

Thames Valley Fire Control Service



Joint Committee Performance Report (Quarter 1 2020/21)



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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

The operating environment for TVFCS during the first quarter of 2020/21 has been significantly affected by the national response to the COVID19 pandemic and in particular, the restrictions on movement and activity which have been applied to the UK population. These changes have impacted on the working environment within TVFCS with the need to operate in accordance with government guidance being paramount to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of TVFCS staff. This guidance has changed as the scientific understanding of the virus and its transmission has developed and has required a flexible and dynamic approach from all staff.

Notable change has also been seen in the volume and nature of calls for assistance being received, with normal seasonal patterns of incidents being affected as communities across the Thames Valley adapted to the guidance on how to control the spread of the virus.

In addition to the impact on the volumes and types of calls received by TVFCS, the response to COVID19 affected working arrangements within TVFCS. The plans developed in February and March continued to be applied throughout the quarter.

The early planning and preparation which took place enabled focused proactive planning and communication to take place and drove a number of key activities, including a supportive local agreement with representative bodies and a clear and detailed TVFCS degradation plan, agreed collaboratively between the three FRS, setting out what mitigating steps could be taken as the situation evolved and how this would affect the way the service was provided.

Early action was taken to restrict access to both Primary and Secondary Control sites to reduce the potential exposure of Control staff to the virus and to maintain the integrity of the environment.

Steps were taken to provide additional support to Control room crewing in a number of ways, which included the reemployment of a small number of staff who had recently left TVFCS on casual contracts and the provision of 24 hour advice and support to the duty Control room watch from the Control management team and Senior Responsible Owners.

A combination of the actions taken and an overall focus on increased hygiene has allowed TVFCS to manage the staff extractions associated with COVID19 without compromising crewing levels at any times.

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The Senior Responsible owners, working with the TVFCS management team, are reviewing the actions taken to identify which might be beneficial to adopt as 'business as usual' once the pandemic period is passed.

TVFCS Managerial and technical staff have worked in collaboration with colleagues from BFRS and Capita during Quarter 1 to prepare TVFCS staff and systems for the introduction of the new 'Blue Light Hub' in Milton Keynes. On June 30th 2020, this work culminated in a seamless transition from the former BFRS stations at Great Holm and Bletchley to the new station at West Ashland.

Resourcing

Recruitment has taken place to fill a vacancy caused by staff movement in January 2020 and to cover maternity leave. Two new members of staff joined the TVFCS team in late June on fixed term contracts. They will complete their initial induction training during July and will join their shifts at the start of August.

During April, May and June, 2 further members of staff left TVFCS. This represents 5% of the total establishment. The staff members leaving have moved onto careers in Fire Safety and operational firefighting with Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service and Surrey Fire & Rescue Service respectively.

A recruitment campaign to fill the establishment vacancies created by this turnover is underway, with successful candidates expected to start their training in October 2020. The recruitment activity during the quarter has attracted a high number of applicants, and it is expected that we will identify a number of suitable candidates over and above those required to fill existing vacancies that we will be able to approach should further staff movement occur.

As expected, Sickness levels in the first quarter of 2020/21 have reduced compared with Quarter 4 2019/20 but slightly higher than for the equivalent period in 2019/20. These patterns are consistent with the seasonal variation that we would expect to see.

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Sickness absence in April 2020 was affected by COVID19, with two staff members requiring a period of short term absence due to suffering from symptoms associated with Coronavirus. No sickness absence relating to COVID19 was recorded in May and June, with absences being caused by other factors. One member of staff has remained shielded during the quarter and is undertaking other work for the TVFCS Management team from home until it is safe for them to return to the workplace.

Measure	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020
Short-term Sickness Episodes	4	1	4
Long-term Sickness Episodes*	1	1	1
Total Days lost to Sickness	30	22	33
Average days lost per FTE	0.75	0.56	0.81

*A sickness episode is considered to be 'long-term' once the individual has been absent for more than 28 days.

Staff Development

TVFCS staff have been working with colleagues from the RBFRS Resourcing and Development team to replace the NVQ system with the new Development and Assessment Pathways (DAPS) for all roles within TVFCS. These pathways have been approved by Skills for Justice and will now be used to evidence full competence in role for TVFCS staff. The pathways identify the key development required for each role and the evidence requirements to confirm knowledge and understanding and are directly linked to the National Operational Standards for Fire Control staff.

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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	20	16	4	20%
TOTAL	39	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.

The relatively high number of staff at Crew Manager level currently going through their development pathway is a reflection of the number of TVFCS staff achieving promotion within the department over the preceding 18 months and is evidence of the progress that has been made in developing TVFCS staff.



