

Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 2017-2018

Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 9(1) of the
Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006

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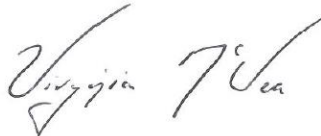
The Rt. Hon Karen Bradley MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
1 Horse Guards Road
LONDON
SW1A 2HQ

2 December 2018

Dear Secretary of State,

I have the honour, in accordance with section 9(1) of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, to present this Report on how I have discharged my functions for the year ending 31 March 2018.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Virginia McVea". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'V'.

Virginia McVea

Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

St. Anne's House
15 Church Street
Belfast
BT1 1ER

FOREWORD

This Annual report covers the last year up to 31 March 2018.

The Northern Ireland Assembly Election was held on 2 March 2017 and work at the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) on this election concluded in this business year. A further unplanned election, the UK Parliamentary Election took place on June 2017. No Executive was formed and EONI remained on standby for a potential further election. Then in February 2018 a Parliamentary by-election for West Tyrone was called for 3 May 2018. Turnout remained high across the electoral events with 65.60% in the June election and 55.13% in the by-election.

The work to facilitate online registration concluded and a launch was planned for June 2018 following the by-election.

A new pilot project on engagement with young people was rolled out training young people to work for EONI and this was well received with plans under development to roll out across Northern Ireland. A further pilot project on engagement with young people through the Education Unit at Stormont was initiated. In addition to plans for on line registration EONI liaised with the Department of Education and other key stakeholders to scope the potential for greater use of administrative data in encouraging attainments to register. To this end EONI has seconded a data lead from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

The public consultation on the future delivery of electoral services in Northern Ireland was further delayed from early 2017 due to the political situation in Northern Ireland.

All of these results have been achieved due to the continued diligence of EONI staff who now total two thirds of the former staff complement to March 2017. I wish to acknowledge with grateful thanks the efforts of our team at EONI. As in previous years the Electoral Office also acknowledges the contribution made to its work by key agencies such as the Electoral Commission, local councils and our sponsor

branch of the Northern Ireland Office. We are grateful for the engagement of political parties and their representatives through this period of significant unplanned activity. This thanks once again must then extend to our casual staff and to the thousands of people across Northern Ireland who come together to be a part of our team during elections, working to serve society in ensuring free and fair elections.

CONTENTS		
	Foreword	
Section		
1	Introduction	1
	Electoral Administration in Northern Ireland	
	Role of the Chief Electoral Officer	
	Role of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland	
2	Performance against Targets	3
3	Registration	4
	Online Registration	
	Data Matching	
	Registration Statistics	
	Meeting the Registration Objectives	
4	Elections	7
	UK Parliamentary Election 2017	
	UK Parliamentary by-election for West Tyrone	
	Electoral Offences	
5	Central Services	8
	Premises	
	Staffing	
	Recruitment	
	Equality	
	Sick Absence	
	Funding	
	Stakeholder and Media Relations	
	Political Parties	
	Electoral Commission	
	Northern Ireland Office	
	Helpline	
	Website	
	Records Management	
	Electoral Identity Cards	
	Complaints	
	IT System	
6	Corporate Governance	12
	Management Board	
	Internal Audit	
7	The Area Offices	13

Annexes		
A	Performance Against Targets and Development Objectives	
B	Electoral Office staff structure as at 31 March 2017	
C	Operating Costs	

SECTION 1 - INTRODUCTION

Electoral Administration in Northern Ireland

1.1 The arrangements for electoral administration in Northern Ireland are different from elsewhere in the United Kingdom. The system in Northern Ireland is administered centrally by the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) for Northern Ireland who is a statutory office holder appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The CEO is assisted by the staff of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI), the administrative structure created to support the CEO in the discharge of her duties. The CEO is both the electoral registration officer for all 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland and returning officer for all elections and referendums in that jurisdiction. The CEO's main duties and responsibilities are set out in the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 (as amended by Article 6 of the Electoral Law (Northern Ireland) Order 1972), the Representation of the People Act 1983 and the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006. The Accounting Officer of the Northern Ireland Office is responsible to Parliament for all expenditure incurred by the CEO.

