



MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY
DRAFT METER READING POLICY

Approved by Council on:

Resolution Number:

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1. DEFINITIONS

“basic municipal services” – means a municipal service that is necessary to ensure an acceptable and reasonable quality of life and which, if not provided, would endanger public health or safety or the environment;

“debt” – means:

a monetary liability or obligation created by a financing agreement, note, debenture, bond or overdraft, or by the issuance of municipal debt instruments, or

a contingent liability such as that created by guaranteeing a monetary liability or obligation of another;

“electricity meter” – means a device that measures the amount of electric energy consumed by a residence, business or an electrically powered device;

“financial year” – means a year ending 30 June;

“local community”, in relation to a municipality, means that body of persons comprising:

the residents of the municipality;

the ratepayers of the municipality;

any civic organization and non-governmental, private sector or labour organizations or bodies which are involved in local affairs within the municipality, and;

visitors and other people residing outside the municipality who, because of their presence in the municipality, make use of services or facilities provided by the municipality;

and includes, more specifically, the poor and other disadvantaged sections of such body of persons;

“meter reading” - Physical collection of water and electricity readings in selected areas of the municipality, Processing of the meter reading data & provision of information to the Municipality;

“local municipality” – means a category B municipality envisaged in section 155 (1) (b) of the Constitution (a municipality that shares municipal executive and legislative authority in its area with a district municipality within whose area it falls);

“municipal council” or “council” – means the council of a municipality referred to in section 18 of the Municipal Structures Act;

“municipal Finance Management Act” – means the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act No.56 of 2003, and any regulations made under that Act;

“municipal systems act” – means the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act No. 32 Of 2000, any regulations made under that Act;

“municipality”, when referred to as –

a corporate body, means a municipality as described in section 2 of the Municipal Systems Act; or

a geographic area, means a municipal area determined in terms of the Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act No.27 of 1998;

“municipal manager” – means a person appointed in terms of section 54 (a) of the Municipal Systems Act (is the head of administration and also the accounting officer of the municipality);

“municipal service” – means a service that a municipality in terms of its powers and functions provides or may provide to or for the benefit of the local community irrespective of whether:

such a service is provided, or to be provided, by the municipality through an internal mechanism contemplated in section 76 or by engaging an external mechanism contemplated in section 76 of Municipal Systems Act; and fees, charges or tariffs are levied in respect of such a service or not;

these services include refuse removal, water supply, sanitation and electricity services;

“municipal tariff” – means a tariff for services which a municipality may set for the provision of a service to the local community, and includes a surcharge on such tariff;

“property” – means

**immovable property registered in the name of a person, and includes a unit as defined in section 1 of the Sectional Title Act No.95 of 1986;
a right registered against immovable property in the name of a person;**

“ratepayer”, in relation to a municipality, means a person who is liable to the municipality for the payment of –

**rates on property in the municipality;
any other tax, duty or levy imposed by the municipality, or
fees for services provided either by the municipality or in terms of a service delivery agreement;**

“resident”, in relation to a municipality, means a person who is ordinarily resident in the municipality;

“service delivery agreement” – means an agreement between a municipality and an institution or a person mentioned in section 76 (b) of Municipal Systems Act in terms of which a municipal service is provided by that institution or person, either for its own account or on behalf of the municipality;

“water meter” – means a device used to measure the volume of water usage/consumption by a residence, business any metered device;

2. BACKGROUND

Provision of Services

Section 95 (d) of The Local Government Municipal Systems Act No.32 of 2000 states that “In relation to the levying of rates and other taxes by a municipality and the charging of fees for municipal services, a municipality must, within its financial and administrative capacity – where the consumption of services has to be measured, take reasonable steps to ensure that the consumption by individual users of services is measured through accurate and verifiable metering systems”.

3. PURPOSE OF THE POLICY

To ensure that all consumers metered services do pay for the actual consumption. This policy also seeks to ensure that persons liable for payment receive regular and accurate accounts that indicate the basis for calculating the amounts due. The policy will protect service users from inaccurate bills from the municipality.

The other purpose is to ensure that Meter Reading policy forms part of the financial system of the municipality and to ensure that the same procedure is followed for each individual user.

4. RESPONSIBILITY OF THE POLICY

In terms of Section 101 of Local Government: Municipal System Act 32 of 2000, the occupier of premises in a municipality must give an authorized representative of the municipality or of a service provider access at all reasonable hours to the premises in order to read, inspect, install or repair any meter or service connection for reticulation, or to disconnect, stop or restrict the provision of any service.

5. SUPERVISORY AUTHORITY

The Municipality’s Executive Mayor must;

- (a) **Oversee and Monitor:**
 - (i) The implementation and enforcement of the municipality’s Meter Reading policy and any by-law enacted in terms of the Municipal Systems Act;
 - (ii) The performance of the municipal manager in implementing the policy and any by-law;
- (b) When necessary, evaluate or review the policy and any by-law, or the implementation of the policy and any such by-law, in order to improve efficiency of its meter reading mechanisms, processes and procedures;
- (c) At such intervals as may be determined by the council report monthly to a meeting of the council, except when the council itself performs the duties mentioned in paragraphs (a) and (b).

6. Implementing Authority

The municipal manager must according to Section 100 of the Municipal Systems Act:

- (a) Implement and enforce the municipality's Meter Reading policy and by-laws;
- (b) Establish effective administrative mechanisms, processes and procedures to levy all readings taken for payment to the municipality.

7. Contents of the Policy

A Meter Reading process will unfold as follows:

Target Dates - The Municipality will read water and electricity meters in the areas identified once every month. The Municipality will attempt to keep the period between consecutive meter readings as near as possible .

