

Thames Valley Fire Control Service



Joint Committee Performance Report (Quarter 2 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

During the second quarter of 2020/21, TVFCS activity has continued to be shaped by the national response to the COVID19 pandemic. The focus has continued to be on safeguarding the health and wellbeing of TVFCS staff, whilst maintaining a first class service for our Fire & Rescue Services and our communities.

The relaxation of the government's COVID restrictions in July and August, allowed staff to take planned holidays and resume other activities. Whilst this proved a welcome respite for staff and had positive effects on their health and wellbeing, a number of challenges were posed in maintaining crewing levels caused by the requirement for self-isolation, quarantine and the normal seasonal fluctuations in sickness absence. This created an additional burden on the TVFCS management team in ensuring crewing levels were maintained.

The reduction in demand on TVFCS seen in Q1 has continued during Q2, in terms of both calls received and consequent resource mobilisations compared with the equivalent period in 2019/20 and 2018/19. This reduction is believed to be linked to the societal and behavioural changes resulting from the response to COVID19, the consequent impacts on the number of journeys made and lower levels of economic activity. Anecdotally, TVFCS staff are reporting an increase in emergency calls where mental health and wellbeing is believed to be a factor in the decision to call 999. The majority of these calls require no FRS emergency response but are referred to partner agencies when a safeguarding referral is appropriate.

Two weather events impacted TVFCS during the quarter in August and September, where high volumes of rainfall were experienced over relatively short time periods. More information relating to these events is included in the 'Performance' section of this report.

The Joint Coordination Group and the TVFCS management team, have commenced work to plan, coordinate and resource the significant level of activity which will need to be undertaken over the next two years and beyond. This includes participation in national work streams to implement recommendations from the Grenfell Tower Inquiry (focusing on delivering key guidance for staff), the replacement and refresh of the hardware hosting the TVFCS command and control system and systems software, and changes required to facilitate the adoption of the Emergency Services Network.

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Early scoping work has indicated a number of challenges around resourcing and capacity for this necessary upgrade work, which will be considered by officers, and presented to members, in the coming months.

Officers received the Capita system upgrade report, outlining the implications of an extension to the existing contract for the command and control system, in August in line with contractual timelines. The Joint Coordination Group are engaging with FRS technical teams, the TVFCS management team, and Capita, over the detail of the report, to ensure clarity on the proposal before bringing recommendations to members. This, and the upgrade programme scoping work, will be a key focus of the planned March 2021 Member workshop.

Resourcing

Recruitment activity to fill the two vacancies caused by staff resignations during Q1 took place ahead of schedule, with the successful candidates starting their initial training in September and joining their new teams during the last week of October 2020. The number of applicants for these vacancies were considerably higher than has previously been experienced for equivalent roles and several suitable candidates were identified over and above the current requirement. TVFCS managers are exploring how we can engage with these individuals should further vacancies arise.

The TVFCS management team were notified of a forthcoming period of maternity leave, due to commence in December 2020 and are making the necessary arrangements to cover this.

Sickness levels in the second quarter of 2020/21 increased compared with both the previous quarter and the equivalent quarter in 2019/20. Whilst the number of short term sickness absences was consistent with normal seasonal variation, two long term absences had a significant effect on the overall number of days lost in July and August. Of these long term absences, one staff member has now returned to full duties whilst the other has begun a phased return to the workplace whilst they continue to receive appropriate treatment for their health and medical needs. As in previous years, all TVFCS staff will be offered access to a free influenza vaccination during autumn 2020.

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Whilst no sickness absence has occurred during the quarter as a result of COVID19 infection, during September a number of staff were required to self-isolate as a result of COVID symptoms. In some of these cases staff would normally have attended work whilst managing mild symptoms but were unable to do so until a COVID test result had been received.

Measure	July 2020	August 2020	September 2020
Short-term Sickness Episodes	4	3	8
Long-term Sickness Episodes*	2	1	0
Total Days lost to Sickness	38	17	24
Average days lost per FTE	0.94	0.42	0.56

*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 from staff on the content of the new pathways has been positive and levels of engagement have been high. It is currently anticipated that a number of staff employed as Crew Managers will complete their pathways before the 2020 Christmas holiday. This will provide additional resilience in terms of TVFCS supervisory management crewing, the management team can then begin to prepare these staff for an eventual transition into Watch Manager roles.



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.

Prevention and Protection

TVFCS staff have contributed to prevention activity during the quarter through the identification and referral of 30 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 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 have only processed 1 notification of this type during Q2 2020/21, however TVFCS have been notified of threats against 19 other addresses during the period which have been passed via other routes. Once suitable inspections have been carried out on 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 appliances sent to the address, or making urgent contact with the Police and other agencies.

