

Thames Valley Fire Control Service



Joint Committee Performance Report (Quarter 2 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 quarter 2 2021/22, TVFCS has continued to focus on maintaining our core service and ensuring the health and wellbeing of staff whilst adapting to the changing demands of the COVID19 pandemic, and progressing other key areas of work.

During July and early August, TVFCS were impacted by increased numbers of staff being required to isolate as a result of being identified as a close contact of a COVID19 case, which created challenges in terms of maintaining agreed crewing levels. This pressure was relieved when the requirement to isolate for those who had received both doses of a COVID vaccine was lifted on August 16th 2021.

Sickness levels during the quarter were significantly higher than would normally be anticipated at this time of year, with a peak of absence experienced in late August and early September. This created particular challenges in terms of maintaining crewing levels.

The TVFCS Senior Responsible Owners (SROs) and the management team continue to consider the implications of the work required to replace or refresh the Command and Control system and to ensure that TVFCS has the right technology in place to support operations until the ESN project is delivered. SROs and TVFCS staff are engaged in national work streams, such as the Home Office 'Multi Agency Information Transfer' (MAIT) programme which will deliver increased resilience to both TVFCS and the national Fire Control sector in the future.

In Q3 2020, TVFCS made changes to support national resilience. This involved radio upgrades to allow the monitoring of a new National radio talk group for Fire Control rooms and a local interagency talk group for use during serious incidents and the adoption of new procedures to support their effective use. The new national arrangements for Fire Control rooms were activated on two occasions during Q2 2021, with TVFCS supporting operations in London, Kent and Surrey when extreme rainfall events were experienced in those counties.

Resourcing

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The TVFCS staff pool has remained stable during Q2, 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 notably increased compared with the equivalent period in previous years. Causes of absence were varied and included incidences of communicable illness which are more commonly seen during winter. Sickness absence is reviewed regularly and managed in line with agreed policy and procedure. Where applicable, staff are signposted to support arrangements to assist with particular issues and maximise availability for work. The majority of the absences during the period were for relatively minor illness, which did not require significant support.

A small number of TVFCS staff experienced COVID19 infection during the quarter. All those infected with COVID19 had received both doses of a vaccine and experienced relatively minor symptoms.

We continue to support 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	July 2021	August 2021	September 2021
Short-term Sickness Episodes	8	12	8
Long-term Sickness Episodes*	2	2	2
Total Days lost to Sickness	55	82	53
Average days lost per FTE	1.38	2.05	1.33

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*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

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. The crewing issues experience during the quarter have had an impact on assessor capacity. Despite this, a number of our Crew Managers are still expected to complete their programmes as scheduled.

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%

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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 42 residents of the Thames Valley with defective smoke alarms in their homes and through the handling of 32 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 2 urgent notifications during Q2. TVFCS were also notified of threats against 38 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,

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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.

Response

Measure		July 2021	August 2021	September 2021	Reporting period average	Q2 2020/21 average	Rolling 12 month average
1	Total Emergency calls answered	3403	2914	3392	3236	3173	2778
2	Number of Mobilisations	1895	1822	1992	1903	1841	1526

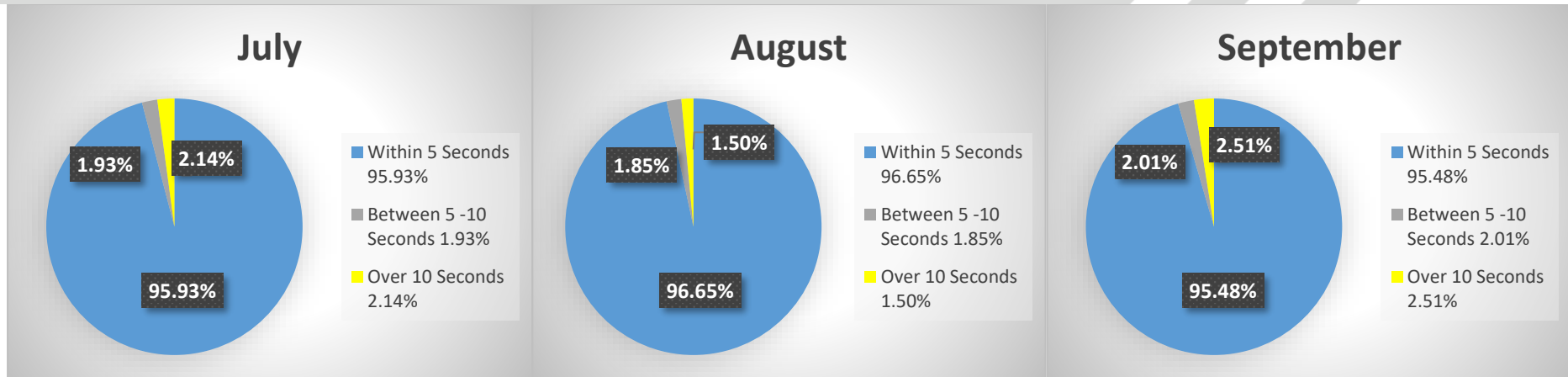
*Definitions are available in appendix A

