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KWAZULU-NATAL PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE MOVES TO PROVIDE CLARITY FOLLOWING REPORTS OF LIGHTS SWITCHED OFF AT VARIOUS GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS

The KwaZulu-Natal Department of Public Works and Infrastructure has noted several media reports and queries regarding a number of government departments which have had their lights cut off.

KZN Public Works and Infrastructure wishes to set the record straight.

KZN Public Works and Infrastructure is a custodian of 10 067 government properties, many of these are buildings where several government departments are housed. These are buildings located across 54 municipalities in the province of KwaZulu-Natal with rates paid for by KZN Public Works and Infrastructure.

As a backdrop, KZN Public Works and Infrastructure's annual rates bill amounts to R1,8 billion, however, the department only receives just around R900 million from provincial Treasury to service rates. This is already not enough and means right off the bat KZN Public Works and Infrastructure is sitting with a significant deficit.

Much of the rates debt is historical over a period going back some 20 years. Despite this KZN Public Works and Infrastructure remains fully aware and committed to its obligation to pay the outstanding rates amounts and intends to honour this, however, it has been unfortunate that some municipalities have not engaged in good faith and in some cases have constantly moved the goal post.

For instance, while the department owes eThekweni Municipality around R500 million in rates and despite attempts to have a sit-down around the table, there has been no real success. It has also come to the attention of KZN Public Works and Infrastructure that several municipalities have been charging the department significantly inflated rates amounts, in some cases, as high as 40%, as confirmed by independent evaluators.

It also remains concerning to KZN Public Works and Infrastructure that schools in the province are subjected to a rates bill by municipalities which currently stands at R252 million. This is not only something unique to the KZN province, but something worrying considering how it impacts the right to basic education as afforded by the South African constitution.

In light of these challenges KZN Public Works and Infrastructure has been forced to approach the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs to declare an inter-governmental dispute.

While KZN Public Works and Infrastructure takes responsibility for the payment of outstanding rates and is working vigorously to resolve the matter, it should be understood that the department is not responsible for the payment of water and lights. That is the onus of each department.

KZN Public Works and Infrastructure is hopeful that with the intervention of KZN COGTA, as a mediator, a solution will be found soon. KZN Public Works and Infrastructure remains committed to finding a lasting solution to this issue and looks forward to working together with all stakeholders so that the people of this province can have access to government services which they are entitled to as taxpaying citizens.

END.

For media enquiries:

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