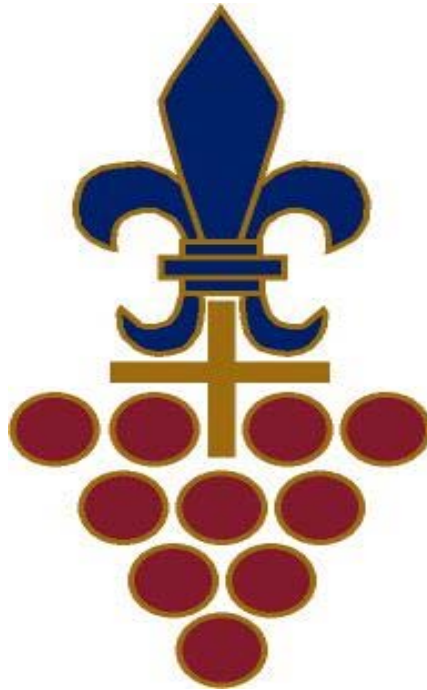


STELLENBOSCH MUNICIPALITY



MFMA CIRCULAR NO.128

**MUNICIPAL BUDGET CIRCULAR
FOR THE 2024/2025 MTREF**



Municipal Budget Circular for the 2024/25 MTREF

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Introduction

This budget circular is a follow-up to MFMA Circular No. 126 that was issued on 07 December 2023. It aims to provide further guidance to municipalities with the preparation of their 2024/25 Medium Term Revenue and Expenditure Framework (MTREF) budgets and should be read together with the budget circulars that have been issued previously.

The grant allocations as per the 2024 Budget Review and the 2024 Division of Revenue Bill are also key focus areas in this circular. Municipalities are reminded to refer to the annual budget circulars of the previous years for guidance in areas of the budget preparation that are not covered in this circular.

1. The South African economy and inflation targets

Over the next three years, South Africa's economy is forecast to grow at an average of 1.6 per cent, a moderate improvement on the 1.4 per cent average expected at the time of the 2023 MTBPS. The outlook is supported by an expected recovery in household spending as inflation declines, and an increase in energy-related fixed investments.

Power cuts and operational problems in freight rail and ports continue to disrupt economic activity and limit the country's export potential. Comprehensive reforms are underway in these sectors, although it will take time to see recovery in growth. Household consumption is under pressure from high living costs, and investment remains low due to weak confidence and challenging business conditions linked to structural constraints.

South Africa has experienced over a decade of weak economic growth, GDP has averaged only 0.8 per cent annually since 2012, entrenching high levels of unemployment and poverty. To turn the tide and raise economic growth sustainably, government is prioritising energy and logistics reforms, along with measures to arrest the decline in state capacity. Successful efforts to improve the fiscal position, complete structural reforms and bolster the capacity of the state will, in combination, reduce borrowing costs, raise confidence, increase investment and employment, and accelerate economic growth.

The National Treasury estimates real economic growth of 0.6 per cent in 2023. This is a decrease from growth of 0.8 per cent projected in the 2023 MTBPS due to weaker than expected outcomes in the third quarter of 2023, resulting in downward revisions to household spending growth and spending on gross fixed investment. GDP growth is projected to average 1.6 per cent from 2024 to 2026 as the frequency of power cuts declines, lower inflation supports household consumption, and employment and credit extensions recover gradually. New energy projects will improve fixed investments and business sentiment.

To accelerate GDP growth after an extended period of weak economic performance, South Africa needs large-scale private investment. Government is working to improve the fiscal position, complete structural reforms and bolster the capacity of the state to reduce borrowing costs, raise confidence, increase investment, and put the economy on a higher job creating growth path.

The following macro-economic forecasts must be considered when preparing the 2024/25 MTREF municipal budgets.

Table 1: Macroeconomic performance and projections, 2022 – 2027

Fiscal year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
	Actual	Estimate	Forecast		
CPI Inflation	6.9%	6.0%	4.9%	4.6%	4.6%

Source: 2024 budget review.

Note: the fiscal year referred to is the national fiscal year (April to March) which is more closely aligned to the municipal fiscal year (July to June) than the calendar year inflation.

Headline inflation is projected to moderate from 6 per cent in 2023 to 4.9 per cent in 2024 and 4.6 per cent in 2025 and 2026 as food and fuel inflation continue to decline. In 2023 food inflation slowed less than expected due to power cuts and rand depreciation, keeping imported food costs high. An avian influenza outbreak also increased the costs for poultry and eggs. These factors are expected to dissipate over the medium term.

The current economic challenges in the country place pressure on households' ability to pay municipal accounts, therefore municipal own revenue generation gets affected.

It is noted that variations in regional specifics are possible, however, any variation of assumptions must be explicitly set out and well explained in the budget narratives, in the absence of which the Treasuries will refer the budget back to council for alignment to the macroeconomic performance projections.

Fiscal strategy to contain debt (fiscal consolidation) through reduction of budgets and reprioritisation

The 2024 budget balances development and sustainable public finances. In the context of persistent low economic growth, government will protect critical services, support economic growth through reforms and public investment and stabilise public debt. Although South Africa continues to confront difficult economic conditions, a moderate recovery is forecast in the economic outlook. Broad reforms are underway in energy, freight, water and telecommunications. Yet it will take time to reverse the consequences of operational, maintenance and government failures at state owned companies responsible for electricity, rail and ports. Rapid growth in debt- service costs choke the economy and the public finances. Government is staying the course to narrow the budget deficit and stabilise debt. This year, for the first time since 2008/09, government will achieve a primary budget surplus. Debt will stabilise in 2025/26.