Role of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO)

1.2 The main duties of the CEO are:

- to act as electoral registration officer for all constituencies in Northern Ireland;
- to act as returning officer for all elections and Referendums in Northern Ireland;
- to recommend to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland by 16 April each year whether or not a registration canvass should be conducted;
- to act as an assessor to the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland;
- to act as an assessor to the Local Government Boundaries Commissioner; and
- to lead and manage the EONI.

1.3 The CEO is required to report to the Secretary of State on an annual basis on how she has discharged her functions. Section 9(2) of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 requires her to include in her Report an assessment of the extent to which the relevant registration objectives in Northern Ireland have been met in the year to which the report relates.

Role of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI)

1.4 The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland is the name given to the organisation that supports the CEO in the performance of her duties. It operates from a headquarters building in Belfast and area offices across Northern Ireland.

1.5 There during the period of this report there were five Area Electoral Offices located across Northern Ireland.

SECTION 2 - PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS

- 2.1 This section summarises the performance achieved against the Targets and Development Objectives set out in the Business Plan 2017/18 which can be viewed at www.eoni.org.uk.
- 2.2 Nine targets were achieved in full.
- 2.3 Three targets were not achieved. Further information can be found at Annex A.

SECTION 3 – REGISTRATION

- 3.1 Very significant electoral activity in year contributed to high levels of registration in Northern Ireland. There were 1,273,661 electors registered on 1 March 2018.
- 3.2 EONI continued to receive quarterly data from the Business Services Organisation (BSO) containing the names and addresses of those who had moved address or had registered a change of name with a health professional in the previous quarter. This was 'data matched' against the information held on the EONI database. As a result, during the period covered by this report, initial 'invitations to register' or to update information on the register were issued to around 63,371 electors.
- 3.3 The Vital Statistics Department of Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency provide weekly lists of births, deaths and marriages. Information on deaths is data matched with the EONI database and approximately 260 records are removed from the register on a weekly basis. Marriage data is also data matched and a report showing change of name and/or address is used by Area Offices to issue registration forms to those who may need to update their details.
- 3.4 Lisburn and Castlereagh District Council continued to send fortnightly records to EONI of those who have attended Citizenship ceremonies and who have attained British Citizenship. Between 1 April 2017 and 31 March 2018 letters were sent to 550 individuals who were not already registered or who had changed their details.
- 3.5 Due to electoral activity and the political uncertainty in Northern Ireland EONI wrote to all attainers in April 2018. Having received the data on attainers for around 140 schools we liaised with them to ensure registration.

Online Registration

3.6 In the reporting year EONI worked to deliver online registration in Northern Ireland. The system was prepared and ready to go-live following the UK Parliamentary by election in West Tyrone.

Data matching

3.7 Following successful collaboration with NISRA (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency) a secondment has been put in place in EONI to develop data analysis and ensure optimal use of data to improve the completeness and accuracy of the Register.

Registration Statistics

3.8 Since 1 December 2017 publication of the register there were 13,797 additions to the register and 13,749 records were removed as deceased, no longer eligible for registration at a given address or in accordance with the legislation (see paragraph 3.4). There were 958 records modified, for example as a result of a name change.

Meeting the Registration Objectives

3.9 Under Section 9 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 I am required to include in the Annual Report an assessment of the extent to which the relevant registration objectives have been met.

3.10 These objectives as set out in Section 10ZB of the Representation of the People Act 1983 are –

“to secure, so far as reasonably practicable –

- (a) that every person who is entitled to be registered in a register is registered in it,
- (b) that no person who is not entitled to be registered in a register is registered in it, and
- (c) that none of the required information relating to any person registered in a register is false.”

