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Who deals with this: Cllr L Kruger

Dear Acting Municipal Manager

Ms N Nqwazi

Re: REQUEST FOR A MORATORIUM ON THE BLOCKING OF INDIGENT ESTATE LATE MUNICIPAL ACCOUNTS

I refer to the aforementioned matter.

It has come to my attention that Budget and Treasury has started to block the electricity accounts of thousands of estate late municipal accounts in bulk. The aforesaid decision comes as a result of some 16 000 estate late accounts being disqualified from the ATTP (Assistance-to-the-Poor) program.

BACKGROUND

When there is an immovable property in a deceased estate, the onus is on the heirs of that estate to ensure that they effect the transfer of that property out of the deceased estate into the names of the heirs. Unfortunately, given the fact that conveyancing costs for an average RDP-house in the metro can be anything upwards from R8000.00 per transfer, most indigent families are unable to afford the conveyancing fees in order to finalize such processes.

The municipality apparently received an audit query regarding the beneficiaries of the ATTP-program. As a result, letters were forwarded to the original addresses of the estate late account holders advising the occupants and/or heirs of the properties in question that they will have to reapply for the free basket of services offered under the ATTP-Program.

STATUS QUO

NMBM has removed 16 000 households from the ATTP-Program in December 2019 which means that these individuals will no longer receive the free basket of services under this programme. As a result, the majority of these accounts are now in the process of being blocked by the metro.

Due to the bulk blocking of these estate late accounts, hundreds of indigent residents are flocking to our customer care services on a daily basis and have been advised to obtain new letters of authority from the Master of the High Court in Port Elizabeth. This is done, because the metro will only start processing applications for ATTP when a Letter of Authority is presented in the name of the occupant.

The aforementioned situation has put the offices of the Master of the High Court under tremendous strain as they are unable to deal with the floodgate of applications for Letters of Authority from these individuals. This has led to a situation where the Master's Office is paralyzed and unable to attend to their ordinary work. In this regard you can make contact with the Master's Office in order to verify the status quo at their offices in Port Elizabeth.

WAY FORWARD

The Democratic Alliance requests that an immediate hold be put on all the affected estate late accounts and that the matter be referred to council for their consideration. Council would ideally then be in a position to consider a more humane approach to resolving this impasse, than blocking some 20% of all indigent households in the municipality at once.

Whilst we have to be responsible in managing the financial affairs of NMBM, it is indefensible that our indigent households should be punished for the failings of metro officials over the last number of years. We have to strike a balance in protecting the interests of the poor, which is part and parcel of the Constitutional mandate of local government, and ensuring effective financial management.

Should you have any queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Cllr Leander Kruger

(Submitted electronically without signature)