

■ BUILT ENVIRONMENT

'Lack of quantity surveyors is root of budget misspending'

A CONSISTENT lack of quantity surveyors in government departments was the root of infrastructure budget misspending, the Association of SA Quantity Surveyors said yesterday.

Late last year, the auditor-general reported a 38% increase in unauthorised expenditure to R2.1 billion, with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure receiving one of the poorest audit results.

"While the department is mandated to be the custodian and portfolio manager of the national government's immovable assets, there are virtually no quantity surveyors within many government departments," the association said.

Quantity surveyors are the built

environment professionals equipped and trained to manage the complete contractual and financial aspects of construction projects.

They provide oversight and management that helps ensure construction project are completed within projected budgets by pricing-forecasting, as well as measuring the value of the work done on-site.

It is incumbent on the government to recognise the deficiencies in project cost management, and appointing quantity surveyors would go a long way in alleviating corruption, executive director of the association, Larry Feinberg, said.

"When quantity surveyors are

appointed at municipalities and within government structures across South Africa, the mismanagement of funds will be substantially curtailed," he said.

"While engineers, architects and other built environment professionals can do contract administration bills of quantities, they will never come close to being as meticulous and as accurate as trained quantity surveyors."

When quantity surveyors oversaw contractual and accounting budgets, the government would be able to get clear-cut answers to why there were cost overruns on projects, providing it with stringent budget oversight mechanisms and ultimate accountability, Feinberg added.

Zandile Makhathini, chairperson

of the built environment matters committee on the Council for the Built Environment (CBE), said government departments were at a critical point where they needed to recognise that a quantity surveyor's skills were specialised and needed on projects.

The CBE is a statutory body established under the Council for the Built Environment Act that co-ordinates six councils for the built environment professions – namely, architecture, engineering, landscape architecture, project and construction management, property valuation and quantity surveying.

"As a construction manager, I'm fully aware of my limitations, which is why I've appointed a quantity

surveyor as part of my project team.

"Instead of expecting engineers and construction managers to excel in cost estimating and cost control, we need to entrust this responsibility to people who have mastered these areas of expertise," Makhathini said.

"Government departments need to make roles for quantity surveyors available at competitive salaries so that they can control costs and help us derive value from our building projects and assets."

In September, Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille called for an overhaul of the department's register after corruption was uncovered. | African News Agency (ANA)