

POLICY ON PROVISION FOR DOUBTFUL DEBT AND WRITE-OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE DEBT

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POLICY ON PROVISION FOR DOUBTFUL DEBT AND WRITE-OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE DEBT

1. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy the following definitions are applicable:

“Debt” - means an amount owing to the Municipality;

“Debtor” – means a person who owes the Municipality money for rates/services rendered;

“Accounting Officer” – the Municipal Manager appointed;

“Council” – means the council of the Municipality;

“Municipality” – means the Kouga Municipality.

“First time” – means from the 2014 / 2015 financial year and onwards.

2. PURPOSE OF POLICY

2.1. This policy provides guidelines on treatment of the impairment and write-off of debtors.

The policy seeks that household consumers with no or lower income are not denied a reasonable service and that the municipality is not financially burdened with non-payment of services.

2.2. Section 96 of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 32 Of 2000, provides that a municipality must collect all money that is due and payable to it, subject to the provisions of that Act and other applicable legislation. The Council is faced with a significant amount of outstanding debt and the continuous defaulting by certain consumers who can afford to pay for services.

2.3. It is recognized, however, that circumstances may arise which may make the recovery of certain debts impossible, impractical or financially unfeasible, and that such debts may have to be written off.

2.4. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for:

2.4.1. limiting the circumstances contemplated in 2.3;

- 2.4.2. determining, when such circumstances have arisen, whether to write-off any debts; and
- 2.4.3. the procedures for writing off such debts.

2.5. The municipality will maintain audit trails in such an instance and document the reasons for the abandonment of the action or claim in respect of the debt.

2.6. In addition, the policy further stipulated that “Council must appoint a committee in terms of its delegations to review and **recommend to Council to approve all bad debt write off cases.**”

2.7. **The effective management of debtors include, amongst others, the following processes:**

- **Implementation/ maintenance of the appropriate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Systems and Business Processes;**
- **Accurate Billing;**
- **Customer Care and Accounts enquiry management;**
- **Effective and timeous Credit Control;**
- **Impairment of Debtors (Provision for Doubtful Debtors); and**
- **Write-off of uncollectable debtors.**

2.8. The objectives of this policy are:

- 2.8.1. To ensure that the debtors disclosed in the annual financial statements are stated at amounts that are deemed to be collectable; and
- 2.8.2. To ensure that uncollectable debt is written off within guidelines of applicable policies and legislation.

3. IMPAIRMENT OF DEBTORS

Consumer debtors and other debtors are stated at cost less provision for bad debt.

Provision for impairment is made on an individual basis based on expected payment. In accordance with GRAP 104, an objective assessment of financial assets is made at year end to determine possible impairment. Impairment loss/reversal is recognised in the Statement of Financial Performance.

4. RESPONSIBILITY / ACCOUNTABILITY

The Council has the overall responsibility for adopting and approving the Provision for Bad Debts and Writing Off of Irrecoverable Debt.

5. WRITE-OFF OF DOUBTFUL DEBTORS

- 5.1 The following should be the guiding principles in implementing the Policy on Writing Off of Irrecoverable Debt:-
- 5.1.1 The policy is in accordance with the Local Government Municipal Finance Management Act 2003, Local Government Municipal System Act 2000, as amended and other related legislation.
- 5.1.2 Before any debt is written off it must be proven that the debt has become irrecoverable. To ensure that recommendations for write off are consistent and accurate, irrecoverable debt will be defined as:-
- 5.1.2.1 Where the tracing of the debtors is unsuccessful; and
- 5.1.2.2 All reasonable steps, at the discretion of the appointed write off committee, were taken by the officials to recover the debt.
- 5.1.3 Bad debt write offs must be considered in terms of cost benefit; when it becomes too costly to recover and the chances of collecting the debt are slim, a write off should be considered.
- 5.1.4 Time value of money is very important because the older the debt becomes, the more difficult and costly it becomes to collect. It is therefore imperative that a proper system of credit control is implemented and maintained to avoid debt reaching the stage of becoming too expensive to recover.
- 5.1.5 Differentiation must be made between those household consumers who cannot afford to pay for basic services and those who just do not want to pay for these services.
- 5.1.6 Debt can only be written off if the required provision exists in the Municipality's budget and/ or reserves.

6. CATEGORIES OF DEBTORS THAT MAY QUALIFY FOR THE WRITING-OFF OF IRRECOVERABLE DEBT

6.1 Approved Indigent Household Consumers in terms of the Municipality's Indigent Policy

6.1.1 Debt owed to Council by an Indigent Household, when registering for the first time in terms of the official Indigent Policy, shall be written off as a once off concession, subject to a thorough audit investigation and certification to the effect that the household is a bona fide indigent as stipulated in the Indigent Policy.

6.1.2 Debt owed by the deceased estate of the breadwinner of a registered indigent household shall be written off up to the date of the death of the owner.