Prevention and Protection

TVFCS staff have contributed to prevention activity during the quarter through the identification and referral of 29 members of the public with defective smoke alarms in their homes and through the handling of 34 safeguarding notifications, helping some of the most vulnerable members of our communities receive the assistance they require.

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. The notifications are then passed to the relevant Fire & Rescue Service to be dealt with in line with their respective procedures. TVFCS have processed 6 notifications of this type during Q1 2020/21.

TVFCS staff have worked with colleagues from RBFRS during June, contributing to the production of a fire Safety video for use in schools.

Response

Measure		April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	Reporting period average	Q1 2019/20	Rolling 12 month average
1	Total Emergency calls answered	2399	2884	2889	2724	3119	2922
2	Number of Mobilisations	1496	1714	1748	1653	1831	1784

*Definitions are available in appendix A

The number of incoming emergency calls handled by TVFCS reduced by 12.66% in comparison with the equivalent quarter in 2019/20. The reduction in calls was most noticeable in April, where the number of calls received was 21.24% lower than in April 2019. This reduction coincided with the restrictions on public movement and activity introduced as part of the national response to COVID19 on March 23rd 2020 and

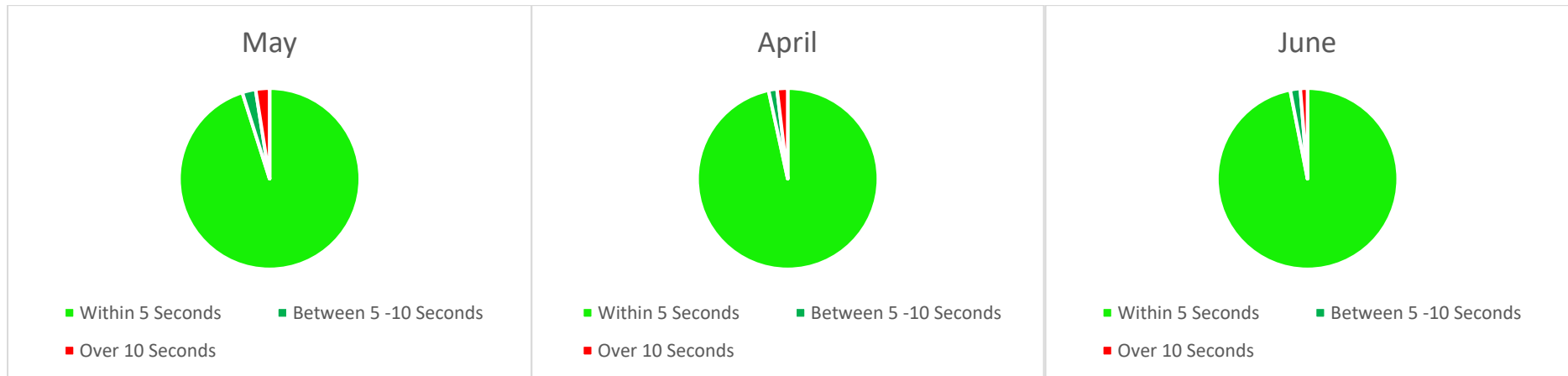
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it is likely that the change observed was a result of the reduced social and economic activity nationally. Whilst calls to some types of incident rose during this period, the overall effect of the national 'lockdown' seems to have created reduction in demand on TVFCS.

The same pattern is also shown in the number of mobilisations which took place during the period with an overall drop in mobilisations of 9.28%. Again, the largest reduction was seen in April where mobilisations were 16.98% lower than in April 2019.

Measure*		2020/21 Target	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	Reporting period average	Q1 2019/20	Rolling 12 month average
3	Emergency calls answered within 5 seconds	92%	96.60%	95.12%	96.93%	96.22%	95.63%	95.87%
4	Emergency calls answered within 10 seconds	97%	98.10%	97.52%	98.72%	98.11%	97.86%	97.92%