The balances approach to fiscal consolidation includes expenditure restraint and moderate revenue increases, while continuing to support the social wage and ensuring additional funding for critical services. Government will after extensive consultation propose a binding fiscal anchor for future sustainability. In the interim, the debt stabilisation primary surplus will anchor fiscal policy.

The consolidate budget includes the main budget framework and spending by provinces, social security funds, public entities including municipalities finances from their own revenue sources. Government remains committed to fiscal consolidation that balances the needs of the most vulnerable in society and protects the public finances for future generations.

2. Key focus areas for the 2024/25 budget process

2.1. Local government conditional grants and unconditional grants allocations

Net reductions of R80.6 billion to main budget non-interest expenditure are identified across the three spheres of government over the MTEF in comparison to the 2023 budget estimates. Among these 2024 MTEF fiscal consolidation reductions, local government has the smallest contribution. Over the 2024 MTEF, the local government equitable share and direct conditional grants will be reduced by a total of R15.5 billion, made up of R9.6 billion in the local government equitable share and R5.9 billion in direct conditional grants. Despite reduction, local government equitable share growth remains high with transfers to local government significantly increasing by 5.2 per cent annually, driven mainly by the strong growth of local government equitable share by 6.1 per cent. National revenue share increases by 2.6 per cent annually, while transfers to provinces grow by 3.8 per cent annually, with the equitable share growing faster than conditional grants. There were no proposed reductions on the sharing of the general fuel levy to the metropolitan municipalities.

Notable changes to the conditional grants system

Given the ongoing review of the conditional grants system, very minimal changes were proposed to local government conditional grants. The proposed changes indicate a continued focus on enabling municipalities to improve service delivery to communities.

New conditional grant for smart prepaid meters

A new indirect grant, which will be managed by the National Treasury will be introduced in 2024/25. This grant will present an important opportunity for municipalities in the debt relief programme. While debt relief is a critical component of supporting struggling municipalities, it is important to also provide the municipalities with the tools and the necessary funding to improve their operations and long-term sustainability.

This new indirect conditional grant for smart prepaid meters is a meaningful step towards providing municipalities with the financial support they need to better manage their utilities, by ensuring timely and accurate billing; reducing losses; and enhancing operational sustainability. Municipalities will be able to manage their utility services and provide to water and electricity services effectively and efficiently. The grant will initially focus on providing debt relief for Eskom and will be implemented targeting specific municipalities in its initial years.

Improving regulatory levers and reforms

By enhancing the usage of regulatory frameworks in the conditional grants system, the government is taking steps to ensure that municipalities prioritise critical projects and utilise resources effectively. The use of results from the Department of Water and Sanitation's Watch Reports in the prioritisation of water and sanitation projects funded from general-purpose grants such as the integrated urban development grant (IUDG), and municipal infrastructure grant (MIG), will improve the quality and impact of these projects. Further, requiring municipalities to use the results of green drop, blue drop and no drop assessments in planning and prioritising projects will drive greater accountability and transparency in the use of grant funds, promoting sustainable and effective service delivery.

2.2. Post 2023 MTBPS changes

A number of reductions that were proposed in the 2023 MTBPS have been reversed but revised downwards, and several further cuts and other reprioritisations effected to make funds available for other government priorities. These include:

Reductions reversed: Previous reductions proposed on the sharing of the general fuel levy to the metropolitan municipalities, the rural roads asset management systems and the water services infrastructure grants have been reversed.

Reductions revised downwards: The previous reduction of R218 million to the integrated national electrification programme municipal grant is revised to R204 million; the previous reduction of R49 million to the municipal disaster response grant is revised to R35 million; and the previous reduction of R48 million to the municipal systems improvement grant is revised to R27 million.

Further reductions: To make funds available for other government priorities, reductions have been made to some municipal conditional grants over the 2024 MTEF period. These include an additional reduction of R3.5 billion to the integrated national electrification programme Eskom grant; an additional reduction of R73 million to the integrated urban development grant; an additional reduction of R14 million to the energy efficiency and demand-side management grant; an additional reduction of R4 million to the public transport network grant; an additional reduction of R127 million to the direct component of the regional bulk infrastructure grant; and an additional reduction of R852 million to the indirect component of the regional bulk infrastructure grant.

Reprioritisations: Reprioritisations over the MTEF period include the following: R58.3 million from the direct component of the municipal infrastructure grant is converted to the indirect component of the grant; R587 million from the direct component of the regional bulk infrastructure grant is converted to the indirect component; R91 million from the integrated urban development grant and R1.4 billion from the municipal infrastructure grant are shifted to the municipal disaster recovery grant to fund the repair and reconstruction of municipal infrastructure damaged by the floods that occurred between February and March 2023; R400 million from the first two years of the MTEF period are shifted to the outer year in the public transport network grant; R2 billion is reprioritised from the integrated national electrification programme municipal grant to fund the baseline for the new smart meters grant; and R432 million is reprioritised from the integrated national electrification programme Eskom grant to fund other priorities in the energy sector.

2.3. Review of the local government fiscal framework

Government's five-year programme of action to improve local governance, as endorsed by the Budget Forum, includes efforts to improve the funding model for local government. The National Treasury is reviewing a draft report for regulating municipal surcharges on electricity and identifying alternative sources of revenue to replace these. The next step will be consultation with external stakeholders.

The local government equitable share formula is being updated in various ways, including improving its responsiveness to the different functions assigned to district and local municipalities. In addition, the formula will be refined with reforms such as exploring the feasibility of introducing a cost differential model, community services components for health services and firefighting functions, objective criteria for benchmarking municipalities in relation to their administrative functions. The Department of Cooperative Governance, the National Treasury, the South African Local Government Association, the Financial and Fiscal Commission and statistics South Africa are identifying areas for refinement over the 2024 MTEF period.

