

Government departments need to cough up

AS OUR country enters the second week of lockdown level 4, a parliamentary reply to questions by the DA has revealed that KZN's municipalities are owed more than R2.4 billion in outstanding rates and services by delinquent government departments.

The finding comes as many municipalities are hiking rates and tariffs as part of their annual budget processes – with many of these increases above inflation – or adding to the increases passed down from Nersa (National Energy Regulator of South Africa) or their respective water authorities.

According to the reply, the departments that owe the most in terms of rates include KZN's Public Works department, with a tab of R708 million, followed by national Public Works with R206.6m and the Ingonyama Trust with R340.8m. In terms of municipal services, the worst offender is KZN Education with R378.7m outstanding, followed by national Public Works with R79.7m.

Of particular concern is that

municipalities have embarked on what they are calling “revenue enhancement programmes” aimed at collecting outstanding debts from residents. This, while government departments owe tens of millions of rand.

Many of KZN's municipalities have collapsed and service is not being rolled out. The lack of capacity, cadre deployment and political will are among the biggest causes of this. The failure by provincial and national departments to pay their debts is another contributing factor to the lack of financial viability of our municipalities.

The DA will be calling for representatives of the delinquent departments to appear before KZN's CoGTA (Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs) portfolio committee at a special meeting.

They must explain why they are not paying for rates and services and advise what mechanisms are being put in place to deal with these arrears.

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