- 3.11 I am satisfied that the work completed during the reporting period has ensured, so far as reasonably practicable, the successful delivery of these objectives. The register published in December 2017 held 1,273,642 electors, an increase of 39,288 electors from the figure at December 2016. By the end of the period covered in this report, the register had risen to 1,273,661.
- 3.12 Having regard to the comments and observations above, no recommendation for a canvass in the year 2017/18 was made to the Secretary of State.

SECTION 4 - ELECTIONS

In the last reporting year there were two unscheduled electoral events, namely, a snap UK Parliamentary election held on 8 June 2017 and in February 2018 a Parliamentary by-election for West Tyrone was called for 3 May 2018.

UK Parliamentary Election 2017

- 4.1 The UK Parliamentary election was held on 8 June 2017. The eligible electorate was 1,242,698.
- 4.2 There were 1,380 polling stations and approximately 3,500 polling staff appointed and trained. Polling day proved successful with all polling stations across Northern Ireland being opened on time and no queues were reported at the close of poll.
- 4.3 Eight count venues were utilised throughout Northern Ireland and over 2,000 staff were employed. The counts commenced as soon as practicable after the close of poll and continued overnight until the results were declared.
- 4.4 The overall turnout was 65.60% and the total number of spoiled votes was 3,010 of 815,260 the votes cast. The total number of postal votes issued was 23,825 and the total number of proxy votes issued was 11,707.

UK Parliamentary by-election for West Tyrone

- 4.5 The by election for West Tyrone was held on 3 May 2018. The eligible electorate was 64,101.
- 4.6 There were 82 polling stations and over 200 polling staff appointed and trained. Polling day proved successful with all polling stations across West Tyrone being opened on time and no queues were reported at the close of poll.
- 4.7 Omagh Leisure centre was the count venue and over 130 staff were employed. The count commenced at 10.10pm.

4.8 The overall turnout was 55.13% and the total number of spoiled votes was 305 of the 35,337 votes cast. The total number of postal votes issued was 1,431 and the total number of proxy votes issued was 583.

Electoral Offences

4.9 Eleven cases were reported to the Police Service of Northern Ireland during the reporting year. No cases were referred to The Public Prosecution Service.

SECTION 5 – CENTRAL SERVICES

Premises

5.1 There were no changes to the premises occupied by Headquarters. However the leases for the outer offices all expired and as we awaited the publication of the consultation response EONI worked with landlords to seek to secure extensions in the public interest. We are grateful for their help during this challenging period and in particular to Omagh Community House for supporting a change of location to the improved service in the town.

Staffing

5.2 There was one resignation and one voluntary redundancy during the reporting year.

Recruitment

5.3 There were approximately 1,000 reserve staff applications processed in preparation for the UK Parliamentary election.

5.4 A number of pupils from Hazelwood Integrated College were count tested as part of an outreach programme, following receipt of 36 applications in March 2018.

Training

- 5.5 Annual mandatory e-learning was completed by permanent and casual staff on information assurance and data handling through the Civil Service Learning website. Further cyber security training was rolled out across the organisation as part of wider security developments.

Equality

- 5.6 The annual fair employment return was submitted to the Equality Commission for the 12 month monitoring period to 1 May 2017.
- 5.7 A Section 75 annual progress report was completed and submitted to the Equality Commission in August 2017.

Sick Absence

- 5.8 Sickness absence continues to be closely monitored and reviewed. There were approximately 12 average sick days per person taken during the period, however, the majority of absence related to long term sickness.

Funding

- 5.9 Total operational funding, excluding capital and depreciation, provided to EONI for 2017/18 was £1,968,000. £ 156,000 of this was transferred to capital and an additional £ 13,000 operational budget was allocated following the submission of a business case. Total expenditure excluding capital and depreciation was £ 1,824,700. Capital expenditure was £ 355,000 with corresponding budget of £ 355,000.
- 5.10 Approximately 78 procurement exercises were completed. EONI now process the majority of operational invoices through Account NI. Suppliers are issued with a purchase order number by EONI and instructed to send their invoices directly to Account NI. The majority of valid invoices were paid within five working days.
- 5.11 Funding for elections is non-voted money and does not form part of EONI core funding. Election expenditure is accounted for in the annual

Returning Officer's Expenses, Northern Ireland which are audited by the National Audit Office before being presented to Parliament.