The Municipality will follow a work schedule to ensure that target dates are met. In the case of extremely unfavourable weather conditions or severe public unrest, the Municipality cannot be held responsible for not meeting the target dates.

Re-reading and test readings - Where meter reading would not be obtained during the first round, the Contractor will attempt to obtain these readings in a second round (within same period). The Contractor will leave notices containing its contact information at the premises where meter reading could not be obtained. Owners whose property remains inaccessible for readings to be taken, they must submit the readings either by phone, email or physically submit to the enquiry desk. The municipality will confirm the readings.

Re-reading will also be undertaken where variance reports show discrepancies in the meter reading data. Special readings may be taken on request of either the public or the Municipality on an ad-hoc basis. Alternatively, the public can phone in readings or provide them via e-mail. The Contractor will take and verify these readings. Meter-reading system (e.g. hand-held terminals) will be used.

Meter Reading Software - The Municipality must have a meter reading management software that will be used for the management of staff, record keeping of clients, meters, properties, consumers, meter reading and printing of various reports.

Meter reading software handles both water and electricity meter data. Meter information will be added to the system on a “per meter” basis or bulk import. All information concerning a particular meter will be kept on this system for historical reference purposes (e.g. number, type, size). Each meter is linked to a property, enabling quick reference to the history of a specified property.

Reports on the meter readings, reading dates, meters not read and duplicate meters per area, customer book or reader book may also be requested. Meter information on the system will also be updated by importing data from the Municipality (in fixed length or delimited text file format).

In the case of older meters which measure in gallons, Meter reading software that allows for a factor, which can be set to calculate the actual consumption will be used. A similar conversion is available for electronic meters with CT ratio colls based on a factor.

The focus of the meter reading software is data quality. Information obtained from the Municipality will be evaluated by the system, which then converts it to the appropriate format for the meter readers and evaluates the information again before sending it back to the Municipality for billing purposes.

Data Processing - Using the meter reading software, the Municipality will capture and verify field data. This includes the processing of data collected by municipal meter readers..

The Municipality will handle and provide feedback on telephonic and other public enquiries. The Municipality will examine and report meter tampering (on grounds of data provided by the meter readers).

Estimated or Interims Readings

The financial system has a built-in formula to calculate and bill the approved tariff for water and electricity meters. This estimation is automatically reversed when an accurate reading is obtained. Estimated readings may be used until a meter is replaced.

Where a particular service was not billed due to different reasons, corrections will be affected as from the beginning of the current financial year.

Leakages

If a meter is replaced due to leakages or any other reason, consumption after three months replacement will be considered as correct for a specified period without any corrections. The consumption from the old leaking meter will be reversed for the account to reflect correct billing on averages.

Billing of Faulty Meters

Once a meter is detected to be faulty and reported to the Municipality, the next billing will be done based on the average consumption taking into consideration the winter and summer season (three months each). After the meter has been changed, the actual consumption for the first three months will be compared to the average consumption and corrections will be done accordingly.

Reports - The following written reports will be made available on a monthly basis:

- Defective and damaged meters
Obvious leakages
- New meters spotted by field personnel
Water leakages or electronic faults.

- Monthly reports on public enquiries and/or complaints
- Meter reference number discrepancy and/or meter identifications plate missing.

Data Security - The Municipality 's computer system must be protected by an anti-virus program (e.g. NOD 32) linked to the internet, which continuously monitors for the newest forms of computer viruses and also checks electronic mail. The Municipality's computer system in different locations may be linked to enable direct communication. This enhances the Contractor's ability to handle problems from distant locations.

Archives - All meter reading sheets and variance reports must be made available for audit purposes.

Equipment – The Municipality will provide its own communication facilities, computer equipment and software, thereby retaining ownership of these items.

8. METERING OF MUNICIPAL SERVICES

1. The municipality may introduce various metering equipment and may encourage consumers to convert to a system which is preferred by the Municipal Council when Council considers this to be beneficial to its functioning and operations.

2. Council's metering system to measure water is the conventional metering system for consumers and businesses and for electricity is both prepaid and conventional metering system

3. On conventional metering system, Water and electricity consumption is measured with credit meters.

4. The following applies to the reading of credit meters: -

(a) Credit meters are read at in cycles of approximately 30 days.

(b) If for any reason the credit meters can not be read, the municipality will render an account based on estimated consumption.

(c) The account based on estimated consumption will be adjusted in the subsequent account based on the actual consumption.

(d) The consumer is responsible to ensure access to metering equipment for the purpose of obtaining meter readings for billing purposes.

(e) Consumers can, for reasons of non-accessibility to their properties by meter readers, provide the municipality with monthly meter readings for billing purposes, provided that an audit reading can be obtained by the municipality once every three months and provided that a final reading can be obtained should the consumer vacate the property.

(f) The municipality reserves the right to disconnect services without notice in cases where access to the premises or where the meters are situated is denied to the municipal officials (meter readers or any authorised person).

(g) If any calculation, reading or metering error is discovered in respect of any account rendered to a consumer –

(h) the error shall be corrected in the subsequent account,

(ii) any such correction shall only apply in respect of an account for a period of three years preceding the date on which the error in the account was discovered,

(iii) the correction shall be based on the tariffs applicable during the period, and

(iv) the application of this section shall not prevent a consumer from claiming overpayment for any longer period where the consumer is able to prove the claim in a court of law.

(g) When a consumer vacates a property and a final reading of the meter is not possible, an estimation of the consumption may be made and the final account rendered accordingly. \

(h) The municipality may use estimate of the readings in cases where the municipality is unable to undertake actual readings at a specific point in time.

There should be an exception report run before dummy billing every month.

IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW OF THIS POLICY

This policy shall be implemented once approved by the Municipal Council and may be reviewed annually for amendments if any.