6.2 Balances too small to recover considering the cost for recovery

6.2.1 Where final accounts have been submitted and paid by the respective consumer and the remaining balance after finalisation of any final readings and other administrative costs results in a balance of one hundred rand (R100) or less, such account must be forwarded once to the consumer for payment.

Should the new owner not qualify to be registered as an Indigent, in terms of the Council's Indigent Policy, the outstanding rates and service charges for the period from the death of the previous owner till the date of the new service application remain payable by the new owner and cannot be written off.

Should the new owner qualify to be registered as an Indigent, in terms of the Council's Indigent Policy, the outstanding rates and service charges for the period from the death of the previous owner till the date of the new service application can be written off in instances where the next of kin/new owner present proof that the property transfer fees has been paid and the service contract is signed in his/her name.

6.3 Insolvency of the Debtor and Insolvent Deceased Estates

6.3.1 Where a debtor becomes insolvent the Municipality must ensure that a creditor's claim is timeously registered. Any amount not being recovered due to insufficient funds or if there is a risk of a contribution being made to an insolvent estate must, after notification, be written off.

6.3.2 In case of death of the debtor, a creditor's claim must be timeously registered against the deceased's estate. Any amount not being recovered due to insufficient funds or if there is a risk of a contribution being made to a deceased estate must, after notification, be written off.

6.4 Untraceable Debtors

6.4.1 Where for any reason the forward address of a debtor becomes untraceable or the debtor becomes untraceable from the current address, such account must be handed over to a collection agent for recovery of the debt. The collection agent will be paid an all-inclusive fee that will be negotiated. The Terms of Reference for such collection agent must include the appointment of a tracing agent to locate the debtor. Should a debtor be untraceable, the collection agent must report to the Municipality on the actions that were taken to attempt to trace the debtor.

6.4.2 Any amount owed by a debtor that has become untraceable must, after notification, be written off or sold to a debt collection agency at a discount.

6.4.3 Debt written off in the above instances will automatically result in the debtor being reported to the credit bureau by the Municipality.

6.5 Special Arrangements in order to obtain a Clearance Certificate

6.5.1 In terms of legislation the Municipality will under normal circumstances not issue a Clearance Certificate on any property unless all outstanding amounts are paid to date, or alternatively payment of the current year and two years preceding the date of application for the certificate have been fully paid, and a guarantee by the attorney handling the property transfer is issued in favour of the Municipality for the balance of the debt.

6.6 Special Incentives introduced by Council for Household Consumers in terms of the Approved Revenue Enhancement Strategy

6.6.1 Notwithstanding the Municipality's Credit Control Policy a debtor may enter into a written agreement with the Municipality to repay any outstanding and due amount to the Municipality under the following conditions:-

6.6.1.1 The outstanding balance, costs and any interest thereon shall be paid in regular and consecutive monthly instalments;

6.6.1.2 The current monthly amount must be paid in full; and

6.6.1.3 The written agreement has to be signed on behalf of the Municipality by a duly authorised officer.

6.6.2 Due to ineffective/ non implementation of credit control measures in the past, the majority of household consumers have accumulated significant arrear amounts and that these consumers are not in a position to pay of these arrear amounts in full together with their current monthly accounts. In order to improve the current payment levels from consumers the Council of Kouga Municipality may resolve to implement special incentives to address the arrear debt.

6.7 Special cases:

The allocation of RDP houses by the Directorate Planning, Development and Tourism has in some instances resulted in debt raised for the property in the name of the person allocated the house, but who never took occupation due to one of the following reasons:

- Occupation taken up by illegal occupants;
- Failure to inform the rightful owner about the allocation; - Alteration of allocation not effected in Council records;

In the above-mentioned cases there will never be a need to implement the Credit Control and Debt Collection Policy; therefore write-off should take place immediately when the Directorate involved in the allocation of property issues a memorandum that confirms the above. Furthermore the write-off should be affected and later reported to Council for ratification purposes.

7. ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMITTEE TO MONITOR ANY DEBT TO BE WRITTEN OFF

7.1 Council will establish and appoint a Committee to monitor the implementation of this Policy.

7.2 The Committee will consist of the following members:-

7.2.1. The Municipal Manager (Chairperson) or delegated authority.

7.2.2. Chief Financial Officer (Alternative Chairperson).

7.2.3. Chairperson of the Finance Committee.

7.2.4. A member of each Political Party.

7.2.5. One member of the Finance Committee to be nominated by the Finance Committee.

7.3. The above Committee will meet at least quarterly to receive and review a report from the Chief Financial Officer containing full details of any actions taken by officials with respect to this Policy, and to consider any circumstances not covered by this Policy.

