

ROYAL BERKSHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY REPORT



COMMITTEE	FIRE AUTHORITY
DATE OF MEETING	13 NOVEMBER 2024
SUBJECT	THAMES VALLEY FIRE CONTROL SERVICE (TVFCS) JOINT COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 23/24
LEAD OFFICER	JIM POWELL, AREA MANAGER COLLABORTION AND POLICY
LEAD MEMBER	COIUNCILLOR PETER FREWER, COUNCILLOR SIMON WERNER
EXEMPT INFORMATION	NONE
ACTION	TO NOTE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide a high-level summary of Thames Valley Fire Control Service (TVFCS) activity during the year 2023/24.

2. RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 That Fire Authority **NOTE** the report.

3. REPORT

- 3.1 An annual report is produced each year by RBFA members who form part of the Thames Valley Fire Control Joint Committee. In 2023/24 RBFA was represented by Cllr Simon Werner and Cllr Peter Frewer.
- 3.2 This report will provide a high-level overview of control room activity and any progress made in relation to service plans and performance, including a look at staffing and a summary of the financial position at year end. Finally, it will provide a look forward to 2024/25 and the key areas of work required to continue making improvements to TVFCS on behalf of the three Thames Valley Fire and Rescue Services (FRS).
- 3.3 TVFCS continues to be the flagship of collaboration in the region since going live in April 2015. The control centre handles calls and mobilises resources for the three Thames Valley FRS.
- 3.4 Governance of TVFCS is undertaken by elected members, two from each contributing authority, who form the TVFCS Joint Committee. Senior Responsible Officers (SRO) from each TV FRS form the Joint Coordinating Group (JCG) and

support the control manager to monitor and manage performance, reporting into the Joint Committee.

- 3.5 The service utilises a single employer model with a single mobilising system, which has delivered significant cost efficiencies to all three authorities. Increased resilience, efficiency and improved performance will result in collective savings of over £1 million a year over a 15-year period up to 2030.

PERFORMANCE

- 3.6 TVFCS is measured against a set of targets agreed by Joint Coordinating Group and endorsed by the Joint Committee and these are reviewed as part of the scrutiny of performance reporting. During the last year, a new set of measures and approach to reporting has been developed by the Joint Coordinating Group in response to feedback from Committee members which highlight key performance metrics, staff attendance and activities where TVFCS provide added value to the communities of the Thames Valley.
- 3.7 TVFCS has performed well against the existing measure for how quickly calls are answered during the year, with the target exceeded on the majority of occasions.
- 3.8 The measures used to monitor the speed with which TVFCS mobilise fire appliances in response to calls were revised in 2022/23 and have been reviewed on a monthly basis over the course of the year. It has been identified that further information is required to enable the TVFCS management team to identify the causes of lower than expected performance levels for specific types of incidents. New reports have been commissioned to support this, with the information captured to be included in TVFCS performance reporting for the 2024/25 financial year.

STAFFING

- 3.9 TVFCS staff turnover has reduced compared with the previous financial year, but still remains higher than the levels experienced prior to the Covid19 pandemic. This is an issue that has been experienced nationally across most Fire Control rooms in the United Kingdom, and an NFCC working group has been established to look at improving staff recruitment and retention, which TVFCS are engaged with. The TVFCS Senior Responsible Officers (SROs) and management team are reviewing leaver data and working together to identify local solutions.
- 3.10 It has continued to be possible to fill internal vacancies for Supervisory and Middle Management roles with internal candidates, demonstrating the progress that has been made in terms of staff development and succession planning.
- 3.11 Levels of sickness absence have been higher than anticipated in the second half of the last year, with a notable increase in staff absent as a result of longer-term sickness. The TVFCS management team are working with the RBFMS Health and Wellbeing Manager to identify ways in which we can positively impact the health and wellbeing of TVFCS staff.