2.4. Update on the review of the conditional grants

The South African government initiated a review of the existing grant system amid concerns of its effectiveness, including underspending on infrastructure grants and fragmentation in

the provincial and municipal grant systems. The review involved stakeholder consultations and literature reviews of conditional grant programmes to gain insights and make evidence-based recommendations for reform.

In April and May 2024, multiple consultation platforms will be set up to share the preliminary findings with the multi-stakeholder team. While some changes resulting from the review were reflected in the 2024 Budget, further proposed reforms are likely to be considered in the 2025 budget process and implemented gradually in a phased manner.

2.5. Funding for Local Economic Development (LED) Programmes

National Treasury is mindful of the essential role played by municipalities in driving economic development and job creation to mitigate inequality and attract private investment. In addition to the infrastructure grants, municipalities also receive about 66 per cent of their allocations in unconditional grants, which can be utilised to fund operational parts of the LED initiatives. However, it is important to note that economic development does not rely solely on a single funding pot, but on various forms of government programmes and grants. This includes support and initiatives from the Department of Trade, Industry and competition funded by provinces through their equitable share.

Whilst there is a call for creation of conditional grant, it is worth noting that the creation of a dedicated grant for LED initiatives comes with its challenges. In the past, when such grants were introduced, government institutions reprioritised funds that were initially funding the LED programmes, leading to over-reliance on conditional grants. This dependence undermines the purpose and sustainability of these programmes, as their funding is primarily dependent on the availability of funds from the fiscus and the performance of the economy. Therefore, there is a need to align conditional grants with economic development areas while also ensuring their integration with other government spheres to support the developmental mandate effectively.

In addition, it is also crucial for municipalities to provide essential services such as electricity, water, and sanitation efficiently. The efficient provision of these services is crucial for attracting private investment, fostering economic growth, and promoting a conducive environment for businesses to thrive. Therefore, National Treasury urges municipalities to prioritise the provision of these services to enhance economic development and improve the quality of life for their residents.

2.6. Reforms to improve the efficiency and financial sustainability of metro's trading services

Due to years of neglect and inadequate infrastructure maintenance, South Africa's municipalities face severe utility services issues, including in water, wastewater, and electricity. A loss of essential management and technical skills has also contributed to the decline in service quality and reliability. Metro water services alone suffer from an investment gap of R9 billion per year. These inefficiencies threaten economic growth and job creation and increases poverty. Government transferred substantial monetary allocations to local government in the successive Budgets to support water services, but the outcome and value for money of these transfers is low. To address this, an incentive grant system is being explored for 2025/26 to increase investments, change management and governance structures, promote professional management, and ensure transparency, starting with metros.

These reforms are commencing in the 2024/25 municipal financial year with the conditions being introduced in the Urban Settlement Development Grant (USDG). Thereafter, the reform will be extended to other revenue-generating trading services.

2024/25 USDG Financing Component for Trading Services

Municipalities must submit the following to the transferring officer and the National Treasury to qualify for making an application for the financing component:

- A council approved turnaround strategy to the Department of Human Settlement (DHS) and the National Treasury by 31 July 2024;
- A roadmap on the institutional reforms for improved management and governance to be submitted to DHS and National Treasury by 30 September 2024; and
- A business and investment plan that is consistent with the services development plan by 30 September 2024.

In support of these conditions, National Treasury will issue a guidance note by 1 April 2024, on requirements for turnaround strategies, institutional reforms and business plans for the financing component on trading services.

2025/26 onwards Improving the efficiency of urban utility services

Beyond 2024/25, the intention is to extend the reform agenda beyond water services to other revenue-generating trading services, including electricity and solid waste management. The Explanatory Memorandum, **Annexure W1**, to the 2024 Division of Revenue Bill provides the following direction on future work on municipal fiscal frameworks linked to trading/ utility services.

The grant reforms will aim to:

- Increase the level of investments in utility services (water, wastewater, electricity and solid waste) by leveraging grant finance with loan finance, linked to improved operational and financial performance of services providers;
- Catalyse changes in the structure, management, and governance of utility services businesses to support improvements in operational, technical and financial performance;
- Promote professional management with a single point of management accountability for utility services in cities, suitable managerial autonomy and the technical skills necessary to manage an effective service; and
- Promote and ensure full financial transparency, including by making the financial relationship between municipalities and the utility services explicit.

2.7. Criteria for the release of the Equitable Share:

- The criteria for the release of the equitable share were covered in Circulars No. 122 remains relevant and are still applicable for the release of equitable share instalments in the 2024/25 financial year.
- Failure to comply with the criteria will result in National Treasury invoking Section 38 of the MFMA which empowers National Treasury to withhold a municipality's equitable share if the municipality commits a serious or persistent breach of the measures established in terms of Section 216(2) of the Constitution which includes reporting obligations set out in the MFMA and National Treasury requests for information in terms of Section 74 of the MFMA.

3. Revenue Management

3.1. Update on Municipal Debt Relief (MFMA Circular No. 124)

Accounting Guidance

Municipalities whose Municipal Debt Relief applications were approved must fully account for and correctly report on the write-off of their Eskom arrear debt and related benefits. Municipalities should note the guidance in this regard provided in *MFMA Circular No. 124: Supplementary Guide on the accounting- and mSCOA reporting requirements* that can be accessed on the MFMA website at the following link: <http://mfma.treasury.gov.za/Circulars/Pages/default.aspx>.

