Thames Valley
Environmental Records Centre

TVERC

Sharing environmental information in Berkshire and Oxfordshire

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TVERC BUSINESS PLAN

APRIL 2023 – MARCH 2026

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) is the environmental records centre for Berkshire and Oxfordshire. TVERC is a partnership organisation between all twelve Local Authorities across Berkshire and Oxfordshire and the Environment Agency. TVERC collects, manages, analyses and shares environmental data with a wide range of customers to enable evidence-based decision-making about the natural environment.

The landscape TVERC operates within is changing. The next few years will be significant in defining its future role. The Environment Act mandating Biodiversity Net Gain, along with the adoption and regular review of Local Nature Recovery Strategies, will increase the use and value of environmental data. TVERC will position itself to support the initial implementation of these initiatives whilst seeking opportunities they give for longer term commitments for its data and services.

TVERC will continue to run as a 'not-for-profit' organisation with any surplus income over expenditure being re-invested into the service and the recording community. The majority of core service funding will remain from data licences and searches. As most of these relate to land development in the region, this does expose TVERC's finances to the impact of a prolonged economic downturn. The income from projects, which currently is largely funded by Local Authorities will continue to remain useful in mitigating some of this risk. To increase resilience further TVERC will seek to increase and diversify the sources of project income, and obtain longer term commitments for data licences, service level agreements and long running multi-year projects, such as field and desk-based monitoring and reporting.

Over the next three years, TVERC commits to work harder to understand and support the recording community in Berkshire and Oxfordshire to help them further their aims and to ensure the region has people committed to monitoring and recording the environment and its wildlife.

This business plan sets out both the challenges and opportunities for TVERC over the next three years and details the proposed objectives for ensuring it remains integral in the support of well-informed environmental decision-making within the two counties.

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TVERC BUSINESS PLAN

APRIL 2023 – MARCH 2026

VISION

We live in a better environment because decisions are made using our data and insight.

MISSION STATEMENT

We are impartial environmental data scientists who collect, manage, analyse and share data in Oxfordshire and Berkshire so people can make sound decisions that protect and enhance our environment.

GOALS FOR ACHIEVING OUR VISION

To achieve TVERC's vision we will work towards the following goals.

A. We live in a better environment in Berkshire and Oxfordshire because decisions are made using our data, information and services.

B. Our region has a diverse, active, and skilled recording community with good geographic and taxon coverage that we encourage and support.

C. We hold an expanding and comprehensive database of high-quality environmental information that is well curated, maintained and accessible for decision-making both now and in the future.

D. We employ a well-staffed, effective, and motivated workforce with valued and respected staff and volunteers, who retain and develop their skills, expertise, and knowledge.

E. We are creative and innovative, using these to drive our development, enhance our systems and processes, and offer solutions to interpret natural environment data.

F. The future of TVERC is secured.

WHAT IS A LERC?

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Local Environmental Record Centres are *"Not-for-profit organisations that collect, collate and manage information on the natural environment for a defined geographic area. LERCs support and collaborate with a network of experts to ensure information is robust, and make information products and services accessible to a range of audiences including decision-makers, the public, and researchers"*

Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC)

OBJECTIVES

Each of the goals is set out below, with relevant objectives defined. They provide the road map to ensure business management decisions steer a course towards TVERC achieving the long-term goals and vision.

A. WE LIVE IN A BETTER ENVIRONMENT IN BERKSHIRE AND OXFORDSHIRE BECAUSE DECISIONS ARE MADE USING OUR DATA, INFORMATION AND SERVICES

A healthy functioning natural environment is vital for supporting a healthy and functioning society, as well as being of intrinsic importance. TVERC will monitor the state of the natural environment for the benefit of everyone.

OBJECTIVES

- Promote informed decision-making using Environmental Data and our analysis
- Champion increasing monitoring of Environmental measures within the two counties.
- Increase profile / outreach so people know we are the "go-to" resource for these services.
- TVERC's services are easy to find, access and are used by a broad customer base for a variety of uses:
  - Ensure the Data Search Service meets the needs of the stakeholders in the two counties for Biodiversity and Geodiversity information.
  - Promote wider use of habitat data
  - Ensure a basic set of products are available at a competitive price
  - Evaluate the demand for additional environmental data
  - Measure and maintain a good level of customer service
- Undertake project work providing an end-to-end environmental data service from Surveys to Analysis to collect data and information to support its interpretation for monitoring, policy and decision-making

B. OUR REGION HAS A DIVERSE, ACTIVE, AND SKILLED RECORDING COMMUNITY WITH GOOD GEOGRAPHIC AND TAXON COVERAGE THAT WE ENCOURAGE AND SUPPORT

Biological recorders are essential to the future success of TVERC and to evidence-based decision-making. The majority of them are volunteers. TVERC already provides support to recorders, but we will better communicate the support available and strengthen these relationships so that TVERC remains the hub of biological recording in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. We will also communicate the value of recorders to other TVERC partners and data users. We will actively encourage participation in biological recording to secure the next generation of recorders by providing support and training as necessary.

OBJECTIVES

- Evaluate the composition and focus of the recording community, understand and map, roles, diversity, activity as well as what and where they record.
    - Implement an initiative to promote the increase of breadth, depth and diversity of the recording community
    - Investigate barriers stopping people from participating
    - Facilitate training and other initiatives to support this goal
    - Build relationships with relevant training providers to help address local training needs
- Proactively encourage volunteer recording efforts in priority areas and taxa especially where the information could soon be used in decision-making, including Local Wildlife Sites
    - Species data – geographic and taxon coverage - gap analysis
    - Habitat data – geographic and habitat coverage – condition assessment – gap analysis
- Recording Co-ordinator – keep primary focus on Recording Community
- Recorder's fund – review relevance, utilisation, opportunity, and amount
- Recording conference – continue to run two per year
- Recording Community is represented at TVERC Steering Group

C. WE HOLD AN EXPANDING AND COMPREHENSIVE DATABASE OF HIGH-QUALITY ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION THAT IS WELL CURATED, MAINTAINED AND ACCESSIBLE FOR DECISION-MAKING BOTH NOW AND, IN THE FUTURE.

We have robust processes for dealing with the vast amounts of data we collate and plan to enhance these processes further in light of the Environment Act and the new requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies, as well as the climate and ecological emergencies. We have a detailed Data Policies and Procedures document which has recently been reviewed in detail and will be updated at least annually in the future.

