

Thames Valley

Environmental Records Centre



Sharing environmental information in Berkshire and Oxfordshire

TVERC Business Plan 2014-15 to 2016-17

Summary

Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) is a 'not for profit' organisation covering Berkshire and Oxfordshire. We are run by a partnership and are one of a national network of local records centres. We are a member of the Association of Local Records Centres (ALERC) and the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). Our funding partners include all the local authorities in Oxfordshire & Berkshire plus Natural England and the Environment Agency. We also work closely with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust

What we do

We provide our funding partners with annually updated species and sites information as GIS tables, and undertake surveys of local wildlife sites. We also carry out data analysis for the monitoring of local authority Local Plans. We provide information to parish councils, local people, conservation bodies, land-owners, students and commercial organisations such as ecological consultants and utilities companies via data searches, data licensing and data exchanges. We provide other services such as ecological surveys, data analysis & presentation, training on MapInfo and ecology and production of promotional leaflets.

Our records

We hold around 1.3 million records of flora and fauna in Berkshire and Oxfordshire plus information about Local Wildlife and Geological Sites, UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats and Ecological Networks (Conservation Target Areas and Biodiversity Opportunity Areas).

We collect this data from the general public, skilled volunteer /amateur recorders, professionals working for wildlife charities (BBOWT and RSPB), professionals working for government agencies (Natural England, the Environment Agency & local authorities) and ecological consultants.

What the information is used:

- by planning authorities and developers to make informed decisions on the design and location of sustainable development
- to help farmers, land-owners and conservation organisations manage land in the best way to enhance biodiversity
- by nature partnerships to direct wildlife conservation work
- by teachers, students and scientists for education and scientific research.

Business Plan

This Business Plan covers three financial years from 1st April 2014 to 31st March 2017. It will be due for renewal in summer 2016, for amendments to be approved by the Steering Group in September 2016. The annual work priorities will be updated annually and presented to the Steering Group for approval in the January preceding each new financial year.

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Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

May 2013

1. Purpose and Objectives

Purpose

The purpose of TVERC is to collect & share environmental information in Berkshire and Oxfordshire.

Objectives

The objectives of TVERC are to:

- Be:
 - Impartial and non-confrontational
 - Non-profit making – any temporary 'profit' (excess income over expenditure) is invested into the service
 - Steered by the needs for data;
- Ensure that TVERC maintains the standards that allow it to be part of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and enable TVERC to retain accreditation from the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC);
- Promote high quality biodiversity recording and a wide understanding of the need for information about our environment to inform decision-making;
- Ensure easy access to biodiversity data for all those who wish to use it whilst maintaining security and quality of data;
- Develop TVERC so that a wide variety of biodiversity data both recent and historic is collected, stored and used;
- Ensure that TVERC is adequately resourced to meet the needs of data suppliers and users;
- Review on a regular basis the framework needed to ensure that TVERC operates successfully;
- Use existing data and develop new datasets and data management tools to improve the information and value of the data TVERC holds;
- Charge a fair fee where appropriate;
- Maintain good relations with suppliers of data;
- Share best practice

2. TVERC Governance and Partnership

Wider Partnership

TVERC is a local centralised point for all those recording wildlife to submit their records and help conserve biodiversity and geodiversity. The TVERC wider partnership includes hundreds of people, such as the general public, skilled volunteer /amateur recorders, professionals working for wildlife charities (BBOWT and RSPB), professionals working for government agencies (Natural England, the Environment Agency & local authorities) and ecological consultants. These records shared by these people will help protect & enhance biodiversity and geodiversity in Berkshire and Oxfordshire by increasing the quality and quantity of data we hold. This data is shared with data-users so that sound decisions can be made about how to develop and manage land sustainably, where to direct wildlife conservation work and for scientific education and research.

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

Supporting Recorders & Volunteers

Volunteer recording groups

Much of the data in the TVERC database comes from volunteer recorders and so supporting them is an essential part of the work TVERC carry out. We provide technical support for recording groups who are collecting and analysing data across Oxfordshire and Berkshire.