It is recommended that all municipalities familiarise themselves with the guidance as far as it relates to correctly budgeting- and accounting for free basic services as well as raising and paying their bulk accounts.

Debt relief reporting requirements

Municipalities approved for debt Relief (in terms of their National Treasury approvals), must ensure that their MFMA s.71 statements, over-and-above the normal MFMA s.71 requirements, include the following as a minimum:

- The municipality's self-assessment in the format of the compliance certificate issued in MFMA Circular No. 124: Annexure A2 (signed by the Municipal Manager) – municipalities should use the latest format of the compliance certificate issued during February 2024 available under MFMA Circular No. 124 and included as **Annexure B** to this circular;
- The municipality's progress towards restricting free basic services to the national policy limits (condition 6.6) and in the format included as **Annexure C** to this circular;
- The municipality's progress towards achieving a minimum average quarterly collection of 80 per cent (condition 6.7) and in the format included as **Annexure D** to this circular;
- If the municipality's 2023/24 and/ or 2024/25 MTREF is not funded, the MFMA Section 71 statement must monthly include the municipality's progress against its approved Budget Funding Plan – if the municipality has an approved the Financial Recovery Plan (FRP), the monthly FRP progress report must include the municipality's progress against the components of the FRP aimed to achieve a funded budget and revenue enhancement initiatives;
- The high-level summary of its monthly property rates reconciliation (in the National Treasury template format already shared with the municipality during the application process); and
- The municipality's progress in addressing any variances evident from its monthly property rates reconciliation; etc.

3.2. Smart Meter Grant

With regard to the smart meter grant referred under 2.1 above, the National Treasury has targeted MFMA Circular No. 124 debt relief applicants for the initial implementation of this grant.

The potential beneficiaries of the smart meter grant will be invited by National Treasury and a compulsory template will be circulated for completion by municipalities. This invitation will be sent out before 15 March 2024. Furthermore, the grant conditions require a council resolution endorsing the application.

A completed template with supporting documentation and council resolution must be submitted to revenuemanagement@treasury.gov.za and sadesh.ramjathan@treasury.gov.za before 30 April 2024.

The applications will be evaluated before 31 May 2024 and allocations will be completed determined the commencement of the municipal budget year.

3.3. Transversal tender RT-29

The National Treasury is finalising the RT-29 transversal tender for a smart metering solution, and the appointed panel is available to all municipalities from March 2024. The transversal tender is targeting smart meter solutions for the water and electricity functions, STS meters compliance and load reduction systems. It will also enable municipalities to implement bi-directional smart metering systems. Municipalities are once again cautioned not to contract any smart metering systems or solutions without considering the RT-29 transversal tender which provides a competitive pricing comparison and cost saving on procurement. Municipalities wishing to participate in the RT-29 transversal must make their interest known to the Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (OCPO) on the email TCcontract1@treasury.gov.za. These municipalities must show evidence of a budget allocation in the current budget as well as future budgets for participation.

4. Conditional Grant Transfers to Municipalities

4.1. Criteria for the rollover of conditional grant funds

In terms of Section 21 of the Division of Revenue Act, 2023 (Act No.5 of 2023) (DoRA) in conjunction with the Division of Revenue Amendment Act, 2023 (Act No. 24 of 2023), the Act requires that any conditional allocation or a portion thereof that is not spent at the end of the 2023/24 financial year reverts to the National Revenue Fund (NRF), unless the rollover of the allocation is approved in terms of subsection (2). Furthermore, the receiving officer, provincial treasury and national transferring officer is required to prove to National Treasury that the unspent allocation is committed to identifiable projects, in which case the funds may be rolled over.

When requesting a rollover in terms of Section 21(2) of the 2023 DoRA, municipalities must include the following information with their submission to National Treasury:

1. A formal letter, signed by the accounting officer addressed to the National Treasury requesting the rollover of unspent conditional grants in terms of Section 21(2) of the 2023 DoRA;
2. A list of all the projects that are linked to the unspent conditional grants and a breakdown of how much was allocated, spent and the balance per project;
3. The following evidence indicating that work on each of the projects has commenced, as applicable to the specific rollover(s):
 - a) Proof that the service provider was appointed for delivery of the project before 29 March 2024; or
 - b) Proof of project tender and tender submissions published and closed before 31 March 2024 or with the appointment of contractor or service provider for delivery of service before 30 June 2024 in cases where additional funding was allocated during the course of the financial year of the project;
 - c) Incorporation of the Appropriation Statement; and
 - d) Evidence that all projects linked to an allocation will be fully utilised by 30 June 2024 (attach cash flow projection for the applicable grant).

4. A progress report (also reflecting percentages) on the status of each project's implementation that includes an attached legible implementation plan);
5. The value of the committed project funding and the conditional allocation from the funding source;
6. Reasons why the grants were not fully spent during the year on the original allocation per the DoRA;
7. Rollover of rollovers will not be considered. Municipalities must therefore not include previous year's unspent conditional grants as rollover request;
8. An indication of the time period within which the funds are to be spent if the rollover is approved; and
9. Proof that the Municipal Manager and Chief Financial Officer are permanently appointed.

No rollover requests will be considered for municipalities with vacant or acting Chief Financial Officers and Municipal Managers for a period exceeding 6 months from the date of vacancy; this also includes acting appointments because of suspensions of either MM or CFO that are more than 12 months.

If any of the above information is not provided or the application is received by National Treasury (Intergovernmental Relations Division) after 31 August 2024, the application will be declined.