OBJECTIVES

- Species Data
  - Maintain quality, increase geographic and taxon coverage and velocity (speed to get in the system)
  - Have systems and processes that could handle 1 million new records per year
  - Make the best use of online data resources
- Sites Data
  - All sites have a current written citation by the end ~~of the~~ of this business plan period
  - Database of LWS sites
  - Support more proactive monitoring and assessment work of sites
- Habitat Data
  - Have systems and processes that
    - Improve and maintain the currency of data records
    - Support receiving, validating, and incorporating habitat data from multiple sources
    - Support BNG, Natural Capital and LNRS
  - Rationalise the datastore
    - Cover polygons, lines and points
  - Add UK Hab and Condition scoring
- Other Environmental Data
  - Have systems and processes that support the cataloguing of other Environmental Data.
- Maintain a comprehensive reference of data sources useful for Environmental Decision making in the two counties
- Review and rationalise our paper records / archive

D. WE EMPLOY A WELL-STAFFED, EFFECTIVE, AND MOTIVATED WORKFORCE WITH VALUED AND RESPECTED STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS, WHO RETAIN AND DEVELOP THEIR SKILLS, EXPERTISE, AND KNOWLEDGE

Highly skilled and experienced staff are key to TVERC's continued success. Volunteers are also vitally important in helping TVERC to maintain its high standards. We will continue to make our team feel valued.

OBJECTIVES

- Maintain an organisation with enough people and skills to complete the core record centre tasks and provide project resource to support key initiatives in the two counties
    - o TVERC is appropriately staffed, and recruitment is completed in a timely fashion to fill the organisational structure
    - o Staff develop the skills and expertise to support the new areas of LNRS, BNG and Natural Capital
    - o Staff extend their understanding and expertise with relevant emerging technology and techniques
    - o Evaluate if TVERC can support apprentices to bring additional people into our disciplines
- Retain existing staff by supporting them through good management and providing in-house training and a budget for external training where appropriate.
    - o All staff actively participate in Oxfordshire County Council's performance framework
    - o All staff attend at least one training course per year to retain or enhance their skills, expertise or knowledge.
    - o Support staff with membership of Professional Organisations like CIEEM
    - o Make use of the extensive training courses available through Oxfordshire County Council
- Retain and expand the use of "office" volunteers
    - o Recognise the value of "office" volunteers to TVERC
    - o Understand, support and promote the benefits of volunteering with TVERC
    - o Extend the number of office volunteers from 5 to 8.
    - o Expand their focus to include:
        - o Species data
        - o Habitat data
        - o Research and Analysis

E. WE ARE CREATIVE AND INNOVATIVE, USING THESE TO DRIVE OUR DEVELOPMENT, ENHANCE OUR SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES, AND OFFER SOLUTIONS TO INTERPRET NATURAL ENVIRONMENT DATA

We use creative solutions to interpret natural environment data. Our projects and data help our customers make sound decisions about the location and design of new development, and about how best to manage land to enhance biodiversity. As TVERC awaits new regulations and guidance about implementing the various threads of the Environment Act, we expect these will drive demand for the data and field services TVERC provides.

TVERC believes that working closely with the science and environmental organisations in Berkshire and Oxfordshire is essential in order to maximise the impact we can collectively make on improving our environment. We hope to maintain, strengthen and develop these collaborations.

OBJECTIVES

- Keep up to date with new legislation, technology, processes and analytic techniques
- Work with others:
  - Maintain and strengthen links with Museums, Universities, colleges and researchers
  - Explore if there are innovation hubs that TVERC could join
  - Understand from consultants what habitat data provision will be useful for their work
- Show and tell:
  - Increase the amount of team collaboration allowing different people to influence the innovation
  - Share TVERC's innovation work more widely looking to benefit from the broader range of experience and skills of the people we interact with
- Innovation process:
  - Explore how we evaluate new technology and processes to decide if something is useful.
  - Take time to be creative and innovate
  - Test and trial new things, be prepared to fail fast and learn
- Leverage TVERC's Data:
  - Investigate ways to use analysis of the combined species and habitat data sets to improve and expand their value
- Field work – review and look to improve the efficiency and quality of our field-based services

F. THE FUTURE OF TVERC IS SECURED

TVERC has been in existence since 2003 and we want to ensure that we can continue to undertake our professional and impartial work in perpetuity. Our data is used by a diverse customer base, but within this, TVERC is currently reliant on a few types of customer for most of our income. We will continue to seek to diversify our income stream by increasing income from other sectors such as community groups, conservation NGOs, university researchers, land management advisors and Parish & Town Councils.

TVERC already provides trusted and scientifically robust evidence on which others base policy. We will continue to do so, as well as develop new products and services, based on sound science, that are trusted and respected by our partners and customers.

Being hosted by Oxfordshire County Council, we operate under their Climate Action Framework. Through this, TVERC ensures its work is aligned with the council's vision for achieving net-zero, adapting to climate change and protecting the natural world. Within TVERC, we have a 'Climate Champion', to help drive our climate and sustainability commitments, to ensure they remain embedded in our ways of working.

OBJECTIVES

- Credibility
    - TVERC is a respected partner in providing an impartial evidence base for policies and decisions
    - Maintain ALERC accreditation and work within ALERC to use TVERC practices to improve other Record Centres
    - Develop a broad customer base
- Sustainability
    - Environment - Understand Carbon and Water footprints for TVERC and the services we provide.
    - Society – Support and encourage an increase in the range and skills of people gathering environmental data and using it for decision-making
        - Make sure everyone in society can find us and knows we are a source of information about the natural environment
        - Educate society about the diversity of the natural environment, its benefits to them and the steps they could take in understanding and protecting it
        - Inspire people to put our data to work in their communities
    - Data sustainability
        - Maintain relevant data policies and procedures

- o Long-term data exchange agreements and processes to collate and store data
  - o Make TVERC's data more easily combined with other similar datasets so local data can be used more easily at a regional and national scale.
- Relevance
  - o Outreach to the counties' key stakeholders and decision-makers ensuring they understand and where possible embed the importance of using high-quality data for decision-making and that TVERC should be supported and encouraged in supporting this endeavor.
  - o Understand and assist the two counties with information for decisions and processes for BNG, Natural Capital and LNRS
- Maintain financial stability and resilience
  - o Running zero balancing budget – with surplus reinvested in the service and recording community
  - o Maintain 3 months running costs and redundancy costs in reserves
  - o Encourage longer term commitments through Data Licenses, SLA's and long-term projects.
- Hosting
  - o Identify and take advantage of additional value for TVERC from being part of Oxfordshire County Council
  - o Work more closely with the County Council GIS Team
  - o Comply with Oxfordshire County Council policies

STAKEHOLDERS / AUDIENCE / MARKET

CUSTOMERS AND SERVICE USERS

The users and customers of TVERC's services are very varied.

LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITIES

TVERC data is often used by the ecology / biodiversity officer, but it has many other uses too...

Development Control Planners: Deciding who to consult, whether to ask applicants for ecological surveys, assessing the impacts of a development and indicating what mitigation or compensation may be required. Ensure planning decisions comply with planning policy and legislation.

Policy Planners: Comparing the benefits and impacts of allocating strategic sites for housing, roads, minerals and waste in different locations. Ensuring plans and policies comply with planning policy and legislation.

Highways Engineers: Avoid breaching wildlife law by checking for legally protected species records before starting works (e.g. water voles in culverts and bats in bridges). This helps prevent costly delays if they're discovered later.

Tree / Arb. Officers: Avoid breaching wildlife law by including a check for bat roosts and nesting birds in standard risk assessments before tree works/vegetation removal. This helps prevent costly delays if they're discovered later.

Parks Officers: Find out what wildlife is already in the local area, and what could be. Use this information to manage parks to encourage wildlife, which will increase the mental and physical wellbeing of local people and increase community cohesion.

Landscape Officers: Advise that planting schemes use local and native species, and even some nationally rare or scarce plants.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS SAY…

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"TVERC data is essential to help me and our planning officers in ensuring that we take full account of biodiversity constraints when making planning decisions. The locations of protected species are a particular problem when making planning decisions as they can be found almost anywhere and affect all types of planning application. The records held by TVERC are particularly helpful in guiding us where we should be asking for surveys; to help with this TVERC has developed a buffered species layer as an early warning of where and when certain mobile species may be found. With the help of this data we are able to make better decisions, avoid lengthy delays in decisions (particularly where species are picked up at pre-application stage) and most importantly conserve biodiversity".

Dominic Lamb
**South Oxfordshire and
Vale of White Horse District Councils**

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT (ENVIRONMENT AGENCY)

EA 'in house' work (e.g. capital and revenue work – Flood risk, Navigation work, physical habitat creation or restoration work e.g. WFD): Data enables a strategic overview on where to prioritise effort for screening to minimise negative impact and, where possible, target increasingly scarce funding to provide the greatest gains.

EA Regulatory work (e.g. EA permits for abstraction, discharge, waste, flood risk activity permits, impoundment licences, herbicide approvals, fish movement, etc.): Local and National permitting teams use pre-determined screening thresholds relevant to various habitat and species data in order to deliver standard responses or engage expert teams for a more bespoke consideration of the impacts. Also used to help determine the type of permit issued (no priority habitats or species present, amongst other factors, might lead to an 'exemption' being registered, rather than a 'standard rules' or 'bespoke' permit, for example).

Statutory consultee role in development planning: In-house planning teams use data to decide whether to consult teams for bespoke responses to the planning authority or use of a standard response (or 'no comment'). The EA concentrates on aquatic and riparian species and habitats for which the EA has a particular remit.

Advice and guidance: The EA uses TVERC data to help inform responses to partner organisations and the general public – directing the enquirer back to TVERC where appropriate/necessary.

> **WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS SAY…**
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> *"Access to quality TVERC data (and that of other LRCs) is vital for us in order to fulfil statutory requirements of our 'core' legislation (plus the more recent NERC Act requirement applicable to all public bodies). Access to the priority species and habitats data helps us ensure our responses are risk-based and proportionate."*
>
> Daryl Buck
> **Environment Agency**

UTILITIES & TRANSPORT

TVERC data is essential for utilities & transport companies such as Thames Water, Affinity Water and Network Rail, when planning maintenance and development work. Making early use of the data to guide their work reduces their risk of delays and unforeseen and costly impacts of protected species, habitats and wildlife sites.

Thames Valley
Environmental Records Centre

Steve Wilkes, TVERC Director
March 2023

DEVELOPERS

TVERC data is an essential component of environmental impact assessments carried out by consultants on behalf of developers and submitted as part of planning applications. Ecological consultants use our data to help them decide which species to survey for, and to make recommendations for mitigation and compensation for the impacts of development. As Biodiversity Net Gain is becoming mandated, they want to understand the types of habitats known to be on site and nearby. As well as evaluating their relationship with the surrounding landscape and strategic biodiversity areas and nature recovery networks.

CONSERVATION ORGANISATIONS

Large and small conservation organisations use TVERC data and expertise for land management, public education, research and citizen science. For example, we have worked with the RSPB on the Oxford Swift City project providing advice to ensure the data is collected in a way it can be used and that there are mechanisms for checking its accuracy. TVERC can ensure that data collected via citizen-science projects is supplied to all of the local planning authorities in Oxfordshire and Berkshire in a format they can easily use for decision-making.

WHAT OUR CUSTOMERS SAY…

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"Being able to call on TVERC as a one-stop-shop repository for reliable species records and designated site information gives a high level of comfort that relevant background data are caught and accounted for early in impact assessment procedures. Without such data, the risk is always there of important information or records jumping out of the woodwork late in the day, which can result in significant and costly delays being caused to development projects"

Dominic Woodfield
BioScan
Ecological Consultancy

RECORDERS AND RECORDING GROUPS

Recorders and Recording Groups use TVERC data for research, planning where to carry out surveys and publishing atlases of species distributions. TVERC also host two Recorders conferences per year to encourage knowledge-sharing and networking amongst the groups.

RESEARCHERS / UNIVERSITIES

TVERC data and datasets are used for education and research by students, teachers and scientists. We have links with Imperial College London (Silwood Park), Oxford University, Oxford Brookes University and Reading University. These links work well for attracting student volunteers to carry out data management and project work. We would like to strengthen further our links with researchers.

COMMUNITY & PARISH GROUPS

Community and Parish Groups have been encouraged by central government to produce Neighbourhood Development or Community-Led Plans. TVERC can assist communities by providing data and maps to support plans and Local Green Spaces designations, carry out surveys, identify wildlife corridors, manage wildlife data and provide advice on sources of funding for community projects.