Recording & Training Events

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.

Funding Partners

Our funding partners include all the local authorities in Oxfordshire & Berkshire plus Natural England and 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.

Steering Group & Director

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/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 endeavours 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).

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

Staff and Volunteers

TVERC team

The TVERC team consists of 8 members of staff, equivalent to 6.8 full time staff (6.8 FTE):

- Director - Development and delivery of the TVERC service (0.9 FTE).
- Project Manager (FT) – Delivering services to our local authority partners in Berkshire and Oxfordshire and managing project work.
- Data Services Officers (1 x 0.6 FTE, 1 x 0.8 FTE) – Data management, analysing and presenting data for commercial customers and project work.
- Oxfordshire and Berkshire Biodiversity Officers (2 x FT) - 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
- Data Assistant (1 x FT) – Assisting the team with data management and project work.
- Admin Officer (1 x 0.5 FTE) – Administrative, promotional and financial tasks to ensure the smooth running of a busy office.

Volunteers

TVERC are fortunate to get the help of volunteers to carry out some data processing, species recording and site surveys. We aim to have about ten regular office volunteers carrying out data management and at least five specialist surveys on Local Wildlife Sites carried out by volunteers, equivalent to 150 volunteer days or 1000 volunteer hours per year. The value of these volunteers can be up to £15k per year¹.

Students

There are a number of opportunities for students to utilise our resources while gaining valuable experience in the work place at the same time as supporting the important work that we undertake. Further details about volunteering for TVERC are available on our website <http://www.tverc.org/cms/content/volunteer>.

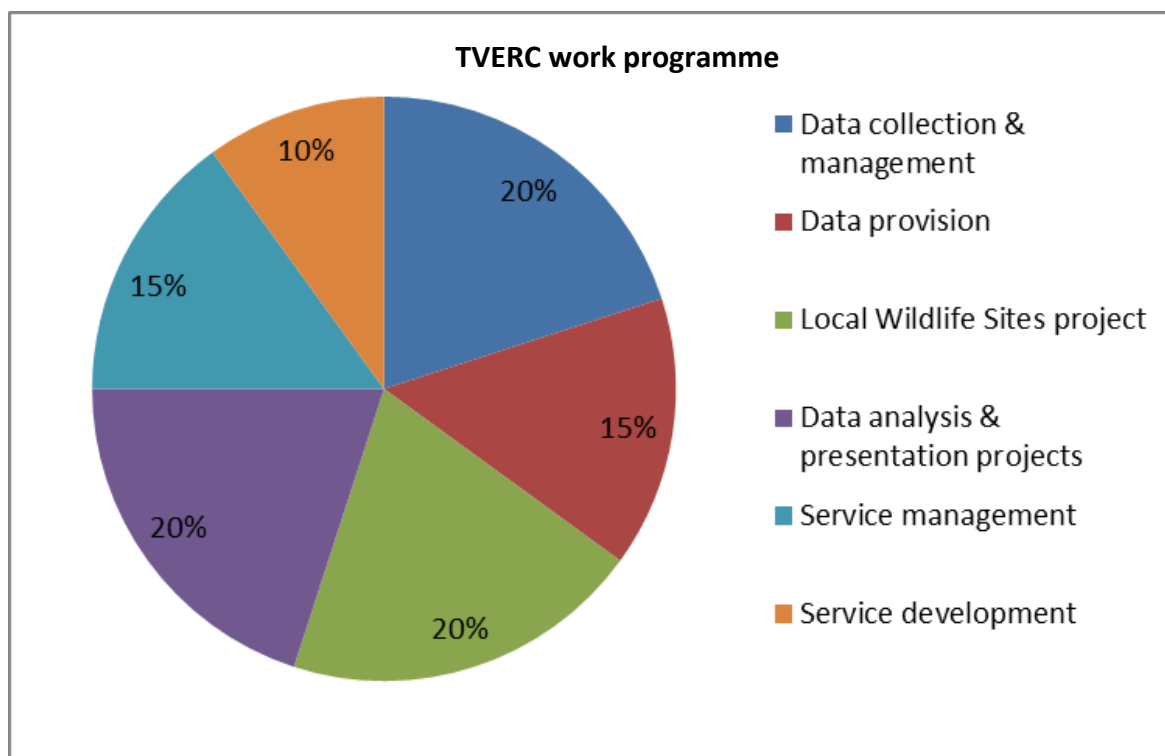
As we can only take on a limited number of student volunteers at any one time we operate an application process to ensure that the most suitable volunteers are taken on and receive a high quality work experience. Students can volunteer, complete a work placement or carry out a BSc / MSc dissertation project and volunteer. TVERC have good links with Oxford Brookes and Reading universities and visit each university annually to speak to relevant lecturers and students.