In addition, National Treasury will also consider the following information when assessing rollover applications; and reserves the right to decline an application should there be non-performance by the municipality in any of these areas:

1. Compliance with the in-year reporting requirements in terms of Sections 71 and 72 of the MFMA and Section 12 of the 2023 DoRA, **including the Municipal Manager and Chief Financial Officer signing-off on the information** sent to National Treasury;
2. Submission of the pre-audited Annual Financial Statements to National Treasury by 31 August 2024;
3. Accurate disclosure of grant performance in the 2023/24 pre-audited Annual Financial Statements, (i.e. correct disclosure of grant receipts and spending in the notes to the AFS);
4. Despite the fact that local government is required to comply with different norms and standards prescribed by different legislations, municipalities are expected to fully comply with the provisions of DoRA that relate to rollover processes and disclose conditional grant performance in the 2023/24 pre-audited Annual Financial Statements (i.e. Cash coverage and unspent conditional grants in the Statement of Financial Position) in order to verify grant expenditure; and
5. Cash available reflected in the Statement of Financial Position and Cash Flow Statements and the bank (net position including short term investments) as at 30 June 2024 is equivalent to the unspent amount at the end of the financial year. If the amount that is requested for rollover is not entirely cash-backed, such a rollover will not be approved. National Treasury will also not approve portions of rollover requests.

It should be noted that under no circumstances will the National Treasury consider requests to rollover:

1. The entire 2023/24 allocation to the municipality. In cases where the rollover request is more than 50 per cent of the total allocation, National Treasury will approve the rollover amount up to 50 per cent of the 2023/24 allocation;

2. Rollover request of the same grant for the third consecutive time. In a case where a municipality is applying for rollover as a result of additional funding, the application will be carefully considered;
3. Funding for projects procured through Regulation 32 and 37 of the Municipal Supply Chain Management Regulations (Gazette No.27636) – Projects linked to additional funding and disasters are exempted; and
4. A portion of an allocation where the proof of commitment for the rollover application is linked to invoices that were issued before or on 31 March 2024. All invoices issued to the municipality before 31 March 2024 should be paid within the same year against the allocated conditional grants. i.e invoices must be paid within 30 days.

4.2. Unspent conditional grant funds for 2023/24

The process to ensure the return of unspent conditional grants for the 2023/24 financial year will be managed in accordance with Section 21 of the DoRA. In addition to the previous MFMA Circulars, the following practical arrangements will apply:

- Step 1: Municipalities must submit their June 2024 conditional grant expenditure reports according to Section 71 of the MFMA reflecting all accrued expenditure on conditional grants and further ensure that expenditure reported to both National Treasury and national transferring officers reconciles;
- Step 2: When preparing the Annual Financial Statements, a municipality must determine the portion of each national conditional grant allocation that remained unspent as at 30 June 2024. The unspent grant values must be determined based on the guidance that was provided in mSCOA Circular No. 13 in as far as VAT, retention and interest is concerned; and
- Step 3: If the receiving officer wants to motivate in terms of Section 21(2) of the 2023 DoRA that the unspent funds are committed to identifiable projects, the rollover application pack must be submitted to National Treasury by no later than 31 August 2024.

National Treasury will not consider any rollover requests that are incomplete or received after this deadline.

- Step 4: National Treasury will confirm in writing whether or not the municipality may retain any of the unspent funds as a rollover based on criteria outlined above by 22 October 2024;
- Step 5: National Treasury will communicate the unspent conditional grants amount by 12 November 2024. A municipality must return the remaining unspent conditional grant funds that are not subject to a specific repayment arrangement to the National Revenue Fund by 18 November 2024; and
- Step 6: Any unspent conditional grant funds that should have but has not been repaid to the National Revenue Fund by 18 November 2024, and for which a municipality has not requested a repayment arrangement, will be offset against the municipality's 04 December 2024 equitable share allocation.

All other issues pertaining to Appropriation Statement and reporting on approved rollovers are addressed in the Annexure to MFMA Circular No. 86.

5. Funding choices and management issues

Given the current economic crisis the country faces, Municipalities are under pressure to generate revenue. The ability of customers to pay for services is declining and this means that less revenue will be collected. Municipalities are advised to consider all the advice

provided in MFMA Circular No 126, 123 and other previous circulars under this topic to ensure the adoption of surplus and funded budgets.

5.1. Employee related costs

The *Salary and Wage Collective Agreement* for the period 01 July 2021 to 30 June 2024 has come to an end and a new agreement is under consultation, which is anticipated to consider the current fiscal constraints faced by government. Therefore, in the absence of any information in this regard from the South African Local Government Bargaining Council (SALGBC), municipalities are advised to consider their financial sustainability when considering salary increases. It has been observed over the previous years that salary increases were above inflation and this has posed challenges to most municipalities' sustainability. In addition, municipalities that could not afford such increases did not apply for exemption as provided by SALGBC.

Therefore, municipalities are urged to consider projecting salary and wage increases that would reflect their affordability given the current economic challenges. The 2022 State of Local Government Finance Report revealed that 157 municipalities are in financial distress. These municipalities need to ensure that they seek an early exemption from this dispensation of this salary agreement. Municipalities should also avoid paying out leave in cash while having major financial challenges.

5.2. Remuneration of Councillors

Municipalities are advised to budget for the actual costs approved in accordance with the Government Gazette on the Remuneration of Public Office Bearers Act: Determination of Upper Limits of Salaries, Allowances and Benefits of different members of municipal councils published annually between December and January by the Department of Cooperative Governance. It is anticipated that this salary determination will also consider the fiscal constraints. Municipalities should also consider guidance provided above on salary increases for municipal officials during this process. Any overpayment to councilors contrary to the upper limits as published by the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs will be irregular expenditure in terms of Section 167 of the MFMA and must be recovered from the councilor(s) concerned.