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Response

Measure		July 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020	Reporting period average	Q2 2019/20 average	Rolling 12 month average
1	Total Emergency calls answered	3029	3579	2912	3173	3543	2819
2	Number of Mobilisations	1761	2009	1753	1841	2101	1712

*Definitions are available in appendix A

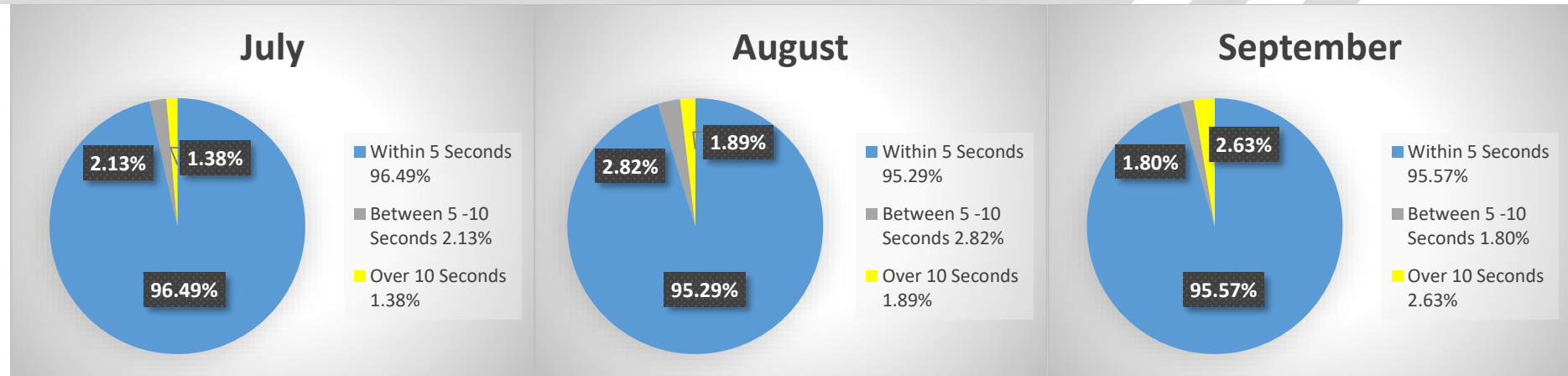
The number of incoming emergency calls handled by TVFCS reduced by 10.44% in comparison with the equivalent quarter in 2019/20. This is consistent with the trend initially observed in Q1 2020/21 which coincided with the restrictions on public movement and commercial activity introduced as part of the national response to COVID19 on March 23rd 2020.

The same pattern is also present in the number of mobilisations which took place during the period with an overall reduction of 12.37% compared with 2019/20.

Measure*		2020/21 Target	July 2020	August 2020	September 2020	Reporting period average	Q2 2019/20	Rolling 12 month average
3	Emergency calls answered within 5 seconds	92%	96.49%	95.29%	95.57%	95.78%	94.23%	96.52%
4	Emergency calls answered within 10 seconds	97%	98.62%	98.11%	97.37%	98.03%	96.74%	98.49%

*Definitions are available in appendix A

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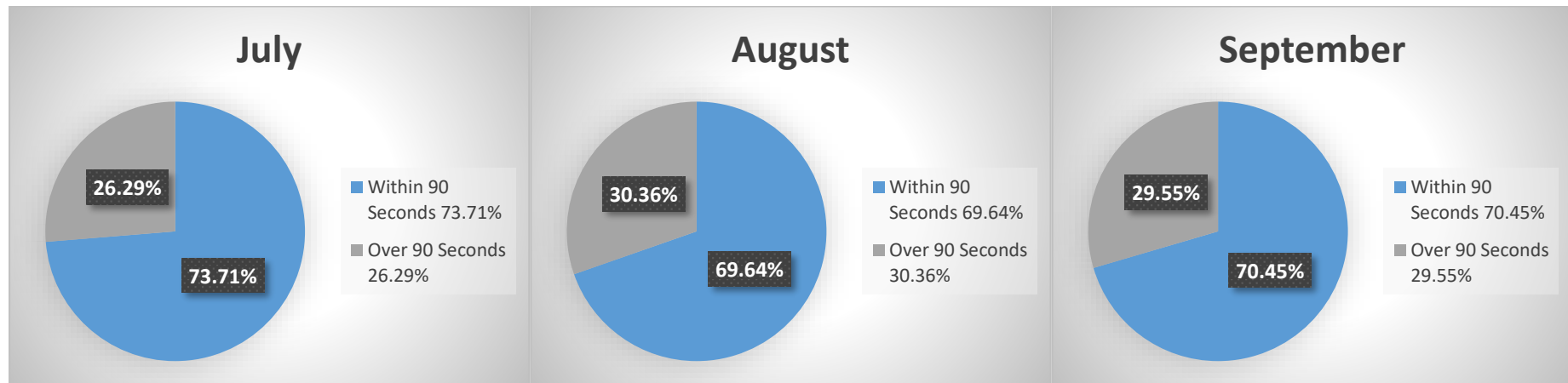
This measure examines call waiting times by looking at the performance of TVFCS staff when answering emergency calls. It sets two targets for how quickly control operators should pick up an emergency call when it comes into the control room. We measure whether a call is picked up within 5 or 10 seconds 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 quarter 2 show that, on average, control operators picked up 95.78% of all emergency call within 5 seconds and 98.03% 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.