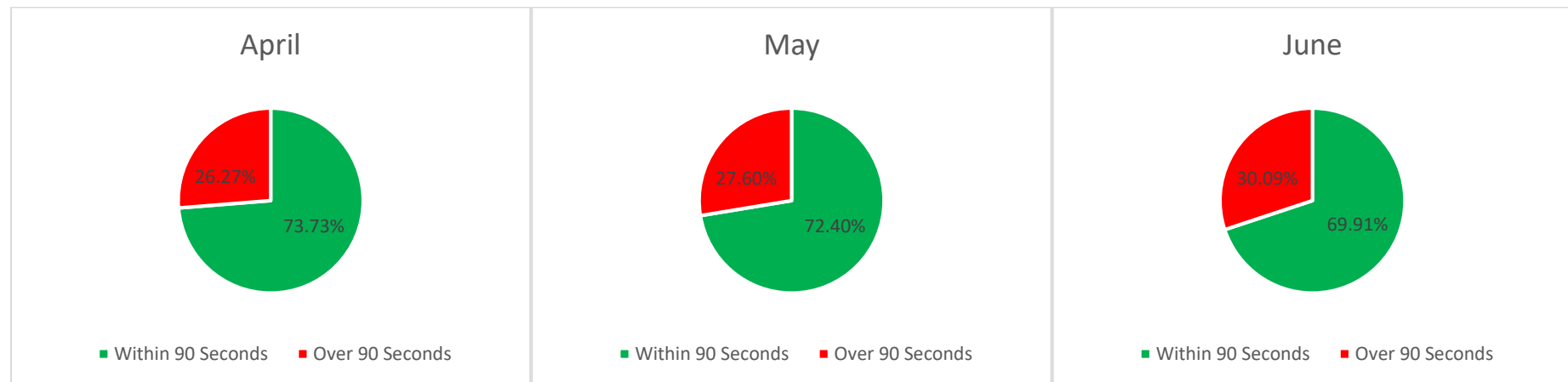
*Definitions are available in appendix A



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When answering emergency calls, TVFCS targets are that no more than 3% of calls received should ring for more than 10 seconds with a second, more demanding, target that no more than 7% of calls should ring for longer than 5 seconds. TVFCS staff continue to exceed these targets, with only 3.78% of calls ringing for more than 5 seconds across the quarter and 1.89% of calls ringing for over 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, often all reporting the same incident. A small improvement in performance can be seen in comparison with Q1 2019/20, which would be expected based on the reduced overall call volume during the period. There is a strong link between high performance against this measure with the maintenance of appropriate crewing levels to meet anticipated demand levels.

Measure*		2020/21 Target	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	Reporting Period Average	Q1 2019/20	Rolling 12 Month Average
5	% occasions where time to alert station is within 90 seconds of the emergency call being answered.	80%	73.73%	72.40%	69.91%	72.01%	72.27%	74.39%



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Performance against the measure for alerting crews within 90 seconds of emergency calls being answered had seen small incremental improvements over the last 12 months. Call handling times are expected to increase slightly during the summer months, as more calls to outdoor locations are received which involve extended questioning of the caller and the use of location identification technology to ensure that the most appropriate resources are mobilised. Whilst some variance was expected in this area, the performance in June fell by more than would normally be anticipated. Analysis of the data and interviews conducted with Control room staff indicate that difficulties were experienced during June with calls to Alarms in Industrial, Commercial, Retail and Public Assembly premises. The call challenge procedure operated by TVFCS on behalf of OFRS and RBFRS for these premises requires TVFCS to contact the premises to ascertain whether the alarm can be confirmed as 'false' before mobilising a response. During June, it proved difficult to make contact with these premises to gain this confirmation. It would appear that this is a result of the reopening of these premises with reduced staffing numbers following the national 'lockdown'. Premises have often opened without fully staffed reception facilities and with reduced staff available on site to carry out the required checks, leading to extended call handling times prior to an eventual mobilisation.

During the quarter, TVFCS did successfully challenge 813 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 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 'blue light' conditions.

Measure		2020/21 Target	April 2020	May 2020	June 2020	Reporting period average	Q1 2019/20	Rolling 12 month average
6	Average time to alert station in seconds – Primary Fires	N/A	61	71	66	67	78	67
7	Average Time to alert station in seconds – Secondary Fires	N/A	79	66	73	72	69	78
9	Average time to alert station in seconds – Road Traffic Collisions	N/A	76	76	90	81	80	83

*Definitions are available in appendix A

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The average time taken to alert a station following a call being answered is a useful measure to determine how quickly Control staff are able to handle calls relating to certain key subsets of incidents. 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, which evidences the role they play in supporting all three FRS' performance against their Integrated Risk Management 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 and a notable improvement can be seen compared with the equivalent period in 2019/20.

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 Control staff will take slightly longer to handle these calls and this is reflected in the statistics for the period. The average speed to mobilise is on average 3 seconds slower than in the same quarter in 2019/20, but still comfortably within 90 seconds.

Road traffic collisions typically take longer to locate than many other incident types, as callers are often not familiar with the area they 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. Despite the challenges associated with calls of this type, TVFCS staff still have an average call handling time of 90 seconds or less.

Resilience

During the Quarter, agreed minimum crewing levels were maintained on 100% of occasions. In order to maintain these crewing levels, 17 hours of weekend cover were provided by members of the Control room management team.

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On June 4th, a business resilience exercise took place which simulated a scenario where TVFCS calls needed to be diverted to the Staffordshire & West Midlands Fire Control (S&WMFC). During the exercise, S&WMFC staff were able to correctly identify and notify the appropriate Thames Valley Resources for each call passed to them using the agreed resilient 'fall back' systems.

