



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2025-26



Kevin Shaw Photography

Andy Burton
Chairman, 2025-26
Cuckfield Parish Council

Introduction – Chairman Andy Burton

Welcome to the Parish Council's review of 2025-26.

The Parish Council continues to be as busy as ever, as we enter the final year of this 2023-2027 Council period ahead of elections next year. Most activities in our business plan are in full swing and I would encourage you to take a look - see www.cuckfield.gov.uk/administration/business-plan.



CUCKFIELD PARISH COUNCIL

BACK ROW FROM LEFT: STEVE OVERSBY- POWELL, ANDREW SYMONDS, ANDREA KING, MARTIN SHELDON, ANDY BURTON, MARIE DORMER, JILL WHITE, ADRIAN PODMORE, PAUL CECCHERINI. INSET – ANGELA KYLE

In 2025, we welcomed Angela Kyle in as our newest councillor.

The Business Plan is guided and directed by our **Strategic Objectives:**

1. Reflect the benefit to Cuckfield in all council operations.
2. Efficient delivery of services. Responsible budgetary and financial control.
3. Improving community engagement and public profile.
4. Increasing sustainability and environmental enhancements in council operations and projects.
5. Maintaining the character and distinctiveness of the village.
6. Maintaining and improving community assets for the enjoyment of all residents.
7. Improving safety and reduction of noise on village highways.

As the first tier of local government, our primary focus remains to serve the interests of the Cuckfield area and community and, as ever, we are keen to receive feedback on anything the council does. See www.cuckfield.gov.uk for contact details.

Some issues of particular note for Cuckfield this year include:

Planning and Cuckstye

The roller-coaster of planning concerns within Mid Sussex and Cuckfield show no signs of settling down!

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF):

The government has recently completed consultation on yet another new NPPF. CPC responded to the 183 questions expressing major concerns over the substantial increase in Whitehall control and significant reduction of local democracy in decision making, together with downgrading of Neighbourhood Plans in planning policy.

Mid Sussex District Plan

The **District Plan** was submitted in July 2024. During 2025 the Examination hit significant turbulence around the Duty to Cooperate (DtC) with neighbouring authorities over housing numbers. The Inspector appeared likely to require withdrawal and re-work of the draft plan for DtC reasons. MSDC disputed this and indicated a potential legal challenge.

A new Inspector, Jonathan Bore, was appointed in the new year and 'phase 1' hearings have been undertaken. Whilst the DtC has recently been removed by the government as a legal requirement, the Inspector now determines what is appropriate and what impact that should have on District housing numbers. MSDC promoted a yearly housing supply rate of around 1,050 per year in their submission. However, reflecting the government's apparent 'economic development at any cost' directives, Mr Bore is now expecting MSDC to accept a significant proportion of Crawley and Brighton's 'unmet need'. This leads to an ever-spiralling target of around 1,350 per year (in 2014, the 525 annual target was considered unsustainable!). MSDC are currently considering their response and how this may be achieved.

Without an approved plan, the current NPPF policies dictate that any existing District development policies are given much reduced weight and the 'presumption in favour of development' takes precedent. We're back to each planning application therefore being determined on individual pros and cons.

All policy and situation direction therefore appears very much in favour of the developers. However, economic conditions are exacerbating the situation in Mid Sussex – the Glenbeigh developments (the Burgess Hill Northern Arc) are currently in slow motion and having received planning consent for 50 in Cuckfield along Hanlye Lane, the developer appears in no rush to start. Though that hasn't stopped Fairfax for submitting another application for 125 houses at the other end of Hanlye Lane, on Sugworth Farm.

Cuckstye

The never-ending **proposed Cuckstye development** continues to cause considerable consternation within the community. Whilst the proposal is not allocated in the draft District Plan, the '**Cuckstye Coalition**' of parish councils (CPC and Ansty & Staplefield), Cuckfield Society, and Stop Cuckstye Action Group (SCAG) remain highly vigilant to ongoing District Plan proceedings, as MSDC come under significant pressure to find additional sites.

The separate and speculative planning application for 1,450 houses reached Mid Sussex District planning committee on 16th October 2025. The Cuckstye Coalition worked extremely hard behind the scenes to ensure that all appropriate evidence was made available to District Councillors so that they could make an informed decision, against the officer recommendation for approval which was driven by the 'presumption in favour'. Thankfully, members refused it on the basis of unsustainable location, landscape harm, car dependency, and the risk of coalescence.

