

R140m for welfare goes unspent

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More than 40,000 girls at Eastern Cape schools did not receive sanitary pads because the social development department spent only R22m of a R160m budget covering the free delivery of the pads, food parcels and other welfare services.

The department now has two months to spend the money before the 2021/2022 financial year or risk treasury taking those funds back.

In addition, 627 people did not receive food parcels because of a failure to verify whether they were beneficiaries.

The underspend is attributed to an ongoing court case between the department and an unnamed service provider over a tender process for an unspecified bid.

The Bhisho legislature also heard a failure to implement policy had led to more than 2,000 youths not getting Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) jobs.

These items are contained in an annual report recently tabled by the social development portfolio committee.

“The social relief sub-programme underspent its final appropriation by 34.2% or R24.313m due to delays in awarding the tender for [the] Sanitary Dignity project. As a result, 40,704 learners did not receive sanitary pads in the year under review. The delays are due to a service provider that has taken the process to court,” the report said.

The service provider’s complaint was that it was eliminated unfairly in the bidding process, social development spokesperson Mzukisi Solani told the Dispatch on Thursday.

“The argument advanced was that the use of limited bidding was not constitutional.”

He said the department was using the allocated budget for the current financial year and had advertised tenders so that 54,577 girls in 85 quintiles 1, 2 and 3 schools could be provided with sanitary pads.

MPLs recommended that the department comply with the court order once the matter was concluded, and the report said regardless of the result, pupils should not be disadvantaged.

DA MPL Edmund van Vuuren slammed the department’s performance. “It has to spend R142m in the next two months or run the risk of being the worst, least caring and most underperforming department in history,” he said.

He labelled the non-procurement of food parcels as an “abomination”.

The annual report said the department had failed to deliver food parcels because it could not assess would-be beneficiaries in time and it paid service providers late.

“The failure to deliver food parcels is inhuman to the impoverished citizenry of the Eastern Cape and is bringing the government into disrepute,” the report found. “The department must report measures it has taken against officials who have caused this and report to the committee 30 days after the adoption of this report.”

The portfolio committee also found the department’s “challenges” in its EPWP unit had led to 2,002 young people missing out on job opportunities.

MEC Siphokazi Mani-Lusithi said the department had made strides to achieve important milestones in 2019/20. It had managed an unqualified audit opinion in 2020/21.

It had also provided funding to early childhood centres with a special focus in rural and semi-urban areas.