

# Dept fails the poor

## DA feels that housing projects in KZN have been neglected by the Department of Human Settlements

**GEORGE MARI**

**E**XCUSES and delays — this sums up the KwaZulu-Natal Human Settlements Department's mid-year budget performance, which also reveals that 43 000 housing units, promised by provincial Premier Zweli Mkhize and MEC Ravi Pillay will not materialise.

The news is a blow for KwaZulu-Natal, with its massive housing backlog and growing number of informal settlements. By its own admission, the department has underspent substantially in a number of key areas, which will impact heavily on various projects, mainly in the eThekweni, Sisonke, Ugu and Umzinyathi municipalities.

The department has also failed to reach its target of rectifying and upgrading 550 pre-1994 housing stock. Not one unit has been worked on due to delays. Expenditure was extremely low at 2,2% and it is unlikely that the funds will be spent by year end. This is unacceptable and it comes despite the introduction of a crack team aimed at keeping expenditure on track. Capacity is another of the department's woes. The current moratorium on the filling of vacant posts, pending the finalisation of an organogram, means that the department still has an acting head of department.

There are several projects in the province which require urgent intervention if they are to be completed timeously.

### **VULINDLELA HOUSING**

This project has run into problems and is behind schedule. Urgent intervention is required to deal with delays in reaching housing targets. According to the department's report, labour-related challenges are hampering progress. This housing project constitutes a significant part of the department's target of 43 000 housing units. The community's queries around the appointment of the implementing agent and the objections lodged by the Democratic Alliance and others with the public protector, Thuli Madonsele, remain unresolved.

### **CORNUBIA — SECOND PHASE, PHASE 1B**

The objection by the lowest bidder for this tender has still not been dealt with, which has delayed the project. It is alleged that the lowest bidder was approximately R30 million lower than the successful bidder. Of concern are the delays with the reconciliation process for the Phase 1A Project, which comprises almost 50% of the department's budget. This has impacted on expenditure and delivery in this instrument. The value of departmental funding is R44,8 million and expenditure is at R43,2 million, while the municipality's reconciliation is R6 million. It is therefore unlikely that the funds for phase two will be spent and will have to be moved. On Phase 1B, departmental fund-

ing is at R209,1 million and expenditure R34,5 million. This phase has been halted due to objection.

### **AUSTERVILLE HOUSING PROJECT**

The DA is concerned about the irregular use of the supply chain-management process here. A docket has been registered with the police related to potential fraud and corruption, and the irregular use of SCM practice to bypass policy. This project was classified as an emergency when it was not, and proper planning could have helped avoid this.

### **SHALLCROSS FLATS UPGRADE**

There has been no progress this year despite this having been made a ministerial project. Further, the allegations of fraud relating to the irregularity in appointment of service providers must be dealt with. The project has now been taken over by KZN's Public Works Department, which is acting as the implementing agent. In March 2011 — just before the local government election — former MEC Maggie Govender vowed that the project would soon begin, yet residents are still waiting.

The province's Community Residential Units (CRU) Programme has also come to a standstill despite millions being spent. Little income has been derived from occupants. We need to know how

long this programme will be on hold, and there is also a desperate need for a new CRU policy framework. There is also a conflict between expenditure and service delivery within the Project Link area, with 68,7% of the housing stock target for the first six months of the year achieved, despite mid-year expenditure being at 38,1%.

The department's slow pace when it comes to transferring ex-state-funded houses has impacted heavily on the poor in KZN, who are forced to pay exorbitant rentals. The delay in receiving title deeds is a further serious concern. The DA has called for the scrapping of rentals where there are undue delays. It is worth noting that in the R293 townships, where transfers are taking place, no rentals have been paid for many years.

These are all serious issues which require swift intervention — something which the department does not seem to realise. If we are to see progress in terms of reducing the backlog in housing in KwaZulu-Natal, we must have a Human Settlements Department that operates efficiently and which does not report delays and make excuses.

**• George Mari is a member of the Human Settlements, Co-operative Governance and Arts and Culture portfolio committees within the KwaZulu-Natal legislature.**