As expected, Fairfax has now appealed this decision to the Planning Inspectorate. A date of 9th June has been set for the start of the Public Inquiry. The Cuckstye Coalition has therefore ramped up legal and technical activities to distil the evidence and appoint representatives for the event. This is the sharp-end of the last four years and will be extremely costly if we are to

give the community the best outcome. Hence, the Cuckfield Society charitable fund-raising strategy is in full swing – the Race Night in January raised several thousand, a 'Disco-Bingo' is scheduled for Sat 25th April, and substantial individual donations are now being received - more are certainly needed! Thank you to those who are contributing to the effort – it is much appreciated.

CPC remains committed to preserving the village character and distinctiveness through implementation of our Neighbourhood Plan policies. As we're seeing, this in the face of extreme, continuous barrage from developers, who see Cuckfield as prime real estate but without any interest in its longer-term evolution and would see it obliterated for their short-term economic gain. As in previous years, there can therefore be absolutely no complacency in our approach.



VIEW ACROSS THE PROPOSED CUCK-STYE SITE TO CUCKFIELD FROM ANSTY, BRAD WILLIAMS 2022

Local government devolution

Nationally, government is continuing to progress its ambitious programme to end two tier local authorities and move to unitary or combined councils, alongside elected mayors. The timeline is being continuously updated as the complexities become apparent. While Sussex & Brighton and Hove appear in the list of areas where decisions are awaited (as of March 2026), final structures and timelines for our area have not yet been confirmed.

In view of the shake-up, local elections had been postponed to avoid new councillors only serving a very short term (and probably not even getting up to speed with the role). This seemed a practical approach, despite delays in the devolution process. However, you'll probably be aware that this decision was politicised and reviewed by the courts, and elections will now be held. There are varying views on the significant election costs for the additional democracy they will provide.

CPC will engage constructively with whatever structural proposals emerge for Sussex, seeking clear lines of responsibility, stable funding of local services, and a stronger role for parishes in neighbourhood decision making.

Whilst we already continue to operate several facilities, including the Village and Queen's Halls (including the Angela Fox Nature Garden), carpark toilets, two allotments, skate park, burial ground and Horsefield Green open space, we're keen to adopt others from MSDC should devolution make this possible.

Community & Council Events

Despite the heavy planning agenda, we've continued to put on and support village events that bring people together.

This year's **Annual Parish 'Roadshow' Meeting** will be held at The Queen's Hall at 7pm on Thursday 26th March 2026, with guest speakers including Katy Bourne, the Sussex Police & Crime Commissioner, Cllr Malcolm Avery for MSDC, Paddy Boyle, Chair of the New England Wood Trust, and Simon Stokes, Chair of Ansty & Staplefield Parish Council for Cuckstye updates - followed by a parish panel Q&A. (See Cuckfield Life notices and our Council events page.)

We will have representatives and displays from many of the village organisations and community groups where you can find out more and discuss with members over a glass of wine. It's these groups that make Cuckfield such a special place to live and work so come along and find out more - it's always an interesting evening about your village.

Beyond the annual meeting, our events calendar features successful **regular community activities**. Examples include the Tuesday Tea & Company drop-in sessions, spring and autumn Silver Sunday (the next is on Sunday 19th April), two Skate Jams at Whiteman's Green, the successful revival of the Summer Show, July's Picnic in the Park (this year's on 5th July) and the Christmas Advent Windows and Street Festival. We're hoping for much better luck with the weather for our outdoor events in 2026! Look out for the Nuclear Bunker open days over the summer and another Rain or Shine Theatre Company production.

Our Speedwatch team is out in all weathers reminding motorists of the traffic restrictions through the village. Our objective remains to lower the speed limit to 20mph, as numerous other villages have done in Sussex, for which we need the support of our County Councillor.

We continue to help approx. 30 local families most in need through our **food hampers**. We worked with the Holy Trinity Primary School and the Medical Practice for their distribution.

The PC website contains details of all events - cuckfield.gov.uk/news, and the Cuckfield Society has a shiny new website which aims to further strengthen community cohesion - cuckfieldsociety.uk

Council budget

We have worked hard this year to apply for numerous external grants to help fund our activities and balance our budget, and we recognise the difficult times for residents, but the inflationary pressures and increased activities we are all experiencing means we've needed to raise the **council tax** precept by £8.82 a year for a Band D property.