LAND-OWNERS AND LAND MANAGERS

We currently provide a growing number of data search reports each year to landowners and carry out ecological surveys where the information collected will be used to inform land management decisions. We also work with landowners to help them understand the biodiversity value of their holdings. This includes Biodiversity Net Gain Habitat and Condition Monitoring surveys to support the development and delivery of off-site receptor sites and Habitat Banks. We also provide services for the independent monitoring and reporting of delivered on-site Biodiversity Net Gains resulting from completed developments. We also provide data reports (based on a search of our database and on-the-ground surveys) tailored to those providing land management advice and to support agri-environment applications.

MARKET

We are in a time of rapid change and uncertainty politically so we will ensure that we keep aware of the wider political landscape. We will work with other organisations that have similar issues and work together where appropriate. We will diversify our income streams to buffer against possible cuts in local government funding, and a possible downturn in the housing market.

There has been a push from central government to make all data 'open' and freely accessible to all. There has so far been little acknowledgment of the cost of collating, checking and updating data. TVERC will work through its stakeholders and ALERC to help ensure the value and costs of good quality data and information are recognised.

Internet tools and smartphone applications to help identify and record wildlife sightings are increasingly popular, as are 'citizen-science' projects where the general public are encouraged by conservation organisations to help record wildlife. These are great ways of getting more people involved in conservation, which is a very important aim. However, the resulting data is often not shared with the LERC, and not collected in a way that means it can be properly checked, and therefore used widely by decision-makers. TVERC will identify and assess where data from these sources can be added to its database, and work with the Recording Community to help them make best use of these tools whilst ensuring their valuable records are fully utilised.

With the Environment Act and the new requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies, as well as the climate and ecological emergencies, it is even more important than ever that decision-making is based on a robust evidence base. The groundwork TVERC has made in this last year is a great start in positioning TVERC as we expect an increase in demand for environmental data and our analytic and survey project services.

COMPETITORS

No other organisation has a database for the region that matches ours in terms of quality or quantity of data. We hold a database of more than 4.25 million validated species records, over 300,000 ha of Berkshire and Oxfordshire's habitats classified and mapped to field level, and more than 2,000 sites including their boundaries and current citation including the important details of their designation.

However, the NBN-Gateway is seen by some of our current and potential customers as a suitable alternative source of species data, and datasets from DEFRA as suitable alternatives for sites and habitat data. We need to ensure that customers are aware of the lower quality of these datasets.

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There are also some commercial companies beginning to offer data analysis and modelling services in addition to many ecological consultancies that are branching out into this area. None of these companies will have access to our data unless they pay for a data licence, but they may be able to persuade their customers that they don't need it, or they may be able to undercut our prices if they consider such work a loss-leader. We will emphasize the value of our data, and also the collaborative approach we take with customers which ensures they get the results they want, rather than what we think they want.

Other Local Environmental Records Centre are NOT competitors, as we have agreements through the Association of Local Environmental Records Centre not to overlap geographically.

PRODUCTS & SERVICES

OUR DATA

TVERC aims to hold all available information about the species, wildlife habitats and important wildlife and geological sites in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. This information is not available elsewhere.

TVERC holds a database of over 4.25 million records, almost one quarter are Protected and Notable species. About 14% of our species records are historic records, recorded before 1991. Out of the remaining 86%, 37% of the records were created in the last 5 years. All species records received by TVERC are validated and verified before entering them into our database. Full details of our validation and verification processes are contained within our 'Data Policies and Procedures' document which is updated regularly.

Much of the data in the TVERC database originates as raw data from volunteer recorders and so supporting them is an essential part of the work TVERC carries out. We provide technical support for recording groups who are collecting and analysing data across Oxfordshire and Berkshire. Working with other wildlife organisations, TVERC organise a local Recorders Conference to share information amongst volunteer recorders and increase their knowledge so they can provide us with even better data. We also provide training courses and talks to local groups.

We hold Local Wildlife Site and Local Geological Site boundaries and site descriptions for every site. We also hold data for BBOWT and RSPB nature reserves, Woodland Trust Sites, Ancient Woodland, Local Nature Reserves and national sites.

We hold habitat data on NERC Act S41 Habitats of Principal Importance (previously called UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats) and other habitat data. Aerial photographs and field surveys are used to identify and map habitats to field level. The data also tells you how certain we are that the habitat has been correctly identified, using determination and interpretation descriptions. We provide data-users with metadata and user-guides to help ensure they are aware of this.

We also hold the boundary data for Conservation Target Areas in Oxfordshire and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas in Berkshire. These landscape-scale conservation areas are used by the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership and Wild Oxfordshire to coordinate biodiversity work in Berkshire & Oxfordshire.

In the future, we will have systems and processes in place that support the cataloguing of other Environmental Data that is useful for Environmental Decision making in the two counties.

WHAT TVERC OFFERS

TVERC staff have a great deal of ecological expertise both in the field and with data analysis and carry out numerous projects for a variety of organisations. The extensive information that TVERC holds on species, habitats and sites and the expertise of TVERC staff in analysis, ecology, planning and surveying can be used for such projects. TVERC also works with other Local Records Centres to undertake projects on a regional basis in the South East.

DATA LICENCES AND SEARCHES

To support informed decision-making TVERC makes its extensive environmental data and information available to individuals and organisations through Data Licenses and a Data Search service. Both can be arranged through the Data Search and Licensing pages on our website.

https://www.tverc.org/cms/content/tverc-data

Data can be selected from the range of information we hold including:

- Species
- Sites
- Habitats

Our standard format for providing biodiversity data is a desktop biodiversity report, supplied as a pdf document, along with an Excel spreadsheet for species data. We can provide GIS datasets for habitats and sites. The biodiversity report is suitable for requests about information on sites with up to a 5km buffer. For data covering more than a 10km square or a 5km buffer, data is provided in GIS layers. The supply of data in this form is subject to a digital licensing agreement which is usually valid for 1 year.

Some groups and organisations for their areas of interest, like to have access to the latest data throughout the year, using it widely to inform a variety of decisions. For them entering into an annual or multi-year licence agreement for the relevant data sets makes sense. The data is provided as GIS layers and they are provided with regular updates.