Whilst it can be very difficult to predict the former, TVFCS will normally receive weather warnings ahead of severe weather allowing plans to be made to match resourcing to anticipate demand. During the recent quarter TVFCS experienced two heavy rainfall events causing widespread flooding. Due to the arrangements made to deal with these events, the impact on the time taken to answer calls within 5 and 10 seconds was marginal, with performance falling by only 0.44% and 0.08% respectively compared with the previous quarter.

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Measure*		2020/21 Target	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020	Reporting Period Average	Q2 2019/20	Rolling 12 Month Average
5	% occasions where time to alert station is within 90 seconds of the emergency call being answered.	80%	73.71%	69.64%	70.45%	71.27%	74.34%	73.42%



TVFCS saw an improvement in performance against this measure in July compared with Q1, however performance then declined in August and September. It is expected that 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, however the drop in performance in August and September was more pronounced than anticipated. Analysis of the data and interviews conducted with Control room staff indicate that difficulties that TVFCS continue to experience difficulties when handling calls relating 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. The changes to the occupation of these premises as a result of COVID19 has meant that it has been more difficult to contact responsible persons on site to carry out the required checks before a mobilisation takes place.

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The heavy rainfall events experienced during August and September have also had an impact on this measure. Where heavy rainfall and consequent flooding occurs, high volumes of calls are routed into TVFCS. Extended call questioning then needs to be applied to these calls to ensure that the situation being reported is one where the FRS are able to render assistance and that FRS operational resources are prioritised to attend incidents where life and property are at immediate risk. This leads to an extension in the time required to capture the information needed to triage calls prior to a resource being allocated to attend.

During the quarter, TVFCS successfully challenged 904 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. The increase in the number of calls challenged in Q2 compared with Q1 was predominantly a result of the number of flooding calls received during the heavy rainfall events mentioned elsewhere in this report, where it was determined that the FRS was not the most appropriate agency to assist.

Measure		2020/21 Target	July 2020	Aug 2020	Sept 2020	Reporting period average	Q2 2019/20	Rolling 12 month average
6	Average time to alert station in seconds – Primary Fires	N/A	69	67	70	69	76	66
7	Average Time to alert station in seconds – Secondary Fires	N/A	88	77	89	84	100	74
9	Average time to alert station in seconds – Road Traffic Collisions	N/A	82	91	93	89	80	85

*Definitions are available in appendix A

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The average time taken to alert a station following a call being answered, where a mobilisation required, is 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 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 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 shows an improvement of, on average, 16 seconds compared with the same period in 2019/20.

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. Although the average call handling time for these incidents remains under 90 seconds, an increase can be seen compared with 2019/20. The TVFCS Management team are now analysing data in relation to these types of incident with a view to identifying factors that may be inhibiting performance.

Resilience

During the Quarter, agreed minimum crewing levels were maintained on 100% of occasions. In order to maintain these crewing levels, evening and weekend cover was provided by members of the Control room management team. Whilst the resilience provided by the TVFCS management team is an important factor in the maintenance of critical staffing levels, there is an impact on the capacity of the team in other areas when this cover is required at night or over a weekend, as the officer concerned then needs to be given compensatory time off during the normal working day, when they would normally be carrying out other work.

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.

On September 29th 2020, a business resilience exercise took place simulating an unplanned evacuation to Kidlington, where TVFCS calls needed to be diverted to the Staffordshire & West Midlands Fire Control (S&WMFC). During the exercise, S&WMFC staff correctly identified and notified the appropriate Thames Valley Resources for each call passed to them, using the agreed resilient 'fall back' systems and notionally managed incidents in line with Thames Valley procedure. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID19 pandemic, TVFCS and S&WMFC have been able to maintain their programme of resilience testing, which is now well embedded.

