



Publication: Pretoria News - Main
Title: Polokwane municipality cuts off non-payers
Publish date: 16 Mar 2023
Page: 4

Reach: 12532
AVE:R: 5443.33
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Polokwane municipality cuts off non-payers

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THE Department of Health buildings in Limpopo have been plunged into darkness after Polokwane Municipality cut off their lights on Monday.

Others that were cut off include the provincial Department of Public Works, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and bus utility Great North Transport.

Municipal officials backed by the municipal police descended one by one to cut off supply to these departments this week.

According to Polokwane Municipality, 10 departments, including Great North Transport, owe the municipality more than R250 million in service fees combined. Great North Transport, under the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, even owes some employees millions of their pension monies.

Municipal spokesperson Thipa Selala said: "This is part of the debt recovery measure to recover millions that the government departments, entities, businesses and individuals owe the municipality."

However, Department of Health spokesperson Neil Shikwambana said: "The department is worried that the provision of healthcare will be significantly disrupted, unnecessarily, at some of its facilities.

"The department has become aware of a R53m rates and taxes bill for Mankweng Hospital that the municipality has once again wrongly directed to the Department of Health."

He said it was the responsibility of the property owner to pay while the occupying departments took care of utility costs such as water and electricity. The switching off of electricity at hospitals had dire consequences that would be felt by the department and the "innocent, poor and vulnerable".