¹ An equivalent paid job would be £17k per annum, the 'on-costs' increase that to £23k. That is equivalent to a daily rate of £110 (assuming 215 working days in the year) and hourly rate of £14.50

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

3. TVERC Work Programme

The pie chart below illustrates the time spent by the TVERC team on different elements of the TVERC work programme. Annual work priorities are set each year and presented to the Steering Group for approval in the January preceding each new financial year.



Data Collection & Management

TVERC spend approximately 20% of our time collecting data from a variety of sources, then checking it to correct any errors, and then converting it into a suitable format to import into our Recorder database.

Data Holdings

TVERC aims to hold all available information about the plants, animals, wildlife habitats and important wildlife and geological sites in Berkshire and Oxfordshire. TVERC holds a database of over 1.3 million species records plus Local Wildlife Site and Local Geological Site boundaries and information and UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and other habitat data.

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 Nature Conservation Forum and Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum to coordinate Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) work in Berkshire & Oxfordshire.

Improving data quality

TVERC endeavour to improve the quality of data in its database, through funded projects such as the habitats framework and by meeting the NBN data standards and ALERC accreditation criteria.

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

Data exchange agreements

TVERC will seek to secure data exchange agreements with all the major local recording groups across the two counties. It is recognised that TVERC is not the sole manager of biological data in the two counties. There are a number of recording groups and individuals (data custodians) who continue to manage large datasets on behalf of their recorders. Through specific agreements TVERC will seek to allow sharing of these data to the TVERC's local government and government agency partners.

Each year, TVERC negotiate with the wide range of recorders and recording groups in Berkshire and Oxfordshire to ensure we can access new data.

Tools for data collection & management

TVERC will aim to keep up with best practice for data collection and management, by liaising and working with other record centres through the ALERC forum and quarterly meetings with other records centres in the south-east.

Local Wildlife Sites

The Local Wildlife Sites Project requires approximately 20% of TVERC's annual work programme. Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are areas in Oxfordshire and Berkshire which include important and rare habitats and species. TVERC plays a key role in the survey, selection and maintenance of information on Local Wildlife Sites. TVERC's approach to LWS identification, mapping & designation is consistent with the approach taken in other counties in England and in line with the DEFRA guidance on Local Sites. Survey work is carried out by TVERC staff and experienced volunteers, with the aim of surveying sites every 10 years, although this is dependent on funding levels. The information collected is used to assess sites against a range of criteria (see <http://www.tverc.org/cms/sites/tverc/files/LWS%20criteria%20Nov%2009.pdf>).

A site selection panel meets during the year to assess the results of the site surveys. The panel comprises representatives from TVERC, the local authorities, BBOWT, Natural England and local wildlife recorders. Panel decisions result in sites being designated as LWS (if they meet the criteria), de-selected (if they don't meet the criteria) or deferred (if further survey information is required). Landowners are made aware of these panel decisions and have an opportunity to challenge them.

Once any remaining issues about the decisions have been resolved, maps of the location of these sites are distributed to local authority planning staff (as well as other TVERC partners) to ensure they are taken into consideration in the planning process.

The Oxfordshire LWS project is jointly run by TVERC and BBOWT, whilst the Berkshire LWS project is run solely by TVERC. The TVERC element of the project is funded by all of the TVERC Partners (all of the local authorities in Oxfordshire, Natural England, Environment Agency) plus contributions from commercial data searches and data licences. The BBOWT element of the project is funded by Oxfordshire County Council, South & Vale District Council, Cherwell District Council and West Oxon District Council plus 'in kind' contributions from BBOWT to cover project officer hosting.