- 5.12 The spending limit (maximum recoverable amount) for the UK Parliamentary election held on 8 June 2017 was £ 3,500,000. Estimated expenditure at 31 March 2018 £ 3,030,000. The cost of candidates mailing expenses are not included in the maximum recoverable amount and are funded separately. These amounted to £ 981,000 for the UK Parliamentary election 2017.

Stakeholder and Media Relations

Media

- 5.13 Primary responsibility for all matters relating to public awareness of elections and registration remained with the Electoral Commission.
- 5.14 A number of press releases were issued during the year and I participated in a number of printed and broadcast interviews on electoral registration and election issues.
- 5.15 A communications strategy was rolled out for the 2017 UK Parliamentary election and the by election in 2018. This included key media briefing sessions and information packs.

Political Parties

- 5.16 I attended all of the Assembly Parties Panel meetings convened by the Electoral Commission to discuss electoral matters. At these meetings, information was provided on changes made to electoral law and practice, on current initiatives and planning arrangements for the elections.

Electoral Commission

- 5.17 Strategic planning meetings were held with the Electoral Commission which included regular ongoing communication and review to ensure continuous improvement.

Northern Ireland Office

5.18 There is regular contact on a range of issues, including suggested amendments to various aspects of electoral legislation.

Helpline

5.19 Our staff dealt with approximately 28,000 calls from 1 April 2017 to 31 July 2017. Helpline statistics are not available from 1 August 2017 due to issues with the reporting software. The helpline closed in October 2017 with area offices answering any further calls.

Website

5.20 Developments to our communications strategy have seen the creation of new forms of information with short films being prepared for our website. There were 279,732 visits to the EONI website during the year.

Records Management

5.21 21 requests were received for information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 of which all but 2 were dealt with within the statutory timeframe. 9 requests were received for information under the Data Protection Act 1998 and all were processed within the statutory timeframe.

Electoral Identity Cards

5.22 There were 13,789 Electoral Identity Cards issued during the reporting year.

Complaints

5.23 The EONI complaints system operated satisfactorily, responding to all queries and concerns raised and attempting to resolve all issues quickly and effectively.

IT Systems

5.24 Work continued on the development of the replacement Electoral Administration system and introduction of online registration in Northern Ireland. EONI was ready to migrate data and launch following the UK Parliamentary by election in West Tyrone

- 5.25 The IT health check on EONI IT systems was carried out in October 2017. All identified vulnerabilities are addressed and mitigated against with a Remedial Action Plan (RAP) update.

SECTION 6 – CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

Management Board

- 6.1 The Senior Management Team operated throughout the year with monthly meetings and during the election periods the Election Strategic Planning Group took over this role temporarily

Internal Audit

- 6.2 During 2017/18, internal audit services were provided by the Government Internal Audit Agency (GIAA). The internal audit services undertook planned audits of Data and Information and Returning Officers Expenses.
- 6.3 The Internal Audit opinion for 2017/18 Returning Officers Expenses reported a moderate level of assurance. Auditors made a total of six recommendations which were accepted. The data audit highlighting work for GDPR was limited with eleven recommendations which were accepted.
- 6.4 Internal Audit reported that they were satisfied with progress made and the majority of recommendations were implemented by agreed dates or explanations provided if any slippage. Progress reports were provided to the Audit and Risk Committee of the Northern Ireland Office.