Demand on the Service has now returned to levels comparable to those seen before the pandemic.

Measure*		2021/22 Target	July 2021	August 2021	September 2021	Reporting period average	Q2 2020/21 Average	Rolling 12 month average
3	Emergency calls answered within 5 seconds	92%	95.93%	96.65%	95.48%	96.02%	95.78%	96.68%
4	Emergency calls answered within 10 seconds	97%	97.86%	98.50%	97.49%	97.95%	98.03%	98.40%

*Definitions are available in appendix A

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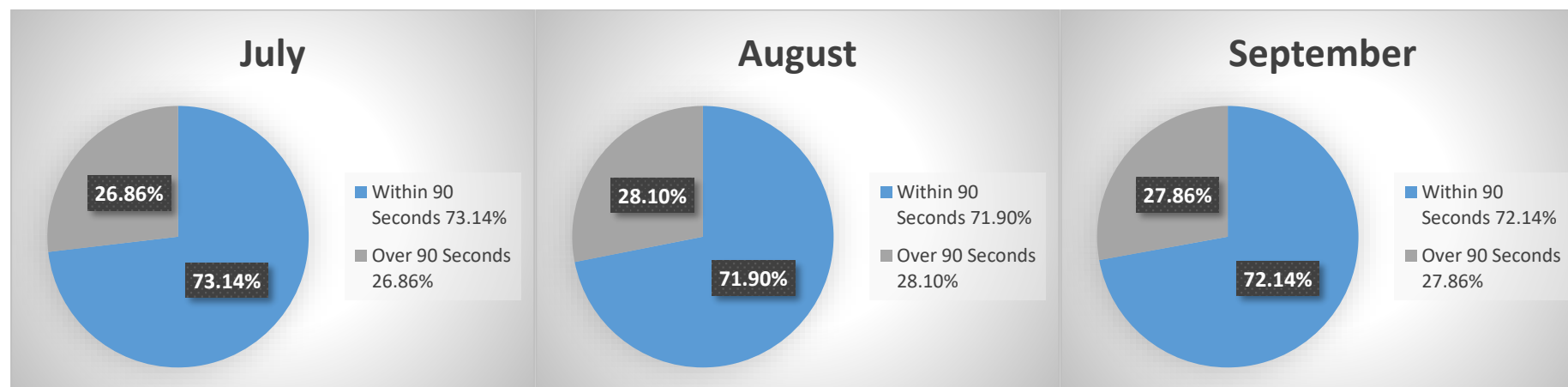


This measure examines call waiting times by looking at the performance of TVFCS staff when answering emergency calls. It sets two targets for how quickly control operators should pick up an emergency call when it comes into the control room. We measure whether a call is picked up within 5 or 10 seconds 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 Q2 show that, on average, control operators picked up 96.02% of all emergency call within 5 seconds and 97.95% 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	July 2021	August 2021	September 2021	Reporting Period Average	Q2 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%	73.14%	71.90%	72.14%	72.39%	71.27%	71.36%



We have seen small variations in performance against this measure which are 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. Although performance against this measure remains below target, the data shows an improvement against the rolling 12 month figure and the equivalent quarter in 2020/21.