Data and Intelligence

During Quarter 1 2020/21, 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 for specific locations, add or amend details of newly promoted FRS officers, changes to details relating to fire appliances and changes to FRS procedures carried out by TVFCS staff when dealing with particular types of events.

On 30th June 2020, the new Milton Keynes 'Blue Light Hub' became fully operational. Throughout Quarter one, TVFCS staff worked with colleagues from BFRS and Capita making the changes to the Command & Control platform required to support this change. The switchover to these new arrangements on June 30th progressed extremely smoothly, with the first mobilisation from the new station taking place at 13:59.

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 2020</i>	<i>Forecast Outturn at Year End</i>	<i>Variance = Forecast - Annual Budget</i>	<i>Variance %</i>
Staff	1,764,060	413,349	1,710,540	-53,250	-3.03%
Corporate	308,250	77,063	308,250	0	0
Other	35,740	-5,853	36,700	960	2.69%
Technology	247,060	10,144	246,884	-176	-0.07%
Total Budgeted Expenditure	2,355,110	494,704	2,302,374	-52,736	-2.24%



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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 June 2020						
	<i>Total Annual Budget</i>	<i>Actual Expenditure To 30th June 2020</i>	<i>Forecast Outturn at Year End</i>	<i>Variance = Forecast - Annual Budget</i>	<i>Variance %</i>	<i>Commentary</i>
Staff						
Employment Costs	1,753,010	412099	1,699,766	-53,244	-3.04%	Staff resignations and two members of staff taking maternity leave in the period since the budget was set, have reduced the amount of salary expenditure and other associated costs. COVID19 restrictions have meant that it initially took longer than normal to recruit replacement staff, causing posts

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						to remain vacant for longer than would normally be expected. Recruitment arrangements have now been refined to account for the restrictions created by COVID19.
Mileage and Subsistence	7,000	867	5,300	-1,700	-24.29%	COVID19 has meant that the majority of physical meetings, both within the Thames Valley and nationally have either been cancelled or held virtually. This has greatly reduced travelling and associated costs for members of the TVFCS management team.
Uniform Allowances	3,000	556	2,224	-776	-25.87%	This expenditure relates to a locally agreed allowance relating to work

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						<p>wear payable to eligible female members of staff. Staff movements have reduced the number of staff claiming this allowance. Work is ongoing between the RBFRS SRO, TVFCS Group Manager and the representative body to remove this allowance and provide the relevant uniform items directly.</p>
Training	750	-172	750	0	0%	<p>The negative expenditure shown relates to the refund of costs for external training cancelled as a result of COVID19. It is anticipated that the training course which utilise this budget will resume when social distancing</p>

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						measures are relaxed.
Recruitment	300	0	2,500	2,200	733.33%	The budget set was based on the aptitude testing of potential new recruits being carried out by TVFCS and RBFRS staff on site. COVID19 restrictions has meant that this approach has not been possible during Quarter 1 and testing has had to be moved to online platforms with higher costs.
Sub Total	1,764,060	413,349	1,710,540	-53,250	-3.03%	
Corporate						
Facilities	98,180	24,545	98,180	0	0%	
Finance	22,720	5,680	22,720	0	0%	
HR	73,070	18,268	73,070	0	0%	

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ICT	91,530	22,883	91,530	0	0%	
Liability and Equipment Insurance	7,090	1,773	7,090	0	0%	
Management	15,660	3,915	15,660	0	0%	
Sub Total	308,250	77,063	308,250	0	0%	
Other						
Professional Services and General Equipment Purchase	5,500	-5,853	6,460	960	17.45%	TVFCS have needed to purchase additional equipment in order to meet the 'COVID Secure' government requirements. It may be possible to recoup some or all of these costs, which may reduce the overspend currently forecast.
OFRS Costs (secondary control facility)	42,140	42,140	0	42,140	0%	
TVFCS Alarm Receiving Centre income	-11,900	0	-11,900	432	0%	

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Sub Total	35,740	-5,853	36,700	960	2.69%	
Technology						
Capita Mobs System (maint)	69,210	0	69,034	-176	-0.25%	There is a small variance in expenditure in this line, due to a difference in the RPI rate between the budget being set and Capita providing their invoice.
DS3000 (for primary and secondary) ICCS	87,200	0	87,200	0	0%	
Telephony and Network costs.	49,510	7,894	49,510	0	0%	
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	17,340	0	17,340	0	0%	
Airwave rental (SAN I ,B) (14,100	0	14,100	0	0%	

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Primary,secondary) (7+8)						
Sub Total	247,060	10,144	246,884	-176	-0.07%	
Total Budgeted Expenditure	2,355,110	494,704	2,302,374	-52,736	-2.24%	