The above successes would not be possible without the great work undertaken by the Parish Council team, consisting of six staff members led by Clerk Noemi Ripert.

More details of our numerous activities can be found in the various committee reports below.

Committee Activities

In 2025-26 the Parish Council ran committees for Assets, Community & Environment, Community Buildings, Roads & Traffic, Planning, and Finance & General Purposes. Reports on their activities are outlined below.

Assets, Community and Environment Committee - Cllr Andrew Symonds

The Assets, Community and Environment committee has a large remit.

The Assets of Cuckfield Parish Council comprise the Village Hall on London Lane, two allotment sites (Courtmead Road and Whitemans Green), the cemetery, Horsefield Green open space, the Observer Field containing the underground bunker, the public toilets, the skate park, and sundry benches and bus shelters. All of these are regularly checked and maintained for your use. The remaining substantial asset, the Queens Hall, is the subject of another report.

The Community aspect includes the Tuesday tea and company in the council chamber at the Queens Hall from 1:30pm to 3:30pm. This is open to all, but primarily to those who live alone. Christmas hampers were distributed to several struggling households. The Christmas Street Festival was relocated at the last minute to the Queen's Hall due to bad weather. The efforts of all stallholders to respond with such speed and good grace were really appreciated.

The Environment element this last year was enhanced by a number of work parties tidying up, planting, weeding, and hedge cutting. Greener Cuckfield organisation played a significant part in making this a successful operation and is very much appreciated for what they have done and also into this current year. Folks are reminded that the fruit trees and berry bushes planted at the far end of Horsefield Green are for the benefit of all, though at present they are some way off maturity.

There has been another rash of graffiti vandalising many walls and structures recently in the village. Please report any further instances you are aware of, locations and the time frame to the Parish Council, but also to the police to follow up.

There were two incidents in the churchyard recently where a dog aggressively approached someone and tried to bite. One was on a long lead. Dog owners are reminded that dogs should be on a short lead in the church yard and kept under control at all times therein.

Community Buildings Committee – Cllr Andrea King

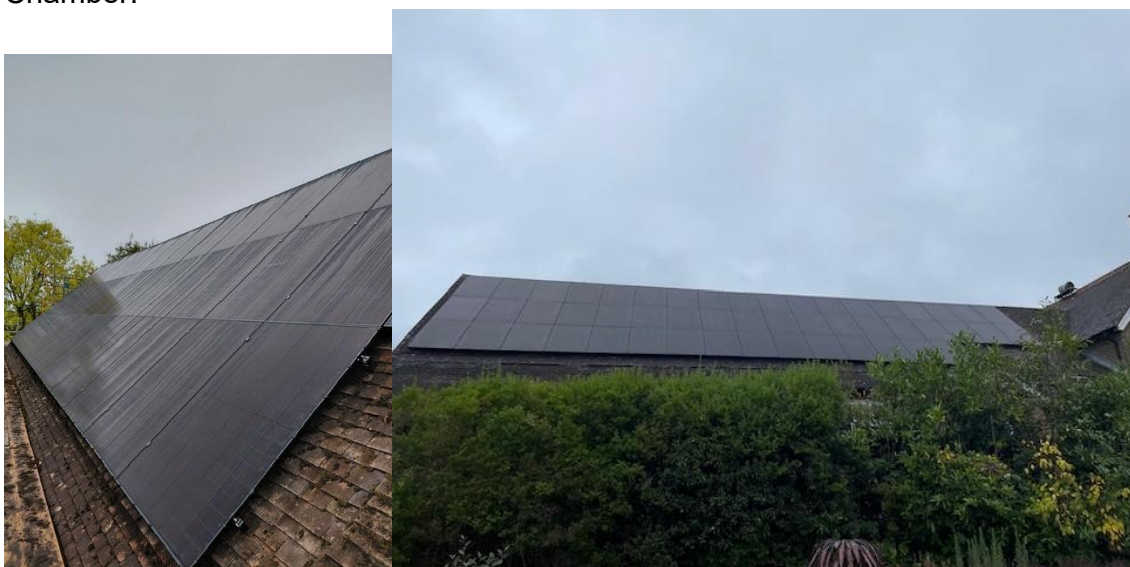
Yet again the halls have both had a busy year with many and varied bookings.