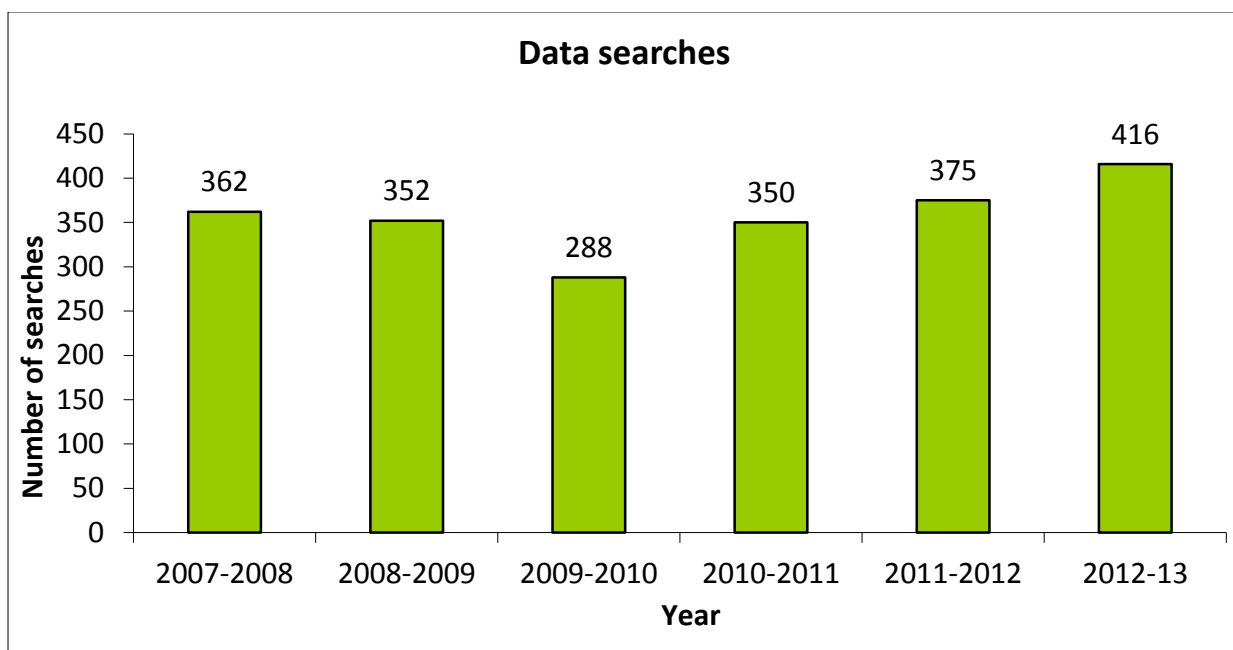
Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

Data Provision

The TVERC team spend about 15% of our time providing data to various individuals and organisations. This can be through data search requests, data licences and bespoke GIS datasets.

Data Searches

TVERC will carry out a search of our database and provide information within a specific search area or site to whoever requests it (e.g. parish councils, local people, conservation bodies, land-owners, students and commercial organisations such as ecological consultants). TVERC charges for the time involved in extracting the data and producing presentable results, although this charge can be waived in some circumstances (see <http://www.tverc.org/cms/content/data-searches> and <http://www.tverc.org/cms/content/charging-rates> for further details). TVERC usually carry out 350-400 data searches per year.



Data Licences

We can supply some of the geographic digital data we hold in the form of layers that can be read directly by Geographical Information Software (GIS). The supply of data in this form will be subject to a digital licensing agreement which is usually valid for 1 year.

Data Provision to Partners

We provide our funding partners with annually updated species and sites information as bespoke GIS datasets. These are essential to ensure that our partners comply with planning policy and wildlife legislation and that sound decisions are made about where to focus conservation effort, how best to manage land and where to direct development to minimise impacts on the natural environment.

