

**Publication:** Issue - Main

**Title:** End of free ride for hospital?

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## End of free ride for hospital?

**B**ecause of non-payment of their municipal account, Dihlabeng Hospital's electricity will be cut off. Dihlabeng Municipality has started a "load reduction" programme where electricity will be cut off to Dihlabeng Hospital for 6 hours every second day.

It is alleged that Dihlabeng Municipality is owed around R28m for services provided to Dihlabeng Hospital. In an effort to put pressure on the hospital to pay, Dihlabeng will be cutting off electricity to the hospital from 06:00 to 09:00 in the mornings and 17:00 to 20:00 in the evenings.

According to a letter sent to the hospital, this will originally be every second day, but from 2 December the "load reduction" will be implemented daily unless the department makes a payment.

ISSUE asked the Department of Health's spokesperson Mr. Mondli Mvambi if it was true that R28m

was owed on the hospital's municipal account. He was also asked why the account had not been paid, how long it had taken to build up such a large account, and when the account will be paid.

Mr. Mvambi replied and said that the hospital (and its outstanding municipal account) are the responsibility of the Department of Public Works. He said that department was responsible for paying the account and he referred Issue to them for answers.

ISSUE then contacted Mr. Mlungisi Maqubela, spokesperson for the Free State Department of Public Works, and asked him whether this shutdown due to non-payment by his department would have an impact on patients and staff of the hospital. By the print deadline no response had been received.

ISSUE also contacted Mr. Tshepo Maitse, Dihlabeng's Manager Communications, and asked him if

this is part of what Mayor Tseki Tseki promised during his budget speech in April this year, when he promised that Dihlabeng would do "whatever it takes to get what is rightfully ours."

He was also asked why this "load reduction" wasn't implemented years ago, and if this was the start of a bigger campaign to get non-paying departments, businesses and residents to pay their fair share? No response was received by the print deadline.

Dihlabeng Hospital is currently being upgraded, and the upgrades are budgeted to cost R758m.

Non-payment of municipal accounts places Dihlabeng Municipality's service delivery under tremendous financial pressure, and frequently cripples the municipality from being able to maintain infrastructure and fulfil its obligations to residents.

*In photo below: Dihlabeng Hospital as seen from Hospital Hill.*

*In photo right: The entrance of Dihlabeng Hospital.*



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