Holy Trinity Primary School is now running the Robin Hood Pre-School at the Village Hall, having taken over from the Cuckfield Pre-School group, and this change has proved to be seamless with slightly extended hours. The Nest also use the Village Hall regularly as do various other hirers. There have been various maintenance works undertaken there and the roof is now clear of moss etc.



VILLAGE HALL ROOF

Our carbon footprint at both halls has been much improved this year. From small things, such as light bulbs, to a major effort at the Queen’s Hall where solar panels have been installed. This took some time as it required planning permission to put them on a listed building and the Heritage Officer was involved, but our plan was accepted and the work was finally completed recently. We await the secondary glazing in the office and new windows in the Council Chamber.



SOLAR PANELS ON THE QUEEN’S HALL

There continue to be many weddings at the Queen’s Hall and we are delighted that we already have several bookings for this year and 2027. Seeing the different ways the hall can be decorated is always fascinating. Such imagination goes into each one.

The Bookfest was very successful in October and brought many people from outside the village into the hall to hear some excellent speakers. The return of the popular Cuckfield Summer Show was very well received, and we hope this will become a bi-annual feature in the future. Cuckfield Dramatic Society also entertained us with some excellent performances.

The current display at Cuckfield Museum is “Post Haste” and is about how the postal service has changed over the years. We cannot say it has improved as it does seem that the days of sending a postcard to say “See you this afternoon for tea” are long gone! The Museum is open

on the first floor of the Queen's Hall from 10am to 12.30pm, Wednesday to Saturday so do call in.

The Angela Fox Nature Garden is due to open soon and we are looking forward to seeing all the lovely spring flowers and foliage at that time of year. When the garden is open to the public, many enjoyed sitting there and admiring the lovely, decorative water feature amongst the raised flower beds and the energetic fox who can be seen at the far end of the garden. We have also recently improved the disabled access in the garden.

The Rain or Shine Theatre Group, a much-loved group, came last August, performing in the garden, and again in January, and gave us two wonderful performances. How do so few actors manage to play so many parts? Three of them managed to play fourteen different characters at their most recent offering!



RAIN OR SHINE SUMMER PERFORMANCE IN THE ANGELA FOX NATURE GARDEN

Of course, none of this would be possible without the dedication of the Parish Council staff and we are very grateful to them for their hard work throughout the year.

Roads & Traffic Committee – Cllr Jill White

General Update

The Parish Council keeps note of traffic accidents in and around Cuckfield (22 during the past year). The most concerning are near Chownes Mead Lane where cars repeatedly damage street signs, fences and gardens; the Co-op roundabout at Whitemans Green where a car overturned and was embedded upside down in a house wall; at London Lane/Chatfield Road where a pedestrian was injured and a house wall damaged; at the Junction of Broad Street/London Lane where a boundary wall was knocked down; at Ardingly Road where a car ran into a fence and house and a further accident on the roundabout at Ardingly Road/London Road.

Traffic continues to travel too fast on our narrow roads, putting the safety of our residents at risk. This inevitably increases calls for a 20mph restriction, especially in London Lane/High Street/South Street. Support from WSCC is needed for this but, as they manage 2,500 miles of roads, it is not their highest priority.

Environment

Speed increases noise in the environment. At 20/30mph, cars produce 50-60 decibels. At 40mph, cars produce 70/80 decibels. Please think of your neighbours.

In Broad Street, some of the reflective posts that protect the green verge rotted and we have replaced them.

Pothole repairs have been attended to much quicker this year but, due to almost double the amount of rainfall, repairs are temporary until the weather improves.

Speedwatch

We started Speedwatch in 2018, and the percentage of drivers booked for speeding has dropped from 12.3% in 2023, to 9.3% in 2024 and 7.1% in 2025. We still need people to join the team for 1-2 hours a month. Come and make a difference!

Hanlye Lane

Although not within the parish boundary, the Lane has been a scene of many accidents during bad weather. The Traffic Steering Group (see below) recommendations were completed with a lowering of the speed limit and large signs highlighting the corners, and recommending lower speeds.