SECTION 7 – THE AREA OFFICES

7.1 In the reporting year there were five EONI offices and constituencies for which they were responsible are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Area Electoral Offices

LOCATION	CONSTITUENCIES
Londonderry/Derry	Foyle East Londonderry
Omagh	West Tyrone Fermanagh & South Tyrone
Banbridge	Upper Bann Newry & Armagh South Down Lagan Valley
Newtownabbey	Belfast North East Antrim South Antrim North Antrim Mid Ulster
Belfast	Belfast South Belfast West Belfast East Strangford North Down

7.2 Each office is managed by an Area Electoral Officer who acted as Deputy Registration Officer for either 2 or 3 constituencies. As such, these officers had, under my supervision, responsibility for all matters relating to electoral registration. Each Area Electoral Officer was supported by an Assistant Area Electoral Officer and a number of registration officers appropriate to the workload of that office.

7.3 Throughout the year there were meetings with the Northern Ireland Public Service Alliance (NIPSA) in accordance with the recognised JCC process.

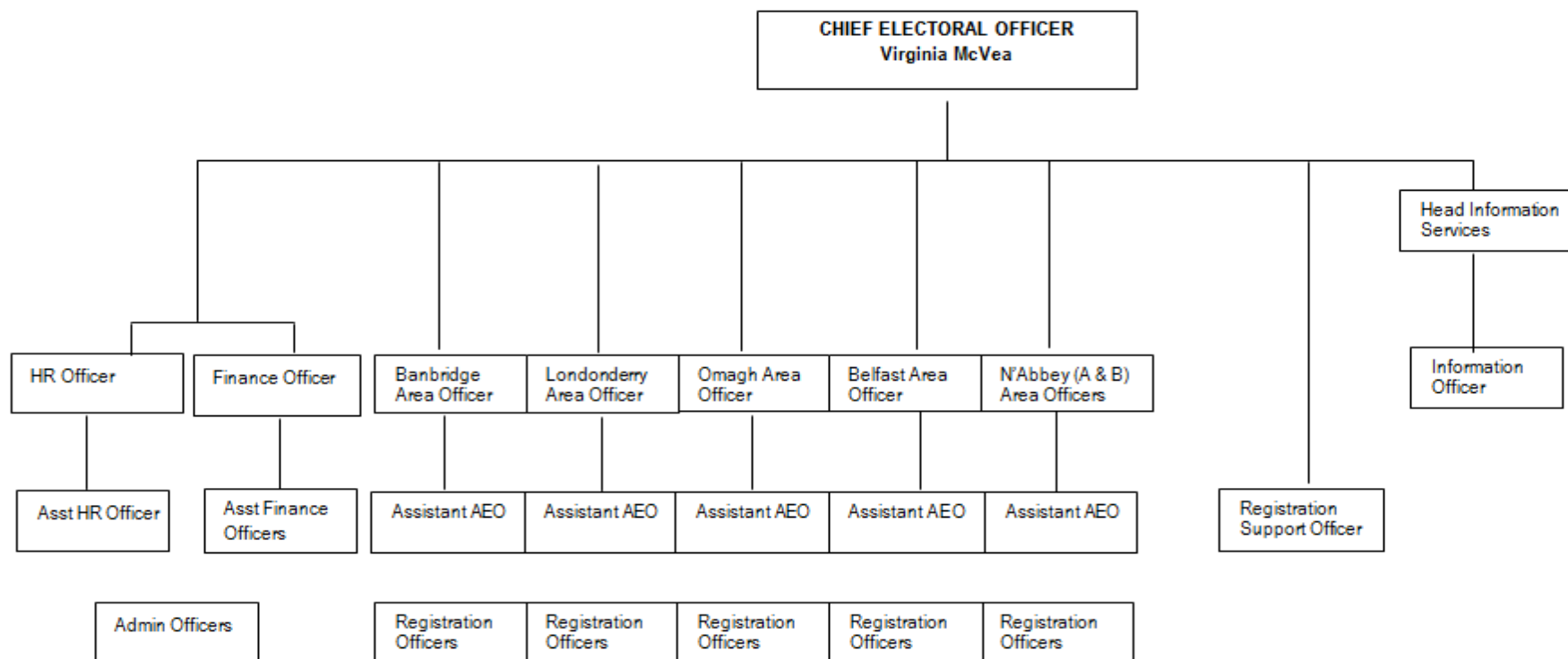
Performance Against targets and Development Objectives 2017/18