DATA VALIDATION, ANALYSIS & MODELLING

Using existing TVERC data, or data collected specifically for the purpose, TVERC can carry out data analysis and interpretation projects. A few examples include:

•Synthesising a variety of data sets to monitor, target and report the state of biodiversity and other measures

•Quantifying the current and potential biodiversity, carbon and other natural capital value of land holdings for spatial planning and decision-making

•Assessing habitat connectivity for protected species, to identify core areas, important corridors, barriers to dispersal and opportunities for improving connectivity

•Identifying important ecological areas, networks and opportunity mapping to focus landscape scale conservation efforts

•Carrying out green infrastructure audits and identifying GI opportunities

•Supporting Local Planning Authorities with Biodiversity Net Gain, including calculator validation and training

•Assessing the value of the natural environment and identifying opportunities for enhancement, such as assessing the value of trees to urban populations and securing investment in their protection and enhancement

ECOLOGICAL SURVEY & LAND MANAGEMENT ADVICE

TVERC's highly qualified and experienced ecologists carry out ecological surveys for land management or nature conservation purposes. We can provide the following:

•Surveys, condition assessments and data to support Biodiversity Net Gain. This includes long-term monitoring of on and offsite developments and habitat banks as well as baseline assessments for offsite gains and habitat banks. Our survey team covers all three aspects of BNG including, habitats, hedges, and rivers assessments

•Surveys, assessments, and data to support Countryside Stewardship applications, such as Farm Environment records maps, building wildlife assessments, grassland assessments or pond assessments

•Hedgerow surveys to assess against Hedgerow Regulations criteria for Important Hedgerows

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•Woodland surveys to support English Woodland Grant Scheme applications

•Species surveys to inform conservation strategies or action

•Monitoring of habitats or species against agreed or proposed conservation action

TVERC provide advice to landowners on how to manage their land to protect and enhance the natural environment. The survey results are used to update the digital habitat mapping of the area.

TRAINING & EDUCATION

TVERC can provide training for habitat and species surveys, biological recording and identification and in using GIS. TVERC runs a training programme offering courses to teach survey skills, which are primarily aimed at beginners. Previously these have included courses on otters, water vole surveying, bumblebee ID, winter tree ID, woodland plant and grass ID. TVERC can also offer bespoke training for organisations and projects to train people in biological recording and survey skills.

CHARGING POLICY

WHAT SERVICES DO TVERC CHARGE FOR?

TVERC charges customers for carrying out data searches, habitat surveys, digital mapping of sites and habitats, species surveys, data analysis projects and training courses. Where TVERC charges for data services this relates to the time and costs involved in acquiring, managing, processing, storing and extracting the data along with producing presentable results and not for the data itself.

TVERC can make a charge for time taken to provide information and advice, though this can be waived in some cases, for local groups or students for instance. In these cases, we will invite a donation too. This is not compulsory but helps TVERC to provide our services.

WHY DOES TVERC CHARGE?

The data TVERC holds takes time and is costly to collect and manage. This work is carried out by both volunteers and paid staff who ensure the data we hold and provide is of a high quality whilst keeping our charges as low as possible. We are grateful that our Service Level Agreement partners (Local Authorities and the Environment Agency) commit to use our data widely within their organisations and

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in return provide us with the reliability of an annual income that contributes to part of the costs of this work. Of the majority of the core service, more than 70% is funded by Data Searches and Licenses. Private sector organisations, individuals or community groups contribute to TVERC by paying for data services at the point of use, when they request a data search or agree a data licence.

TVERC also charges on a time and materials basis for survey and data analysis projects. This covers the costs of maintaining the resources to undertake relevant projects, and should also contribute, either with data, skills or income to running the core service. The Local Wildlife Projects in the two counties account for about one third of project income. This is mainly funded by the Local Authorities with a 20% contribution from the Data License and Search income.

As a non-profit organisation, TVERC's income sustains the services we provide to the local recording community, who in turn share their data with us, so we can share it with everyone. By using TVERC as a central resource, the costs of collating and managing the databases are spread across all our funding sources, which results in economies of scale for everyone.

Total Income	SLA Clients − 47%	
	Other Clients − 53%	
Core Service - 58%	SLA − 15.7%	Data Searches − 34.2%	Data Licences − 8.1%
Projects - 42%	SLA − 14.6%	Data Searches − 3.1% / Data Licences − 0.4% / SLA Clients − 16.8%	Other Clients − 7.2%

Local Wildlife Sites − 18%   Other Projects − 24%

FIGURE 1: SOURCES OF TVERC'S INCOME BASED ON 22/23 FORECAST

GOVERNANCE, TEAM & PARTNERSHIP

STAFF & OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

We plan to expand the team to 14 people, but as some work part-time, this is equivalent to 12.8 full-time staff.

Together, the TVERC staff encompass a range of skills including ecological knowledge, data management and data modelling expertise.

OFFICE STAFF

Steve Wilkes, Director - Development and delivery of the TVERC service.

[Vacant], Projects Manager – Delivering services to our local authority partners in Berkshire and Oxfordshire and managing project work.

Henrietta Pringle, Biological Recording Co-ordinator - Working with TVERC volunteers and recording groups to increase the quality and quantity of wildlife records.

Miguel Batista and Ellen Lee, Biodiversity Data Officers – Data management, analysing and presenting data for commercial customers and project work.

Rob Curtis, Julie Kerans and Katherine Howell, Biodiversity Officers - Surveying local wildlife sites with the help of volunteers, analysing and presenting data for project work and developing links with the local groups and recorders.

Elizabeth Tatham and [Vacant], Biodiversity Data Assistant - Assisting the team with data management and project work.

Gordon Barker, Nicolette Bell and [Vacant], Biodiversity Project Officers – Assisting the team with data management and project work.