Traffic Steering Group

With Pete Bradbury WSCC, the Parish Council established a Traffic Steering Group to review and address traffic, parking and road safety concerns raised by Cuckfield residents. The group includes representatives from West Sussex County Council (WSCC), Mid Sussex District Council (MSDC), Highways officers and the Parish Council. A range of solutions are being explored, but it is important to note most highway changes require WSCC approval and funding, meaning progress can take time.

Key issues under discussion include speeding, congestion, pedestrian safety, and inappropriate parking. A significant step forward has been achieved with approval for a Traffic Regulation Order to reduce the speed limit at Tylers Green from 40mph to 30mph, scheduled for implementation from July 2026.

Concerns around school routes, especially on lower and middle London Lane, include narrow pavements (that cannot be extended), the constant damage to the 'keep left' bollard, speeding vehicles, poor visibility at junctions, and congestion at peak times. Near misses at the exit of Brick Lane to Chatfield Road are occurring as drivers do not give way. WSCC is reviewing re-marking of junction lines. Potential measures range from improved signage and road markings to longer-term options such as junction redesigns and new crossings. London Lane already has a width restriction at the lower end, and the High Street has a weight restriction. Residents can photograph miscreants and report them via [Operation Crackdown](#)

Parking pressures near the High Street, South Street, Church Platt, and Tollgate Lane are also being reviewed, with solutions including yellow lines, planters, village gateways, and local engagement to encourage more considerate parking.

Pedestrian safety remains a priority, with discussions ongoing regarding new crossings at Ardingly Road, Whitemans Green, and other key locations. The group is also addressing pavement and verge parking; both damage infrastructure and restrict access, and are encouraging residents to work with the Parish Council on verge protection and improvements.

Further updates will be shared as discussions progress and decisions are reached.

Planning Committee – Cllr Steve Oversby-Powell

As our chairman has alluded to in his summary above, the big story in planning this year was the refusal of the Cuckstye planning application by district councillors, despite a recommendation for approval from Mid Sussex District Council's own planning officers.

It is important to remember that the primary reason the Planning Officers recommended approval for this contentious application was because of the unusual circumstances that resulted in a Government-appointed Planning Inspector refusing to ratify Mid Sussex District Council's new District Plan. This is a required legal document that demonstrates to developers that there **is** land identified to meet the five-year housing requirement target — and greatly reduces the ability of developers to successfully promote speculative sites outside of those sites already vetted as being the most suitable.

In the absence of a confirmed five-year housing supply, Planning Officers considered themselves obliged to apply the “tilted balance” argument in favour of approval. However, the “Cuckstye Coalition”, supported by substantial legal opinion and relevant case law, presented a robust alternative position. Councillors ultimately agreed with this assessment and refused the application.

The underlying issues relating to the District Plan remain unresolved. The reasons for the Inspector's initial refusal are contested, and a further review is ongoing. The Parish Council supported MSDC's proposed District Plan and maintains the view that it was a sound and appropriately evidenced document that should have been adopted at first submission.

What struck us as particularly interesting about the Cuckstye vote before Full Council on 16th October, aside from the very gratefully received public support (although it apparently is “not the done thing” to applaud the key speakers!) was the broad consensus amongst councillors from different political parties that the plan should be rejected. It is also worth noting here that no political party can honestly claim unanimous opposition among its district councillors.

Some might therefore take the various political parties' claims that they have always been vehemently against Cuckstye with a pinch of salt, but we take a different view.

Here in Cuckfield, the overwhelming message from those who have chosen to engage in the planning process has been that Cuckstye should be rejected. Even if the application had an appreciable degree of merit, this is unsurprising given the profoundly negative effect such a large development would have in such close proximity to our village. But councillors on MSDC's Planning Committee represent wards as far North as Copthorne and East Grinstead and as far South as Fulking (Devil's Dyke). Each of these areas has its own planning pressures that a development of 1,450 homes in our area might ease. Those councillors who

voted in favour of the plan will tell you privately that they were simply looking out for their own constituents.

Winning the vote against the Cuckstye development was in part at least, an exercise in diplomacy. It wouldn't have been possible without district councillors who had an intimate knowledge of the case and, crucially, constructive working relationships with the other councillors whose votes would decide the outcome.

What **is** important to us as parish councillors is the competency of those who form the bridge between our Parish Council, the District Council (MSDC) and the County Council (West Sussex County Council) — i.e., our District and County councillors.