We arrange annual meetings with each of the partners to ensure they are making the best use of our data and share best practice between each other.

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

4. Projects

Project work comprises approximately 20% of our work programme. TVERC staff have a great deal of ecological expertise and we have carried 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 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.

TVERC can provide services including:

- Environmental data analysis, interpretation and presentation
- Training on species and habitat identification
- Ecological surveys for wildlife sites (not for development purposes)
- Habitat management advice

For all project work we provide bespoke information, costed to cover the time taken to undertake the data extraction, analysis and report production.

Examples of previous projects are available on the TVERC website, and included in the biannual newsletter, the End of Year report and the annual reports to local authorities.

5. Finance

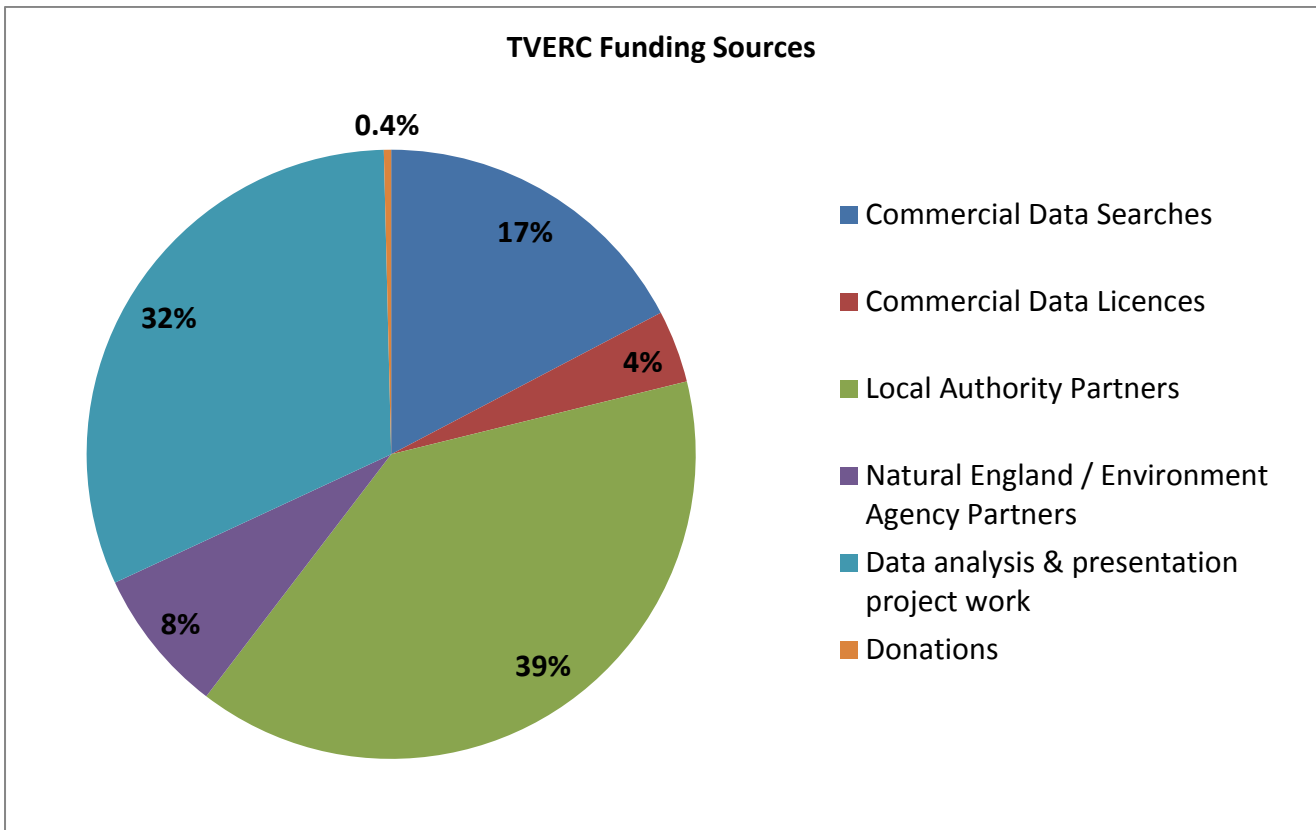
Income

TVERC is funded via a number of ways, as shown in the table and pie chart below, resulting in an annual income of £260k. All of these funding streams contribute to the annual cost of collating and managing the TVERC database, resulting in economies of scale for funders.