Filipa McGuinness and Chloe-Mae Kilby, Administration Officer - Administrative, promotional and financial tasks to ensure the smooth running of a busy office.
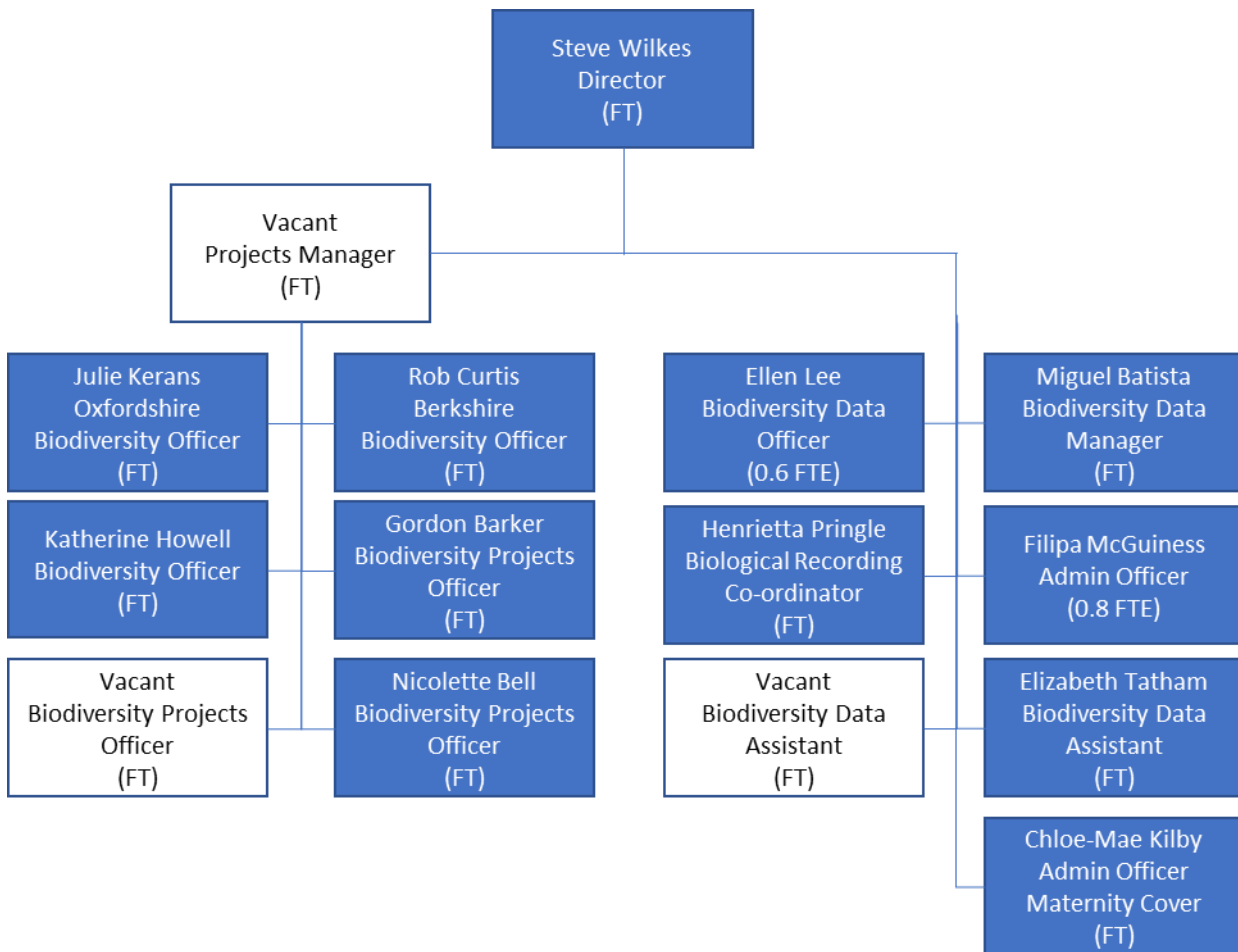
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FIGURE 2: TEAM ORGANOGRAM

OFFICE VOLUNTEERS

We are fortunate to have the help of office volunteers who, since the pandemic, support us from home. We usually work with about five office volunteers at any one time. Their efforts often equate to more than 200 days per year. The tasks they carry out for us are varied and include:

•Data validation to make sure records contain accurate information

•Digital mapping

•Preparation of datasets for import into our Recorder 6 database

We are looking to extend these to help further with enhancing our habitat data and also to conduct research and analysis.

Volunteering with TVERC provides opportunities to:

•Learn more about how biodiversity and geodiversity data are collected, managed and used.

•Develop skills in using software such as Excel, GIS and R.

•Increase knowledge of local biodiversity.

WHAT OUR VOLUNTEERS SAY

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"Volunteering at TVERC has strengthened my CV and made me more confident to apply for jobs I thought I wouldn't have a chance at."

"Whether you are seeking to establish a career within the ecology sector, or you simply have an interest in the natural world in general, then I would certainly recommend TVERC as a great place to volunteer."

PREMISES AND HOSTING

We are currently hosted by Oxfordshire County Council. Our primary office is County Hall, but most staff work from home for much of the time. The costs of hosting TVERC are deducted from the Oxfordshire County Council's SLA payment. The hosting arrangements cover the necessary services of Facilities, HR, IT and Finance needed to support TVERC's staff and activities. This is valuable to TVERC and Oxfordshire County Council and also is reassuring to our other partners as TVERC gains cost-effective access to Local Authority grade services.

GOVERNANCE, PARTNERSHIP AND STEERING GROUP

Our funding partners include each of the Local Authorities in Berkshire and Oxfordshire along with the Environment Agency. These partners contribute to the overall collection, processing and distribution of environmental information so there are efficiencies of scale which provide excellent value-for-money. We also work closely with Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust.

TVERC is managed by the TVERC Director and guided by the TVERC Steering Group consisting of representatives from the partners, data users and data providers. The TVERC Steering Group has agreed Terms of Reference under which it operates. It comprises the key sponsors and main suppliers and users of data.

The TVERC Steering Group aims to operate on a consensus basis and each partner has representation on the TVERC Steering Group. This representation may be either directly by a representative from that partner or indirectly by another partner who is expected to consult and feedback to the partners they represent. All partners agree to support the group and to use all reasonable endeavors to ensure it functions effectively and decisions are made expediently. All decisions will be recorded in the minutes of TVERC Steering Group meetings.

The TVERC Director undertakes work as guided by the TVERC Steering Group. The TVERC Director reports on progress to the Steering Group at each meeting. The TVERC Director is responsible for ensuring all products and services are delivered on time, within budget and outputs are achieved. The TVERC Steering Group monitors progress by meeting no less than three times in each year (usually May, September, and January).

DATA SUPPLIERS

Biological species are recorded for many reasons and by many groups and individuals and so TVERC obtains data from a wide variety of sources (see box opposite). TVERC also downloads online species records, mostly from iRecord. Other online sources include NBN Atlas, Record Pool and the TVERC sightings website

Data is collated into datasets, which range from one individual sighting to several thousand records within one set. In 2021, 59% of the datasets we received were created by ecological consultancies. However, the majority were either downloaded from planning portals by TVERC volunteers or sent to us by Local Authorities as part of their Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with us. We have also seen the number of datasets coming from members of the public nearly double last year, whichmay reflect TVERC's increasing engagement with the public via social media. Looking at individual records, nearly 70% of our records received last year were from NGOs and local groups; the majority from BBOWT, with whom we work closely.