With local elections approaching, parish residents will choose their representatives. From a planning perspective, it is important that those elected have both the necessary planning knowledge and strong interpersonal skills; without them, there is a risk that unsuitable proposals like Cuckstye could be approved without proper scrutiny.

In other (non-Cuckstye) news, the Planning Committee continues to meet more often throughout the year than any other committee (every three weeks or so), which is necessary due to Local Planning Authority deadlines. We are a statutory consultee for all applications in the parish. In the 2025–26 period, we reviewed an average of six cases per meeting. Most applications were home-improvement projects.

As in previous years, the committee felt that most applications were perfectly grounded. Where we have had minor concerns about an application, rather than object, we offer a suggestion to the Mid Sussex Planning Department about how an application might be improved. Indeed, our submissions often start with the words: "If MSDC were minded to approve this application, they might consider..." We have found this approach effective, and considerate applicants often take these comments on board before the determination deadline, which can help the progression of their case.

We have been encouraged by the use of energy-efficient technology, particularly roof-integrated solar systems, including coloured modules that blend with surrounding tiles on sensitive sites. However, some air source heat pump installations on existing properties are less convincing; while effective, inadequate acoustic shielding can make them intrusive, and comparisons to "a washing machine on spin cycle" underestimate the cumulative noise impact in residential areas.

We have also objected to a number of modifications to new-build "eco houses" where the proposed changes would mean the properties would no longer have any hope of retaining the Energy Performance Certificate targets that were used by the developer as part of the case for having their plans approved.

We remain concerned with the preservation of trees, and in the last 12 months have reviewed a large number of applications to either fell or structurally prune major trees in the village. In any case where a mature tree is to be felled, we ask that evidence be presented for why this is necessary. More often than not, there is a good reason — e.g., ash dieback, significant and unstable lean, or shear cracks in the main stem — but often no evidence is presented, and this only becomes apparent after intervention by MSDC's Tree Officer

Finance and General Purposes Committee - Cllr Martin Sheldon

This committee is responsible for the setting and control of the annual budget and to ensure the appropriate level of reserves are maintained. There are 2 types of Reserve:

1. General Reserves – CPC follows the national guidelines of 50% of annual precept; this is used to cushion the effect of uneven cashflow.
2. Earmarked Reserves – these are used for specific projects designated by the council or for specific purposes designated by S106 monies.

This year we expect to have annual results in line with budget. We have invested some of our General Reserves in solar panels on the Queen's Hall roof and expect to begin to receive income from FY2026-27 to offset some of our electricity costs. We also unexpectedly had to spend £10K replacing the 20-year-old lighting in the main hall, repairing the main boiler after various functioning issues and other associated costs to the effective running of the old, listed building. Vandalism of the public toilets, fencing, dog bins, and graffiti have cost £1,473; this is your money used to repair senseless damage. We have also incurred substantial legal costs in registering our land assets.

Planned expenses for FY2026-27:

1. Update our Neighbourhood Plan as Mid-Sussex District Plan was delayed by the National Planning Inspectorate and the latest National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
2. We believe we will need to replace our very old boiler in the Queen's Hall which is becoming increasingly unreliable.
3. Replace rotted window frames in the Queen's Hall.
4. Install Listed-Building double glazing in the Parish Council office to help improve the energy efficiency of the building.

These are all large expenses, and we have therefore deemed it appropriate to increase the Parish Council precept by 6% (equates to an increase of £8.82 p.a. for a Band D house) having held FY2025-26 at below inflation.

Budget Data as of 5th March 2026

Category	2025-26 Budget (£)	Actual Net (£)	Balance (£)
Roads & Traffic			
Income	2,000	1,232	768
Expenditure	8,550	7,654	896
Planning			
Income	0	0	0
Expenditure	2,000	10,510	-8,510
Finance & General Purposes			
Income	314,120	317,270	3,150
Expenditure	257,654	245,176	12,478
Assets, Community & Environment			
Income	72,750	70,814	1,936
Expenditure	108,365	96,980	11,385
Queen's Hall			
Income	31,000	33,226	2,226
Expenditure	70,950	64,349	6,600
Village Hall			
Income	23,000	30,449	7,449
Expenditure	32,000	19,454	12,546
TOTALS			
Income	442,870	452,991	10,121
Expenditure	479,519	444,123	35,396