Strategic Aim ONE			
To build on the range of successful registration initiatives aimed at maintaining the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the electoral register and to meet, as far as is reasonably practicable, the three statutory remigration objectives			
In year targets:		Status	Comments
a.	To publish on 1 December 2017 a register that meets the statutory objectives of accuracy and comprehensiveness	A	
b.	By December 2017 to have increased the number of attainers (students in the 17-18 age range) on the register	NA	Target not reached due to election duties. Mailshot sent to secure attainers in April. See also schools project.
c.	By December 2017 to ensure that EONI has completed its requirements to provide the facility for online registration in Northern Ireland	A	Awaiting go-live which was delayed by Government
d.	By December 2017 to have reviewed the use of data sources available to EONI to check the details of persons on the register or applying to come onto the Register	A	Internal audit report received and action plan underway
Strategic Aim TWO			
To review plans and processes for future elections			
In year targets:		Status	Comments
a.	To remain in a state of readiness should a further election be called in calendar year following the March 2017 unplanned Assembly election	A	Maintained. Parliamentary election in June
b.	To conclude election responsibilities for the March 2017 Assembly election	A	Concluded
c..	To conclude review of operations at the March 2017 Assembly election	A	Completed. Post-election shredding 2/3/18
d.	To develop a suite of training tools for permanent and temporary staff by December 2017	A	Manual for registration and elections. EA guidance

Strategic Aim THREE To meet the highest standards			
In year targets:		Status	Comments
a.	To operationalise the government response to the public consultation on the way EONI should work going forward	NA	Awaiting response
b.	To provide online registration in Northern Ireland	A	Provided by EONI. Delayed by Govt. Go live due June 2018.
c.	To conduct at least one review of the new online registration system	NP	Not possible in this business year
Strategic Aim FOUR			
In year targets:		Status	Comments
a.	To implement a new risk management system within EONI	NA	Awaiting public consultation response
b.	To consider audit and risk oversight opportunities for EONI	A	Paper prepared by CEO

OT	On Target
A	Achieved
UC	Under consideration
NA	Not Achieved
NP	Not Proceeding

ORGANISATIONAL CHART AS AT 31/3/2018



PARLIAMENTARY CONSTITUENCIES:

Lagan Valley South Down Upper Bann	Foyle East Londonderry	West Tyrone Fermanagh & South Tyrone	Strangford North Down Belfast East	North Antrim Mid Ulster	Belfast North East Antrim South Antrim
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OPERATING COSTS 2017/18

	£k
<u>Basic Pay -</u>	
Permanent Staff	660.7
Temporary Staff	120.2
Basic Pay Total	780.9
<u>Overtime -</u>	
Permanent Staff	2.5
Temporary Staff	0.0
Overtime Total	2.5
<u>Employers National Insurance -</u>	
Permanent & Temporary Staff	97.5
Employers National Insurance Total	97.5
Accrued Superannuation Liability Charge	197.4
Total Staff	1,078.3
Travel & Subsistence	11.9
Staff Training & Development	3.4
Other Staff Costs	13.0
Operating Leases	194.5
Accommodation Costs	139.6
Communications	76.3
Computer Charges	199.0
Other Office Services - Postage	164.5
Advertisement & Publicity	1.4
Contracted-out Services	20.1
Professional Costs	22.9
Consultancy Costs	4.3
Hospitality	1.5
Non Capital Purchases	3.7
Inter Departmental Notional Charges	9.3
Total Goods & Services	865.4
Non Cash Costs (Depreciation)	188.4
Receipts	-119.0
TOTAL PROGRAMME	2,013.1
Capital	355.0
GRAND TOTAL	2,368.1

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