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Political parties comment on region's grant underspending

Mbuso Kunene

THE DA in the City of uMhlatuze says it will not support the allocation of performance bonuses for senior officials amid underspending of critical budgets to the tune of millions.

This after the city was last week hit by National Treasury for returning R23.5m in conditional grants meant for the Water Services Infrastructure Grant (WSIG), Integrated National Electrification Programme (INEP), and the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).

DA councillor in uMhlatuze,

Christo Botha said they have persistently raised the issue of grant funding, and the affected departments acknowledged they were communicating with the relevant national government departments.

"Nevertheless, they failed to convince Treasury of the reasons for non-compliance, which is a disconcerting development," said Botha.

He added that the deputy city managers and heads of sections will be required to provide explanations to the DA, "as we will be insisting on timelines and conducting regular oversight visits on projects funded by grants".

"Furthermore, if underspending is due to negligence, the DA will not support the allocation of performance bonuses," said Botha.

Electricity

Elaborating on the issues of electricity as the city failed to spend over R1.9m of its INEP funding, Botha said the challenges in eSikhaleni mostly arise from Eskom's requirement that residents pay for replacement transformers due to overloading and illegal connections.

However, the completion of the water packaging plant in eSikhaleni has been delayed for various reasons, mainly the non-performance of the contractor, whose contract was cancelled, according to Botha, and in this regard, the city underspent by a whopping R21.4m.

Water

"The completion of the water pipe replacement project in Alton has been negatively impacted by the retention of grant funding," said Botha.

Commenting on the matter ANC Councillor Phiwe

Mhlongo said this was a cause for concern for all citizens.

"We thought by raising the issue of maladministration, those in power would turn a corner and do what's right, but they seem to be deeper in crippling the municipality. While the issue of water is a national problem, uMhlatuze lacks the requisite know-how on dealing with such problems, and does not even have contingency plans," said Mhlongo.

Meanwhile, DA King Cetshwayo Caucus Leader Sihle Magubane has written to the KCD municipal manager, Philani Sibiya, to account for Treasury's decision to cut R26.5m in grant funding in the district.

Among the budget cut for underspending was R6.5m for WSIG.

Magubane said this critical grant is vital to the completion of important water infrastructure projects that will enable the municipality to provide sustainable and reliable drinking water.

"At the next council meeting, we look forward to hearing from management on this issue and how they plan to mitigate the fallout from the cut funds, as well as for Council to take action where wrongdoing or negligence has been identified.

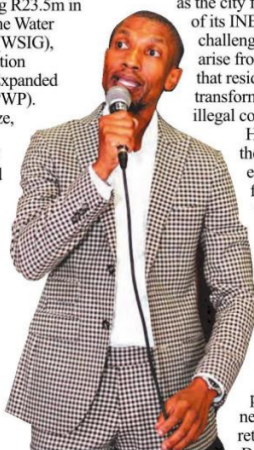
"The reality is King Cetshwayo needs all the money it can get, with many communities faced with persistent water challenges. Every cent counts, and we need accountable leadership that plans and puts the interests of residents first," said Magubane.



Councillor Christo Botha
(City of uMhlatuze, DA)



Councillor Sihle Magubane (DA King
Cetshwayo Caucus Leader)



Councillor Phiwe Mhlongo
(City of uMhlatuze, ANC)