Over a year, data searches contribute 30% and data licences 10% of the cost of collating and managing the TVERC database, equivalent to about 0.075% contribution per search. The daily project rate includes a 20% contribution to the annual costs of collating and managing the TVERC database. Natural England / Environment Agency contribute 10% and Local Authorities contribute 30% of the annual cost of collating and managing the TVERC database between them.

Funding source	Amount	% contribution to total annual cost of collating & managing TVERC database
Commercial Data Searches	£45,000	30%
Commercial Data Licences	£10,000	10%
Local Authority Partners	£102,000	30%
Natural England / Environment Agency Partners	£20,000	10%
Project work	£82,000	20%
Donations	£1,000	0%
TOTAL	£260,000	100%

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director



Funding Partners

TVERC is funded by all of the local authorities in Berkshire and Oxfordshire, plus the Environment Agency and Natural England. As each TVERC funding partner contributes to the overall collection, processing and distribution of environmental information, there are efficiencies of scale which provide excellent value-for-money for funding partners.

Commercial data searches and data licences

The data TVERC hold in our database takes time to collect and manage. This work is carried out by both volunteers and paid staff to ensure the data we hold and provide is of a high quality and we can keep our charges as low as possible. Our funding partners (local authorities, Natural England, Environment Agency) cover the cost of part of this work through annual funding agreements. Currently the only way for private sector organisations, individuals or community groups to contribute is by paying for data services at the point of use, when they request a data search. As a non-profit organisation, TVERC uses our income to sustain the services we provide to the local recording community, who in turn share their data with us, so we can share it with whoever asks for it.

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

Projects

TVERC carry out data analysis and presentation projects, which add value to the data we hold. These are commissioned by a variety of organisations, including local authorities, government bodies, conservation charities and other organisations. For all project work we provide bespoke information, costed to cover the time taken to undertake the data extraction, analysis and report production.

Usually, about a quarter of the funding for projects comes from local authorities, with the remainder coming from other sources.

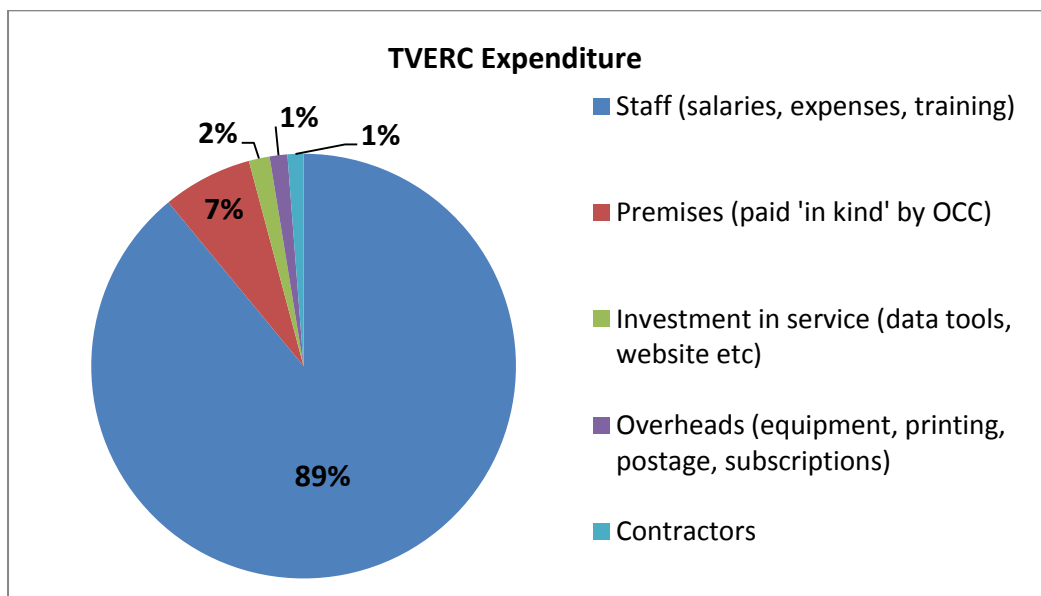
Funding organisation	Year	
	2011-12	2012-13
Local authority	24%	24%
Natural England / Environment Agency	13%	45%
Other	63%	32%