Data and Intelligence

During Quarter 2 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.

An information sharing agreement has been signed between the three FRS and Thames Valley Police to facilitate a more effective means of receiving data in relation to some high risk domestic premises. This will improve the speed with which relevant information to assist responding crews is added to the Command & Control system.

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 2020</i>	<i>Forecast Outturn at Year End</i>	<i>Variance = Forecast - Annual Budget</i>	<i>Variance %</i>
Staff	1,764,060	836,565	1,730,080	-33,980	-1.76%
Corporate	308,250	154,125	308,250	0	0
Other	35,740	1,219	36,220	480	1.34%
Technology	247,060	-6,091	220,203	-26,857	-10.87%
Total Budgeted Expenditure	2,355,110	985,817	2,294,753	-60,357	-2.56%

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 September 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	832,340	1,722,092	-30,918	-1.76%	Staff movement during Quarter 1 and the COVID related delay in recruitment have a continued effect on this area of the budget but, as a result of the changes made to TVFCS recruitment process, it has proved possible to recruit slightly earlier in Q2 which has had a positive

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						effect on projected variance.
Mileage and Subsistence	7,000	1,491	4,000	-3,000	-42.86%	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	1,157	2,314	-686	-22.87%	This expenditure relates to a locally agreed allowance relating to work wear payable to eligible female members of staff. Staff movements have reduced the

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						number of staff claiming this allowance. Work is ongoing between the RBFRS SRO, TVFCS Group Manager and the representative body find an alternative way of providing these uniform items, which will remove the need for the allowance to be paid in the future.
Training	750	-172	750		0%	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 measures are relaxed.

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Recruitment	300	1,749	924	624	208.0%	The original 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 and testing has had to be moved to online platforms with higher costs. It is anticipated that some of these costs will be recovered via the Central government COVID grant, which is why the anticipated end of year figure is lower than the current expenditure.
Sub Total	1,764,060	413,349	1,710,540	-53,250	-3.03%	

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Corporate						
Facilities	98,180	24,545	98,180		0%	
Finance	22,720	5,680	22,720		0%	
HR	73,070	18,268	73,070		0%	
ICT	91,530	22,883	91,530		0%	
Liability and Equipment Insurance	7,090	1,773	7,090		0%	
Management	15,660	3,915	15,660		0%	
Sub Total	308,250	77,063	308,250		0%	
Other						
Professional Services and General Equipment Purchase	5,500	1,219	5,980	480	8.73%	Costs for the equipment purchased as part of the COVID response have been recouped, however wear and tear of some items, necessitating replacement means a small

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						overspend against this budget is likely.
OFRS Costs (secondary control facility)	42,140	0	42,140		0%	
TVFCS Alarm Receiving Centre income	-11,900	0	-11,900		0%	
Sub Total	35,740	1,219	36,220	480	1.34%	
Technology						
Capita Mobs System (maint)	69,210	-12,449	56,585	-12,625	-18.24%	Payments were received from Capita during Q2, representing credits due for failure to rectify a number of minor faults within the agreed contractual service levels. Due to some internal issues within Capita, TVFCS received credits due for both the 2018/19 financial year and the 2019/20 financial

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						<p>year. These credits can be used to obtain services and upgrades from Capita over and above those set out in the contract, with any remaining credits applied to the Capita Maintenance and Support costs to generate an in year efficiency.</p>
DS3000 (for primary and secondary) ICCS	87,200	-14,232	72,968	-14,232	-16.32%	<p>Payments were received from Capita during Q2, representing credits due for failure to rectify a number of minor faults within the agreed contractual service levels. Due to some internal issues within Capita, TVFCS received credits due for both the 2018/19 financial year and the 2019/20 financial</p>

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						year. These credits can be used to obtain services and upgrades from Capita over and above those set out in the contract, with any remaining credits applied to the Capita Maintenance and Support costs to generate an in year efficiency.
Telephony and Network costs.	49,510	16,041	49,510		0%	
Software Maintenance	700	49	700		0%	
EISEC Services (Primary and Secondary Control)	9,000	4,500	9,000		0%	
Smart services to switch 999 lines to secondary control or elsewhere	17,340	0	17,340		0%	
Airwave rental (SAN I ,B) (Primary,secondary) (7+8)	14,100	0	14,100		0%	

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Sub Total	247,060	-6,091	220,203	-26,857	-10.87%	
Total Budgeted Expenditure	2,355,110	985,817	2,294,753	-60,357	-2.56%	