During the quarter, TVFCS successfully challenged 836 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	July 2021	August 2021	September 2021	Reporting period average	Q1 2020/21	Rolling 12 month average
6	Average time to alert station in seconds – Primary Fires	N/A	65	60	76	67	69	65
7	Average Time to alert station in seconds – Secondary Fires	N/A	78	82	100	86	84	80
9	Average time to alert station in seconds – Road Traffic Collisions	N/A	78	89	85	84	89	91

*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.

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

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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, leading to slightly longer call handling times.

Resilience

As a result of the crewing pressures caused by the high level of staff absence experienced during the quarter, there were a number of occasions where it was not possible to achieve the desired crewing levels within TVFCS. In total, TVFCS was staffed below normal crewing levels for 2.4% of the available hours during the quarter. On these occasions, TVFCS staff were supported by the three FRS working to agreed degradation plans, which prioritise risk critical operational activity whilst ensuring the health and wellbeing of control staff performing their duties. Although this created additional pressure for Control room staff, there was no impact on business continuity as all emergency calls placed to TVFCS were responded to without needing to utilise our buddy arrangements.

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. A simulated evacuation exercise took place on August 6th 2021, demonstrating Staffordshire & West Midlands Fire Control's ability to receive calls and alert resources within the Thames Valley.

S&WMFC's anticipated move to the Capita Vision 4 mobilising system has been rescheduled for early 2022, which will allow the full technical integration of the fall back solution.

Data and Intelligence

During Quarter 2 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.

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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 September 2021</i>	<i>Forecast Outturn at Year End</i>	<i>Variance = Forecast - Annual Budget</i>	<i>Variance %</i>
Staff	1,798,104	935,866	1,832,386	34,282	2.02%
Corporate	324,343	162,171	324,343	0	0
Other	37,995	1,890	37,995	0	0.12%
Technology	250,005	111,748	245,417	-4,588	-1.84%
Total Budgeted Expenditure	2,410,447	1,211,677	2,440,141	29,694	1.23%

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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 September 2021						
	<i>Total Annual Budget</i>	<i>Actual Expenditure To 30th September 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	933,976	1,818,354	28,550	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	1,714	5,200	-1,800	-25.71%	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	177	1,000		0%	
Recruitment	300	0	300	0	0%	
Sub Total	1,798,104	465,284	1,832,386	34,282	1.91%	
Corporate						
Facilities	99,184	49,592	99,184		0%	
Finance	23,289	11,644	23,289		0%	
HR	81,076	40,538	81,076		0%	
ICT	93,818	46,909	93,818		0%	
Liability and Equipment Insurance	10,924	5,462	10,924		0%	
Management	16,052	8,026	16,052		0%	

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Sub Total	324,343	162,171	324,343		0%	
Other						
Professional Services and General Equipment Purchase	5,500	1,402	5,500	0	0%	
OFRS Costs (secondary control facility)	44,395	0	44,395	0	0%	
TVFCS Alarm Receiving Centre income	-11,900	488	-11,900	0	0%	
Sub Total	37,995	1,367	38,039	44	0.12%	
Technology						
Capita Mobs System (maint)	70,276	0	70,897	621	0%	A small difference in the rate of RPI used when the budget was set and the prevailing rate when the year's costs were calculated by Capita has led to this variance.

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DS3000 (for primary and secondary) ICCS	85,356	88,031	88,031	2,674	3.13%	A small difference in the rate of RPI used when the budget was set and the prevailing rate when the year's costs were calculated by Capita, as well as an unforeseen framework fee for contract extension has led to this variance.
Telephony and Network costs.	53,343	19,218	45,460	-7,883	0%	Lower than anticipated network costs will result in an in year saving against this budget line.
Software Maintenance	715	0	715	0	0%	
EISEC Services (Primary and Secondary Control)	9,000	4,500	9,000	0	0%	
Smart services to switch 999 lines to secondary control or elsewhere	17,000	0	17,000	0	0%	

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Airwave rental (SAN I ,B) (Primary,secondary) (7+8)	14,315	0	14,315	0	0%	
Sub Total	250,005	111,748	245,417	-4,588	-1.84%	
Total Budgeted Expenditure	2,410,447	1,211,677	2,440,141	29,694	1.23%	