Our Biological Recording Co-Ordinator supports local recorders and conservation organisations to help them to continue to share data with TVERC, preferably in a format we can easily add into our database.

Data Suppliers

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Local natural historians & local wildlife groups

Ecological Consultancies (often via Local Authorities)

Local Wildlife Site surveys

Landowning NGOs & charities (e.g. BBOWT, RSPB, NT etc)

Government Bodies (e.g. EA, NE etc)

Private landowners (e.g. for agri-environment schemes)

Other businesses (e.g. Thames Water)

Members of the public (incidental records)

Other TVERC run recording schemes (Otter Spotters, crayfish surveys)
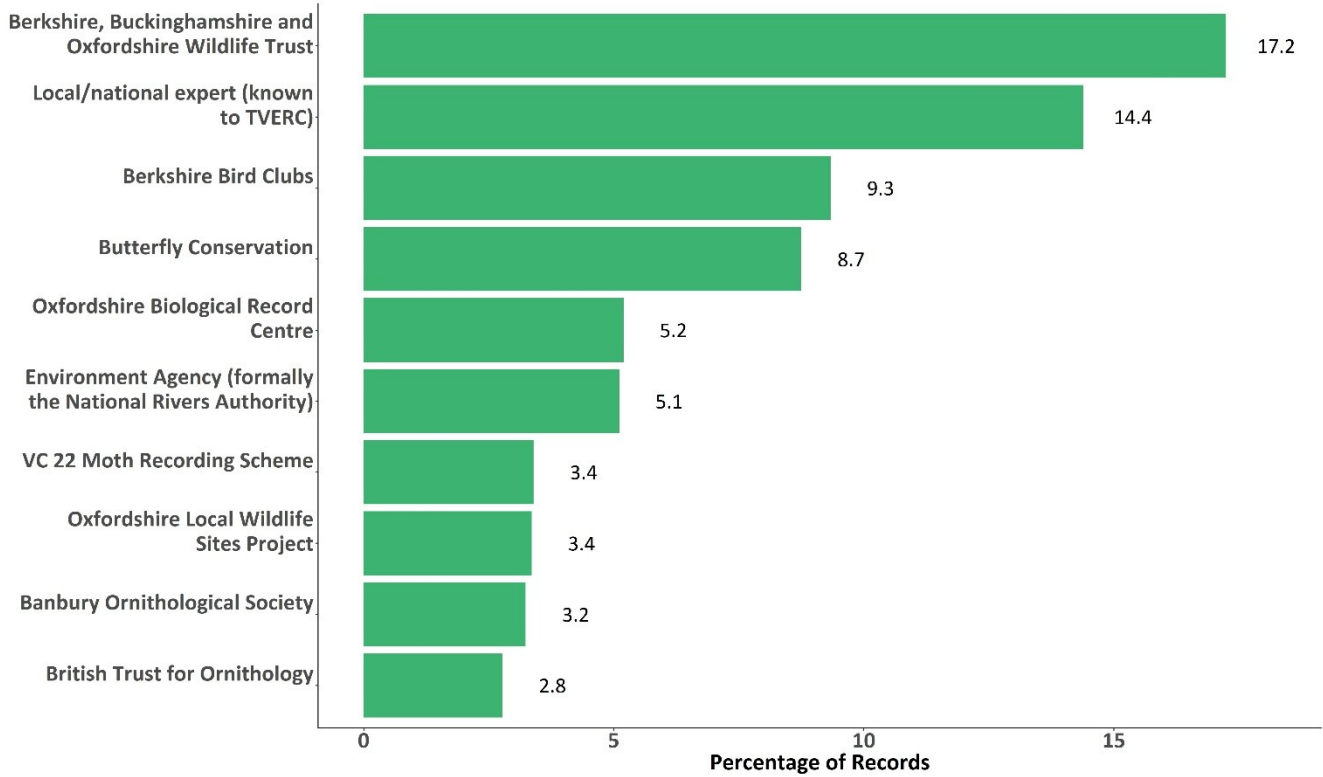
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Top 10 donors of species records

FIGURE 3: SOURCES OF RECORDS IN THE DATABASE

ASSETS

DATABASE

TVERC is the only organization in Berkshire and Oxfordshire providing a comprehensive ecological information hub. Our database is therefore our main asset, and very valuable. In 2022 we held more than 4 million species records, information on over 1,000 local sites, plus detailed habitat information covering all of Berkshire and Oxfordshire. We ensure this database is kept up-to-date with the most recently available information to ensure it retains its value. We do this by seeking out relevant data, including data we have not previously held, such as soils, water quality and landscape information.

EQUIPMENT

TVERC have an asset list of equipment and books, which is available on our website to allow local recorders to borrow them as required. This is maintained by our Admin Officer. ICT equipment and licences are owned and maintained by Oxfordshire County Council.

MANAGING OPERATIONAL RISKS

TVERC has an annually updated Business Continuity Plan. It covers mitigation and recovery solutions of services and processes provided by the team for foreseeable and unforeseeable events.

COMMUNICATION & PROMOTION

TVERC has a Communication Strategy which supports our business plan by retaining existing customers, attracting new customers and supporting our recorder network. TVERC tailors its communications to a wide range of audiences from local authority planners and Councilors to environmental consultants working on behalf of developers to local recorders and conservation groups to nature conservation professionals. Our key messages include:

- Who are TVERC and what do we do
- Why is TVERC important to customers, partners, recorders etc
- How we support recorders, how their data is used
- Messages around data ownership, management and sharing

FINANCE

TVERC is a 'not-for-profit' organisation so any surplus income over expenditure is re-invested into the service, except for that which is held in the Reserve.

TVERC is an internal trading unit within Oxfordshire County Council meaning that our budget must balance to zero each financial year, but we can hold funds in a separate Reserve account.

The Director is responsible for ensuring that sufficient income is obtained each year to cover the costs of running the TVERC service. Financial forecasts are reviewed monthly, with reports to the Steering Group every three months. Charges may be increased or decreased differently than is forecast here, depending on the future situation. TVERC will work to ensure that any fee increases are kept to a minimum for all our customers by ensuring our processes are as efficient as possible

INCOME

TVERC is funded in several ways, as shown in the table below, resulting in an annual income of around £600k. All these funding streams contribute to the annual cost of collating and managing the TVERC database, resulting in economies of scale for our customers.