5.3 Governance, performance, and investment matters

South Africa has reached a stage where all of government including municipalities need to play a pivotal role in igniting the economy of the country. There is a need for a concerted effort to put initiatives that will attract the investments which will stimulate the economy. The investments take place in the local government and municipalities in particular as the custodian of the spatial planning and enabling infrastructure.

Critical infrastructure such as water, sanitation and electricity to stimulate the economy is owned, maintained and developed by the municipalities. In the last 30 years, there has been investment in ensuring that access to basic services – water, electricity and refuse - is improved markedly.

However, there has been little to no investment on bulk infrastructure such as water treatment works, wastewater treatment works and electrical substations which are the backdrop for enabling investment in municipalities.

Of concern is that budget for operation and maintenance have been negligible. If the trends continue without arresting the decline, the municipalities will in all likelihood not experience

growth. This will reduce the prospect for economic growth leading to high unemployment and less economic activities in general.

As such, the municipalities need to take the responsibility to create initiatives which will attract more investment. Key initiatives to improve this are investing in bulk and connector infrastructure as well as strengthening good governance.

The budget allocation to address infrastructure requirements are not sufficient. As such, the municipalities should improve governance and the overall financial health which will allow for the financier to be attracted to borrow municipalities to finance enabling infrastructure.

Urban management and in particular cleaning of the environment is critical for ensuring that municipal area is attractive. Thus, ability to attract investment should also include clearly defined initiatives that ensure the city is continuously clean. This will retain existing investors and also enable the municipalities to attract new investors who wishes to locate in the municipal area.

A firm's decision to invest is influenced by factors such as infrastructure and land availability, the institutional and regulatory environment, skills availability and innovation levels and the availability of enterprise support and finance. Municipalities have key roles that influence a decision to invest and expand in a particular space. Poorly performing spaces – such as industrial parks, CBDs, logistics hubs, townships – discourage investment and encourage disinvestment. Poorly performing economic assets, such as roads, ports, rail, communications, do the same. Many of the reasons for poor performing spaces and assets lie within the ambit of the public sector, but not all within the local sphere. In some instances, municipalities are directly responsible for what needs to be done, in other areas the municipality needs to mediate inter-governmental solutions.

To turnaround these spaces and unlock their economic potential the immediate focus must be on getting the basics right first –

- Ensure reliable and sustainable service delivery – water, sanitation, stormwater, roads, lighting and waste management;
- Ensure effective land governance – urgently resolve inter-governmental issues that inhibit performance;
- Undertake bulk infrastructure repair and maintenance;
- Address business and community safety issues;
- Operationalise and manage public open spaces and assets; and
- Manage the spaces – at minimum put in place municipal transversal teams responsible for ensuring the basics are in place.

The quality and transparency of municipal governance has a direct impact on economic performance. Dysfunctional municipalities discourage new investment and result in job loss. Ensuring the effective management of municipal businesses through evidenced-based decision making and sound financial management is essential to attract and retain firms. Improving the efficiency and transparency of municipal business processes that impact on the private sector – such as registering property, getting electricity connections, construction permits, obtaining wayleaves, getting a water connection, and issuing an informal trader permit – goes a long way to building business confidence and municipal credibility.

5.4 Environmental Pollution

The deteriorating quality of water resources in urban and rural areas due to pollution, failing infrastructure such as wastewater treatment and the lack of enforcement of by-laws, legislation and urban management, exacerbates water scarcity, and increases costs of providing potable water.

Municipalities are urged to anticipate the imminent approval of the water pricing strategy, which introduces a waste discharge charge. This penalty underscores the need for municipalities to ensure that they comply with and enforce all legislation and by-laws governing urban and environmental management. This requires municipalities to prioritise effective and efficient service delivery, including sufficient investment in asset maintenance, expansion and renewal for solid waste management, wastewater treatment, as well as by-law enforcement to mitigate the continuous pollution of streams and rivers.

Collaboration among municipalities, sector departments, NGOs, citizens, and the private sector are essential for mobilising resources to prevent further deterioration and restoration of water resources. Such efforts need to only prevent pollution at source but also safeguard water quality for future generations, making the strategic investment in water resources a cornerstone of sustainability, economic growth and healthy environments.

6. Municipal Standard Chart of Accounts (*mSCOA*)

6.1. Go Live on Version 6.8 of the Chart

mSCOA version 6.8 will go live on 20 March 2024, whereafter municipalities will be able to upload their tabled budget (TABB) and tabled project files (PRTA) data strings for the 2024/25 MTREF on the GoMuni portal.

After going live on version 6.8 of the chart, all the reports available on the LGDRS will be aligned to *mSCOA* chart version 6.8. This includes the format of the Section 71 report for Q3 and Q4 of 2023/24.

The Municipal Budget and Reporting Regulations (MBRR) Schedules (A to F) and non-financial data string (A1S) was also aligned to version 6.8 of the chart. A **protected** version of the MBRR Schedules for version 6.8 of the chart and A1S is available on the on the MFMA Webpage on the link below:

<http://mfma.treasury.gov.za/RegulationsandGazettes/Municipal%20Budget%20and%20Reporting%20Regulations/Pages/default.aspx>

The reports on the Local Government and Reporting System (LGDRS) are populated from financial and non-financial data strings. Municipalities must use the linkages on GoMuni referred to above and not the formulas in the regulated Municipal Budget and Reporting (MBRR) Schedules when generating their A schedule from the financial system.

In terms of the *mSCOA* Regulations, municipalities must generate the regulated MBRR schedules that is tabled and adopted by Council directly from their financial ERP systems and not import or captured it on the system at a later stage. This is necessary to ensure that there is 'one version of the truth', namely the data in the financial ERP system is the same as the report tabled and adopted by Council and the information submitted to the National Treasury and other stakeholders.