NOTABLE ACTIVITY

- 3.12 Whilst the Thames Valley did not experience the extreme summer weather conditions experienced in 2022, the wetter than normal weather experienced in January caused an increase in demand, with call volumes being over 20% higher than would normally be expected.
- 3.13 In September, TVFCS completed a hardware refresh of the Vision Command & Control system. This is a challenging activity, as it involves the migration of the service from the old hardware onto the new, whilst maintaining business as usual levels of service. Close co-operation between TVFCS, the 3 Fire & Rescue Services and the system supplier meant that the works were completed with only minimal disruptions to operational activity.
- 3.14 In October, TVFCS commenced work to migrate the service from the legacy 'SAN H' connection to the national Airwave radio network onto the replacement 'DCS' connection. This was a complex piece of work, requiring coordination between our systems supplier, NEC, Airwave and TVFCS. The final elements of the work were completed during Q4. This key piece of work will allow TVFCS to continue to connect to the Airwave network for the remainder of its operational life and will also allow a connection to ESN when this is eventually delivered.
- 3.15 In December, TVFCS delivered another key piece of technical work to replace the legacy system used by supervisory managers to monitor Control room operators whilst handling emergency '999' calls. These works were completed ahead of schedule and the new, improved system has been well received by TVFCS Control room staff.
- 3.16 Following the appointment of a temporary Watch Manager in September 2023, TVFCS have begun to make good progress in the adoption of National Operational Guidance for Fire Controls. Full adoption of this guidance will align TVFCS with accepted industry best practice and will form the basis of a new maintenance of knowledge and skills system for TVFCS staff.

LOOKING FORWARD

- 3.17 In Q3 2024/25, TVFCS are expecting to complete a hardware refresh of the Integrated Communication Control System (ICCS), which handles all radio and telephone calls made by or to TVFCS. This will be the final technical refresh of TVFCS systems during the current contract and will provide TVFCS with a stable platform which complies with ICT security requirements until the end of the contract term.
- 3.18 TVFCS expect to adopt Multi Agency Incident Transfer (MAIT) technology during the course of the coming year. Adoption of this national initiative will enable TVFCS to exchange incident details with other Fire Control rooms across England electronically without the need for a telephone or radio call, which will improve efficiency and reduce the possibility of errors in the exchange of information. Area Manager Jim Powell (RBFRS) is the strategic lead for MAIT for the National Fire Chiefs Council.
- 3.19 The Joint Coordination Group will continue to progress work to improve the staffing resilience of TVFCS.

4. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC COMMITMENTS

- 4.1 Response: We will ensure that our people are trained and resources are located to provide the most effective response and to have a positive impact on incidents in our communities.
- 4.2 Resilience: We will ensure we are resilient and work with our partners to promote and build resilience in the communities we serve.
- 4.3 Sustainability: We are committed to ensuring that we provide a financially sustainable Service and take meaningful action to help address the climate emergency.
- 4.4 People: We will support our staff by providing a safe and inclusive environment for them to thrive in, building a diverse organisation that is engaged with, and accessible to, our communities.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The budget for TVFCS is set at the December meeting of the Joint Committee each year. The budget for TVFCS for 2023/24 was £2,639,306. At year end, the actual expenditure was £2,696,706 creating a variance of £57,400 (2.17%). The principal cause being pay awards in both 2022 and 2023 being higher than forecast.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 This report conforms to the requirements of the TVFCS Inter Authority Agreement.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no equality and diversity implications.

8. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 There are no risk implications directly associated with this report. Risks relating to future activity are captured in the TVFCS risk register and reviewed regularly by the SROs.

9. CONSISTENCY WITH DUTY TO COLLABORATE

- 9.1 TVFCS is an existing collaboration between RBFA, BMKFA and OCC.

10. PRINCIPAL CONSULTATION

- 10.1 Chief Fire Officer.
- 10.2 Chief Finance Officer.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1 None.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 None.

13. CONTACT DETAILS

13.1 Area Manager Jim Powell powelli@rbfrs.co.uk