Charging policy

TVERC is a 'not-for-profit' organisation so the charges for services are based on the amount of staff time required to collect, manage, and present data. Any excess income over expenditure is re-invested into the service, except for the Reserve fund. The charging policy is set out on the TVERC website (www.tverc.org)

Expenditure

As illustrated by the pie chart below, the majority of TVERC's income is spent on staff (including volunteer expenses). Our staff and volunteers are the biggest asset TVERC has, as it's the staff time spent on projects, data searches and data licences which bring in the income. Our staff and volunteers also work continuously to improve the TVERC service and data products we can offer our funders.



Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

Reserve

The TVERC Reserve is held for unforeseen circumstances and to cover any redundancy liabilities plus two months running costs. The running costs should comprise of staff costs and overheads (e.g. salaries, expenses, training, equipment, printing, postage, subscriptions). The Reserve will allow TVERC to move to a different host organisation or become independent should the need arise.

As of 2012/13, the reserve required was calculated to be £64k, based on redundancy costs of £30k plus monthly running costs of £17k. This was achieved by the end of 2012/13 and should be increased by 5% each year to cover the rising costs of staff salaries (and therefore potential redundancies) and inflation, as outlined in the following table:

Year	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Minimum required Reserve	£67,200	£70,400	£73,600	£77,280

Camilla Burrow, TVERC Director

May 2013

6. Performance Indicators

The following performance indicators are used to measure how successfully TVERC meets the objectives set out in this business plan.

Objective	Indicator	2014-15		2015-16		2016-17	
		Target	Met?	Target	Met?	Target	Met?
Ensure that TVERC maintains the standards that allow it to be part of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) and enable TVERC to retain accreditation from the Association of Local Environmental Records Centres (ALERC)	TVERC is accredited by ALERC.	Retain standard accreditation		Review criteria to retain standard accreditation.		Identify work required to meet advanced criteria.	
Promote high quality biodiversity recording and a wide understanding of the need for information about our environment to inform decision-making	Funding retained from Partners	£100k from LAs £20k from NE/EA		£100k from LAs £20k from NE / EA		£100k from LAs £20k from NE / EA	
Ensure easy access to biodiversity data for all those who wish to use it whilst maintaining security and quality of data	Number of data searches	400		420		450	
Develop TVERC so that a wide variety of biodiversity data both recent and historic is collected, stored and used	Number of volunteer hours Number of office volunteers	1000 hours 4		1200 hours 5		1500 hours 6	
Ensure that TVERC is adequately resourced to meet the needs of data suppliers and users	Amount of project income secured Number of projects completed	£80k 10		£80k 10		£80k 10	
Review on a regular basis the framework needed to ensure that TVERC operates successfully	Business Plan in place.	In place.		In place.		Review	
Use existing data and develop new datasets and data management tools to improve the information and value of the data TVERC holds	Number of datasets input. Number of new records input.	50 datasets 30,000 records		60 datasets 40,000 records		70 datasets 50,000 records	
Charge a fair fee where appropriate	Charging policy.	In place.		In place.		Review	
Maintain good relations with suppliers of data	Number of datasets received. Number of volunteer LWS surveys	100 datasets 5 sites		120 datasets 5 sites		140 datasets 5 sites	
Share best practice	Number of attendees @ Conference. Number of students	70 @ Oxon 40 @ Berks 3 students		75 @ Oxon 45 @ Berks 3 students		80 @ Oxon 50 @ Berks 3 students	