6.2. *mSCOA* data strings credibility

Municipalities must verify the credibility and accuracy of the tabled budget (TABB) and project file (PRTA) data strings **prior and post** to uploading it to the National Treasury Local Government Database and Reporting System (LGDRS). These data strings will be the sole source used by National and Provincial Treasuries to analyse and determine if the municipality's budget is funded and the credibility is therefore of utmost importance.

Registered users from municipalities, provincial treasuries and National Treasury have full access to their data on the LGDRS and can draw the information to verify the accuracy of the figures for their respective municipalities or province (in the case of provincial treasuries). The LGDRS reports can be accessed by registered users on the following link:

https://lg.treasury.gov.za/ibi_apps/signin

From 2025/26, the National Treasury will open the access to all reports available on the LGDRS to the public. Municipalities should make a concerted effort to resolve their *mSCOA* data strings credibility issues as soon as possible to avoid facing the consequences of financial misconduct in terms of Section 171(1)(d) of the MFMA.

The LGDRS also provides information on municipal budgets and performance to the public through the Municipal Money portal. The information on the Municipal Money portal is sourced from the Consolidated Section 71 Reports published quarterly by the National Treasury. The Municipal Money portal is part of South Africa's Open Government Partnership (OGP) 5th National Action Plan to improve transparency and public participation in government processes and a link to the Municipal Money portal is available on the OGP website (76 countries and 104 municipalities are members).

6.3. Regulating the minimum business processes and system specifications for *mSCOA*

The National Treasury commenced with the work to regulate the minimum business processes and system specifications for *mSCOA* towards the end of 2025/26. The following working groups will be established to ensure that relevant stakeholders are consulted during the review processes:

- a. **Corporate governance** including internal and external audit, oversight committees, performance management, IT system requirements and management, municipal websites, document management, reporting mechanisms;
- b. **Municipal budgeting, planning and financial modelling** including IDP, Budgets Management, Revenue, Human Resources (HR) /Payroll, Assets;
- c. **Financial accounting** including general ledger, accounts receivables and payables, financial reporting, AFS reporting, insurance management, consolidation reporting;
- d. **Costing and reporting** including cost planning and cost management and reporting;
- e. **Project accounting** including project creation and planning, project management and reporting, contract management;
- f. **Treasury and cash management** including cash management and reporting, grant management and reporting, investment management and reserves, borrowings management, provisions and contingent liabilities;
- g. **Supply chain management** including supply chain management and inventory;
- h. **Full asset life cycle management** including maintenance management and asset management;
- i. **Real estate management** including property register and rental management and general processes;
- j. **Human resource and payroll management** including human resources, time management, payroll management and reporting;
- k. **Revenue management**, customer care, credit control and debt collection including revenue management and billing, credit control, customer management, debt collection, indigent management;
- l. **Valuation roll management**; and
- m. **Land use building control** including land use and building control.

Municipalities are urged to ensure that the officials that participate in the working groups have the technical knowledge and experience to participate meaningfully in these forums. Integrated Consultative Forums will also be held quarterly to keep **all** stakeholders informed and provide them with an opportunity to provide inputs on the business processes and system specification that will be regulated. A dedicated email address will be created for comment and inputs relating to the review processes underpinning these Regulations.

7. Submitting documents to the GoMuni Upload Portal

7.1. Submissions to the National Treasury

Municipalities are reminded to submit documents and queries to the correct portals/ mailboxes. These portals/ mailboxes are:

- https://lg.treasury.gov.za/ibi_apps/welcome (GoMuni Upload Portal) – All documents required in terms of legislation by approved registered users, including: • mSCOA Data Strings; • Budget-related, in-year and year-end documents and schedules (A, B and C); and • Revenue and MFRS Documents (as per MFMA Circular No. 126);
- lgdataqueries@treasury.gov.za – Database related and submission queries; and
- lgdocuments@treasury.gov.za – Only Provincial Treasuries may send contact details to lgdocuments@treasury.gov.za.

Any document/ queries that are submitted to the incorrect portal/ mailbox will not be processed and the submission status report will continue to reflect the documents as outstanding.

7.2. Updating of contact details on GoMuni

From 1 April 2024, municipalities (registered users) will be able to make changes/ additions to their own contact details directly on the LGDRS. To municipalities and their respective provincial treasury must select and update the relevant details on GoMuni under Database/Contacts/Reporting/Contact information on the following link:

https://lg.treasury.gov.za/ibi_apps/signin

Municipalities must ensure that their contact details on GoMuni are updated as soon as changes occur.

7.3. Submission of additional reports

From 14 March 2024, municipalities whose debt relief applications were approved will be required to submit reports to the GoMuni Upload portal as indicated in MFMA Circular No 124 dated 31 March 2024. The list of the required debt relief reports is attached as **Annexure A**.

7.4. Procurement spend reporting

In order for government to fulfil its social responsibility to channel procurement spending towards certain designated groups and to unlock economies of scale in government procurement expenditure, a single standardised view needs to be created into the

procurement spend information across all spheres of government on a transactional level for spend and trend analysis purposes.

The OCPO designed and built a Data Warehouse that serves as common repository for procurement related data with the necessary capabilities to produce standardised information in a dashboard format via various Business Intelligence tools. Currently procurement spend data of all National and Provincial departments from 2017 to date is hosted and analysed in the Data Warehouse.

