of newly promoted FRS officers, changes to details relating to fire assets appliances and changes to FRS procedures carried out by TVFCS staff when dealing with particular types of events.

A number of requests for information to assist with investigations have been received from Thames Valley Police during the quarter. These requests are referred to the relevant FRS for approval before being released to ensure all relevant data protection legislation is complied with.

Financial Position

	<i>Total Annual Budget</i>	<i>Actual Expenditure To 30th June 2021</i>	<i>Forecast Outturn at Year End</i>	<i>Variance = Forecast - Annual Budget</i>	<i>Variance %</i>
Staff	1,798,104	465,284	1,823,659	25,555	1.42%
Corporate	324,343	81,086	324,343	0	0
Other	37,995	1,367	38,039	44	0.12%
Technology	250,005	-9,803	250,005	0	0
Total Budgeted Expenditure	2,410,447	537,934	2,436,046	25,599	1.06%

Appendix A

Performance Measure Definitions

Measure	Description
% of occasions where the time to answer emergency calls is within 5 seconds	This measure uses the time taken from when the Fire Control Room system receives an emergency incoming call alert to the moment they are answered by a TVFCS Operator.
% of occasions where the time to answer emergency calls is within 10 seconds	This measure uses the time taken from when the Fire Control Room system receives an emergency incoming call alert to the moment they are answered by a TVFCS Operator.
% of occasions where time to mobilise is within 90 seconds	This measure is calculated from when emergency calls are answered to when control room staff operate equipment at a station notifying crews that they are required to respond.
Average time to alert station in seconds – Primary Fires	The average number of seconds elapsed between an emergency call being answered and control staff operating equipment at a station notifying crews that they are required to mobilise when responding to primary fires. Primary fires are defined as ‘more serious fires that harm people or cause damage to property’
Average time to alert station in seconds – Secondary Fires	The average number of seconds elapsed between an emergency call being answered and control staff operating equipment at a station notifying crews that they are required to mobilise when responding to secondary fires. Secondary fires are defined as ‘generally small outdoor fires, not involving people or property’.
Average time to alert station in seconds – Road Traffic Collisions	The average number of seconds elapsed between an emergency call being answered and control staff operating equipment at a station notifying crews that they are required to mobilise when responding to road traffic collisions.



Appendix B
Budget Summary

TVFCS Budget Monitoring 3 Months to 30th June 2021						
	<i>Total Annual Budget</i>	<i>Actual Expenditure To 30th June 2021</i>	<i>Forecast Outturn at Year End</i>	<i>Variance = Forecast - Annual Budget</i>	<i>Variance %</i>	<i>Commentary</i>
Staff						
Employment Costs	1,789,804	471,401	1,817,735	27,931	1.56	The unexpected pay award for staff conditioned to the Grey book announced in July, and higher than anticipated requirements for overtime have led to an overspend in this area.

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Mileage and Subsistence	7,000	656	4,624	-2,376	-33.94	Currently we expect to realise some in year savings against this budget line, as restrictions to travel and the use of virtual meetings have reduced costs in this area.
Training	1,000	154	1,000		0%	
Recruitment	300	0	300	0	0%	
Sub Total	1,798,104	465,284	1,823,659	25,555	1.42%	
Corporate						
Facilities	99,184	24,796	99,184		0%	
Finance	23,289	5,822	23,289		0%	
HR	81,076	20,269	81,076		0%	
ICT	93,818	23,455	93,818		0%	
Liability and Equipment Insurance	10,924	2,731	10,924		0%	
Management	16,052	4,013	16,052		0%	

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Sub Total	324,343	81,086	324,343		0%	
Other						
Professional Services and General Equipment Purchase	5,500	1,367	5,544	44	0.80%	
OFRS Costs (secondary control facility)	44,395	0	44,395		0%	
TVFCS Alarm Receiving Centre income	-11,900	0	-11,900		0%	
Sub Total	37,995	1,367	38,039	44	0.12%	
Technology						
Capita Mobs System (maint)	70,276	0	70,276	0	0%	
DS3000 (for primary and secondary) ICCS	85,356	-15,930	85,356	0	0%	
Telephony and Network costs.	53,343	3,877	53,343	0	0%	
Software Maintenance	715	0	715	0	0%	

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EISEC Services (Primary and Secondary Control)	9,000	2,250	9,000	0	0%	
Smart services to switch 999 lines to secondary control or elsewhere	17,000	0	17,000	0	0%	
Airwave rental (SAN I ,B) (Primary,secondary) (7+8)	14,315	0	14,315	0	0%	
Sub Total	250,005	537,934	250,005	0	0%	
Total Budgeted Expenditure	2,410,447	537,934	2,436,046	25,599	1.06%	