7.4. The quorum for the Committee shall be 50% of the members plus one.

7.5. Formal minutes of Committee meetings must be prepared and submitted to Council.

7.6. The Chief Financial Officer will, after thorough review of any applications in terms of this Policy, be delegated to write off any amounts to the maximum of;

7.6.1. in the case of a household consumer an amount of R15,000 (excluding interest and penalties) per submission;

7.6.2. in the case of a business consumer an amount of R20,000 (excluding interest and penalties) per submission; and

7.6.3. any amount in excess of the delegation provided for in paragraph 7.6.1 and 7.6.2 above must be submitted together with a recommendation to the Municipal Manager for consideration. The Municipal Manager or delegated authority will, after thorough review of any recommendation by the Chief Financial Officer and in terms of this Policy, be delegated to write off any amounts to the maximum of:-

7.6.4. in the case of a household consumer an amount of R25,000 (excluding interest and penalties) per submission; and

7.6.5 in the case of a business consumer an amount of R50,000 (excluding interest and penalties) per submission.

7.7. Any amount in excess of the delegation provided for in paragraph 7.6.4 and 7.6.5 above may only be reviewed by the Committee to Monitor Debt to be written off and must be submitted together with a recommendation to Council for consideration.

7.8. All write-offs as per 7.6 is to be reported to the Committee to Monitor Debt to be written off.

8. DELEGATED POWERS ON WRITING-OFF INTEREST AND PENALTIES ON RECOVERABLE DEBTS

8.1 The Chief Financial Officer will, after thorough review of any applications in terms of this Policy, be delegated to write off interest and penalties, **subject to full settlement account**, to the maximum of;

8.1.1 in the case of a household consumer an amount of R10 000 per submission;

8.1.2 in the case of a business consumer an amount of R20 000 per submission; and

8.1.3 any amount in excess of the delegation provided for in paragraph 8.1.1 and 8.1.2 above must be submitted together with a recommendation to the Municipal Manager for consideration. The Municipal Manager will, after thorough review of any recommendation by the Chief Financial Officer and in terms of this Policy, be delegated to write off interest and penalties, **subject to full settlement of the account**, to the maximum of:

8.1.4 in the case of a household consumer an amount of R20,000 per submission; and

8.1.5 in the case of a business consumer an amount of R50,000 per submission.

8.2 Any amount in excess of the delegation provided for in paragraph 8.1.1 to 8.1.5 above may only be reviewed by the Committee to Monitor Debt to be written off and must be submitted together with a recommendation to Council for consideration.

8.3 All write-offs as per 8.1.1 is to be reported to the Committee to Monitor Debt to be written off.

9. PREVENTION OF PRESCRIPTION OF DEBT

9.1 Prevention:

Proceedings out of the appropriate court for the recovery of a debt must be commenced as soon as it is appropriate in order to prevent prescription of the debt. A summons process for payment of the debt must be successfully concluded to prevent prescription of the debt in terms of the Prescription Act.

9.2 Prescription Act, 1969 (Act No. 68 of 1969):

Section 10 (1) of the Prescription Act provides that a debt shall be extinguished by prescription after the lapse of the period which in terms of the relevant law applies in respect of the prescription of such debt. The Municipality cannot legally enforce payment of a debt once the debt has prescribed, but the period of prescription is interrupted:-

- (i) By the service on the debtor of any process whereby the creditor claims payment of the debt (Section 15). "Process" means a Summons or Notice of Motion, which must actually be served on the debtor and not simply issued by the court, and does NOT include a registered letter of demand.
- (ii) the debtor acknowledges liability, whether expressly or tacitly (Section 14); payment of a portion of the debt can constitute a tacit acknowledgement of liability.

The completion of prescription may also be delayed in certain circumstances (Section 13).

9.3 In terms of Section 11 of the Prescription Act, 1969 (Act 68 of 1969), the periods of prescription of debts are as follows:

- (i) **Thirty years** in respect of - any debt secured by a mortgage bond;
any judgment debt;
any debt in respect of any taxation imposed or levied by or under any law and
any debt owed to the State in respect of any share of the profits, royalties or any similar consideration payable in respect of the right to mine minerals or other substances.
- (ii) **Fifteen years** in respect of any debt owed to the State and arising out of an advance or loan of money or a sale or lease of land by the State to the debtor, unless a longer period applies in respect of the debt in question in terms of paragraph (i) above.
- (iii) **Six years** in respect of a debt arising from a bill of exchange or other negotiable **instrument** or from a notaries contract, unless a longer period applies in respect of the debt in question in terms of paragraph (i) or (ii) above.
- (iv) **Three years** in respect of all other debts, save where an Act of Parliament provides otherwise.

10. BAD DEBTS RECOVERED

The approval of Council for the write-off of any debt does not mean that actions to recover the money will be terminated, however, further actions will be instituted depending on the costs involved and if debt is recovered it will be recorded in the financial records of Council as recovered.

11. IMPLEMENTATION

This policy will be effective on the date of adoption by Council.

All future submissions for the writing off of debt must be considered in accordance with this policy.

APPROVED ON: 29 July 2022

COUNCIL RESOLUTION NUMBER: 22/07/F2

C DU PLESSIS
MUNICIPAL MANAGER

DATE