



NEWS The Witness 24/10/2007

Application of indigent policy hindered



Buyi Maphumulo

RESearch conducted on the Msunduzi Municipality's Indigent Policy has revealed that the policy is not communicated well to the targeted communities, and of the people who participated only a few of them had heard about the policy.

This was revealed in a presentation by Vicki Nott from the Built Environment Support Group after an assessment was carried out on the policy. The assessment looked into who is indigent, communication of the policy and awareness of the policy by ward councillors.

Any person living in poverty who is eligible for certain municipal poverty relief programmes can be considered indigent under the policy. The assessment report found that effective dissemination of the policy is hindered by the fact that the municipality still does not have ward committees.

Ward committees would be the most effective channel to provide information to communities. Ways in which the policy document has been distributed so far are through *Umpithi* and a once-off edition of *Umpithi* News.

As very few ward councillors have offices

in their wards, they have to use the offices at the city hall which makes access difficult for some people coming from the outskirts of Pietermaritzburg. The policy is on the Msunduzi Municipality website, but it has been found to be difficult to interpret.

Ward councillors feel that not enough households are benefiting from indigent free basic services offered by the municipality. Lack of proper policy co-operation and communication links between policy makers, administration, councillors and the public were cited as barriers to effective implementation of the policy.

Knowledge and understanding of specific aspects of the policy are low among councillors, which makes it difficult for them to inform the communities about its provisions.

The report recommends that there be a reformulation of the qualifying criteria, which should be based on household income as opposed to property values. The current billing would need to be reviewed and officials must implement more stringent debt control measures to reduce bad debt and combat the culture of non-payment.

Adequate accessibility to the services offered by the policy to genuinely poor people falls short and the municipality will have to make radical changes to reach people.

'Not enough households are benefiting'

The Witness 16/10/07

PMB's poor not benefiting from municipal support

NALINI NAIDOO

ANY poor people in the city are not benefiting from the Msunduzi Municipality's indigent policy, according to a study carried out by the Built Environment Support Group (ESG).

The study entitled, "Seen but not heard", and that a major shortcoming was the definition of poverty in the policy, which tended to include a large number of people. The researchers suggest that a more appropriate definition would be one based on household

income rather than on property values.

"This will produce a policy more conducive to the intended target and also ensure that the policy does not become outdated by changing municipal legislation."

The researchers also found that the policy is administered in a complex and "unwieldy" manner, with little co-ordination among all the departments involved. This leaves it open to misinterpretation and failure, said the report.

However, the biggest criticism seemed to be that so few people in the city knew about the policy. The study pointed out that the policy

was written in an inaccessible style that made it difficult to comprehend.

There has also been very little public awareness around it.

The researchers say this means that the genuinely poor members of the public who require a lifeline to basic services are not getting them because they are unaware of the policy and that there is help at hand.

A recommendation made by the study is that one or more dedicated officials within the municipality be made responsible for policy dissemination and consumer education.