The forecasts in table 1 are based on the following assumptions:

Core Income

- Data searches remain at a similar level of around 1,000 per year. Charges remain the same in 23/24 but increase with inflation in the following two years
- Data licences revenue reduces in 2023/24 as some longer agreements end and charges remain the same, but the following years see the number and value of agreements increase by £10,000 plus inflation each year
- Core Local Authority SLA income remains stable and increases with inflation
- Environment Agency SLA income remains stable and increases with inflation

Project Income

- Projects, Local Authority SLA: Income remains stable and increases with inflation
- Other Projects funded by Local Authorities: Income increases by about 50% in 23/24 and then grows with inflation. This growth is anticipated largely from supporting the implementation and running of the Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Net Gain.

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- Projects funded by Government Agencies: It is expected that this can grow to regularly 1 or 2 projects a year
- Projects funded by Other organisations: These are planned to double over the three years. Growth opportunities will come from LNRS and BNG alongside more community focused work and additional needs from the two counties Local Nature Partnerships

Reserve Project Funding

- About £120,000 of TVERC reserves will be used to fund TVERC's organisational change over the 3 years of the plan

TABLE 1: FORECAST INCOME 2022 - 2026

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Commercial Data Licenses	£40,000	£30,000	£42,000	£54,600
Commercial Data Searches	£180,000	£180,000	£189,000	£198,450
Local Authorities Core SLA	£59,000	£61,950	£65,048	£68,300
EA SLA	£15,000	£15,859	£16,652	£17,485
Donations	£500	£1,000	£1,050	£1,103
Projects - LA SLA Funded	£81,480	£84,498	£88,723	£93,160
Projects - LA funded	£69,030	£90,000	£94,500	£99,225
Projects - EA / NE / DEFRA funded	£0	£6,000	£9,450	£13,230
Project - other funded	£34,406	£30,000	£47,250	£71,663
Reserve Project Funding	£78,157	£69,101	£37,814	£9,632
TOTAL	£557,572	£568,409	£591,487	£626,847

CHARGING STRUCTURE

Data licences are provided for a variety of data sets and are charged based on location and size of the area and can be provided for multiple years with regular updates being provided. To help support local charities and social enterprises, the rate they are charged can be discounted where they are using the information for conservation purposes.

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Data search charges relate to the data sets requested and the size of the search area. These provide the information once, and if an update is later required a new search must be commissioned. The most regularly requested data searches are for information about Species and Sites at either 1km or 2km areas. We expect further growth in requests for Habitat data and our Great Crested Newt Package. The charges can be reduced by 50% or waived under certain restricted circumstances.

Charges for Data Analysis and Ecological survey projects are calculated on a daily rate for the time taken to complete the project work. The day rate includes a contribution to the annual costs of collating and managing the TVERC database. There is a standard daily rate for commercial organisations and this can be discounted for partner and not-for-profit organisations.

Service Level Agreement charges are based on the required deliverables, geographic area and for Local Authorities the population size.

For each of the three key types of charge, Data Licenses and Searches, Day Rates and Service Level Agreements charges are planned to increase over the coming three years, see table below.

- Data License and Search charges will remain at the same level for 2023/24 reflecting previous increases and efficiencies made in the automation over the previous few years. From 2024/25 the charges will rise with inflation.
- The project Day Rate charge will increase by 10% in 2023/24 as it was quite low and did not cover the increased project staff costs. From 2024/25 the charges will rise with inflation.
- The Service Level Agreements will rise with inflation each year.
- Inflation has been modelled at 5% over the period of the Business Plan

TABLE 2: INCREASE IN CHARGES 2023 - 2026

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Data Licenses and Searches	0	5%	5%
Day Rates	10%	5%	5%
Service Level Agreements	5%	5%	5%

Details of TVERC's charging policy and the current charges are made available on TVERC's website.

https://www.tverc.org/cms/content/charging-policy

EXPENDITURE

The majority of TVERC's income is spent on staff (including volunteer expenses). Our staff and volunteers are the biggest assets TVERC has, as it's the staff time spent on supporting the Recording community, acquiring and managing data, providing data searches and data licences, and a variety of projects which bring in the income. Our staff and volunteers also work continuously to improve the TVERC service and data products we can offer. The forecast shows staff costs increasing from the start of 2023/24 when all vacancies in the team are filled and then increasing each year with inflation.

It is likely that other costs will rise with inflation over the period of this plan, modelled at 5% for each year.

TABLE 3: FORECAST EXPENDITURE 2012 - 2026

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
Staff (salaries, expenses, training)	£450,000	£515,006	£545,913	£578,994
Project expenses	£2,500	£1,000	£1,050	£1,103
Overheads (equipment, stationary, subscriptions)	£9,500	£10,000	£10,500	£11,025
Hosting & Premises (paid 'in kind' by OCC)	£16,575	£17,404	£18,274	£19,188
Recorders Conferences & Recording Fund	£4,500	£5,000	£5,250	£5,513
Investment in service (data tools, website etc)	£10,578	£20,000	£10,500	£11,025
TOTAL	**£493,653**	**£568,409**	**£591,487**	**£626,846**

MANAGING FINANCIAL RISK AND CASH FLOW

Cash-flow is not currently an issue whilst TVERC remains hosted by Oxfordshire County Council. Although it is good practice to manage income and expenditure so the Business account remains balanced throughout the year.

Due to Oxfordshire County Council accounting rules, the Business account must balance to £0 at the end of each financial year, but 'surplus' monies or deficits can be moved into or out of a Balancing account. The TVERC Reserve is also kept in the Balancing account.

The TVERC Reserve mitigates TVERC from financial risk. The policy that the Reserve covers the costs of staff redundancies plus three months running costs was agreed by the Steering Group in the September 2012 meeting.

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For the period of this Business plan, the reserve will hold £53,000 for redundancy costs and £160,000 for three months running costs.

Over the last few years, TVERC has built up its reserves while understaffed. It is planned that in April 2023 the reserve will also hold £120,000 to be drawn down over the three years of the Business plan. This will cover the additional costs of the expanded TVERC team. This expansion supports the growth of the core business, the assistance to the recording community and the future growth in project work. At the end of the three-year period, TVERC will generate sufficient income to cover its expenses and no longer require its reserve funds to cover this expanded core and project expenditure.