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Departments' electricity switched off

Alex Japho Matlala

Several government departments and entities in Limpopo are operating in the dark – and it's not load shedding but because the Polokwane municipality has switched off their electricity supply.

This after the entities defaulted on their obligation to pay electricity bills to the tune of R252 million.

Members of the portfolio committee on finance had visited several departments on Monday, where they switched off power supply directly from transformers that feed the affected buildings.

The municipality said yesterday the bills were accumulated over go-day period.

It said it had tried to engage some of the affected departments and entities to settle their bills in November last year, but they failed to do so, while others made commitments to settle their accounts.

Municipal spokesperson Thipa Selala said properties that were switched off include those that housed the departments of public works (national and provincial); agriculture and rural development; health; education; sport, arts and culture; cooperative governance, human settlements and traditional affairs; and Great North Transport.

"We are not only focusing on departments but top owing businesses and individuals as well, in and around Polokwane," said Selala.

"We turned to this move in an endeavour to ensure that our municipality is financially viable and our people get used to the culture of paying for services rendered to them."

Last week, some of the departments which owe millions received fattest slices of the Limpopo's annual budget from the office of the Provincial Treasury.

Education received the highest share with 48.2% of Limpopo's annual budget.

The department was allocated R38.1 billion for 2023-24 financial year, R39.3 billion for 2024-25 and R40.6 billion for 2025-26. Health got the second-largest slice at R23.7 billion for 2023-24, R24.1 billion for 2024-25 and R25.2 billion for 2025-26.

Health MEC Phophi Ramathuba's office said in a statement it was concerned about threats to switch off the Mankweng Hospital, one of the biggest in Limpopo.

"The department has become aware of a R53 million rates and taxes bill for Mankweng Hospital that the municipality has once again wrongly directed to the department of health," spokesperson Neil Shikwambane said.

Selala said that in a case where a hospital was owing, "we switch off the department of health's head office" and where a school is owing, "we cut off at the department of education's head office".