From 1 March 2024, municipalities must on monthly basis report all goods and services related payments at a transactional level monthly. Towards this end, municipalities must complete and submit the template attached as **Annexure E** and submit it to the GoMuni Upload portal under the folder Documents/ Other. These reports are due by the 15th of the month that follows the reporting month. The first report is therefore due on 15 April 2024. This information is only required for municipalities and not for municipal entities.

A Data Upload Tool is also available that allows municipalities to capture their spending data manually or extract the relevant information from the municipality's payment system automatically. Information captured on the Data Upload Tool will be submitted directly into the OCPOs Data Warehouse once the various online input validations to ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data has been passed. To access the tool, an email request must be sent to ocpodatarequest@treasury.gov.za to obtain a User ID and Password that is institution specific. Training on the use of the OCPO Data Upload Tool as well as technical integration information will be provided after the institution has received a User ID and Password.

The submission status of the OCPO Spend Report will be included on the status report of document submissions available on the LGDRS. Municipalities that opt to use the Data Upload Tool instead of submitting the excel template to GoMuni must submit a 'not applicable form' to the GoMuni Upload portal for their non-submission is not classified as outstanding.

8. The Municipal Budget and Reporting Regulations

8.1 Assistance with the compilation of budgets

If municipalities require advice with the compilation of their respective budgets, specifically the budget documents or **Schedule A**, they should direct their enquiries to their respective provincial treasuries or to the following National Treasury officials:

Province	Responsible NT officials	Tel. No.	Email
Eastern Cape Buffalo City	Matjatji Mashoeshoe Pitso Zwane Mandla Gilimani	012-315 5553 012-315 5171 012-315 5807	Matjatji.Mashoeshoe@treasury.gov.za Pitso.Zwane@Treasury.gov.za Mandla.Gilimani@treasury.gov.za
Free State	Sifiso Mabaso Cethekile Moshane	012-315 5952 012-315 5079	Sifiso.mabaso@treasury.gov.za Cethekile.moshane@treasury.gov.za
Gauteng City of Tshwane and City of Johannesburg City of Ekurhuleni	Matjatji Mashoeshoe Pitso Zwane Oreal Tshidino Willem Voigt Makgabo Mabotja Enock Ndlovu Kgomotso Baloyi Lunathi Dumani	012-315 5553 012-315 5171 012-315 5830 012-315 5156 012-315 5385 012-315 5866	Matjatji.Mashoeshoe@treasury.gov.za Pitso.Zwane@Treasury.gov.za Oreal.Tshidino@Treasury.gov.za WillemCordes.Voigt@treasury.gov.za Makgabo.Mabotja@treasury.gov.za Enock.Ndlovu@treasury.gov.za Kgomotso.Baloyi@treasury.gov.za Lunathi.dumani@treasury.gov.za
KwaZulu-Natal Msunduzi eThekweni uMhlathuze	Kgomotso Baloyi Lunathi Dumani Sifiso Mabaso Kevin Bell	012-315 5866 012-315 5866 012-315 5952 012-315 5725	Kgomotso.Baloyi@treasury.gov.za Lunathi.dumani@treasury.gov.za Sifiso.mabaso@treasury.gov.za Kevin.bell@treasury.gov.za
Limpopo	Sifiso Mabaso Jabulile Ngwenya	012-315 5952	Sifiso.Mabaso@treasury.gov.za Jabulile.ngwenya@treasury.gov.za
Mpumalanga	Mandla Gilimani Sibusisiwe Mchani	012-315 5807 012-315 5539	Mandla.Gilimani@treasury.gov.za Sibusisiwe.Mchani@treasury.gov.za
Northern Cape	Mandla Gilimani Sibusisiwe Mchani	012-315 5807 012-315 5539	Mandla.Gilimani@treasury.gov.za Sibusisiwe.Mchani@treasury.gov.za
North West	Willem Voigt Makgabo Mabotja	012-315 5830 012-315 5156	WillemCordes.Voigt@treasury.gov.za Makgabo.Mabotja@treasury.gov.za
Western Cape Cape Town George	Willem Voigt Enock Ndlovu Kgomotso Baloyi Mandla Gilimani	012-315 5830 012-315 5385 012-315 5866 012-315 5807	WillemCordes.Voigt@treasury.gov.za Enock.Ndlovu@treasury.gov.za Kgomotso.Baloyi@treasury.gov.za Mandla.Gilimani@treasury.gov.za
Technical issues on GoMuni Website	Data management		lgdataqueries@treasury.gov.za
Local government Conditional Grants	Conditional Grants team	012-315 5183	Sello.mashaba@treasury.gov.za Unathi.lekonyana@treasury.gov.za Pretty.mavhungu@treasury.gov.za Marvin.ngobeni@treasury.gov.za Akanyang.modise@treasury.gov.za

Contact



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Post Private Bag X115, Pretoria 0001
Phone 012 315 5009
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Website <http://www.treasury.gov.za/default.aspx>

JH Hattingh
Chief Director: Local Government Budget Analysis
08 March 2024

ANNEXURE A – LIST OF REQUIRED REPORTS TO BE SUBMITTED TO NATIONAL TREASURY FOR DEBT RELIEF PROGRAMME (TEMPLATE)

ANNEXURE B – MUNICIPAL CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE FOR DEBT RELIEF PROGRAMME (TEMPLATE)

ANNEXURE C – MUNICIPAL DEBT RELIEF – MONTHLY REPORTING – INDIGENT HOUSEHOLDS INFORMATION (TEMPLATE)

ANNEXURE D – MUNICIPAL DEBT RELIEF – MONTHLY REVENUE COLLECTION REPORTING (TEMPLATE)

ANNEXURE D – PROCUREMENT SPENT REPORTING (TEMPLATE)