



## Complaints pour in about City billing

**Thami Magubane**

THE eThekweni Revenue Management System (RMS) billing system is continuing to cause headaches with hundreds of residents allegedly objecting to the amounts on their bills every week.

DA councillors, among them Sharon Hoosen of ward 71, have claimed they have received hundreds of complaints.

The system which produces water, electricity and sanitation accounts was brought online last year at a cost of more than R620 million, 10 years after it was first mooted, and hundreds of millions of rand over budget.

It has been a challenge for

residents since its launch.

Recently, Phoenix residents held a heated meeting where they discussed their billing grievances with councillors.

Darryl Schoeman, who lives in the Overport area, told The Mercury yesterday that he felt the municipality was cheating him by overestimating his bill.

"I send in my meter readings every month but they continue to estimate. They are grossly overestimating the bill.

"I normally budget around R2500 for my electricity but now pay R2800. This is seriously affecting my budget.

"You are taking excess consumer money to boost your coffers," he said in an e-mail which Schoeman said he had

also sent to the municipality.

Schoeman said by his calculations, the municipality could be getting around R33 million a month if it overestimated by the same amount for 100 000 households.

Speaking about the meeting in Phoenix, Hoosen said: "The officials keep telling us that there are no issues with the billing; that is because they are not dealing with angry community members."

She said she received about 20 complaints a week.

"From what I understand, all DA councillors are dealing with the issue of incorrect billing, you can see a lot of people are frustrated. The Phoenix meeting almost came to blows but officials in-

sisted there was nothing wrong with the system."

Hoosen said some people were getting bills ranging from R50 000 to R500 000 or more.

"When you get that bill, you still have to pay while the municipality investigates, or you will be disconnected. If you are used to paying R1 500 and that suddenly increases to R7 000, where are you supposed to get that money?"

"We had asked the municipality to put a moratorium on the disconnections, at least for six months while the issue of the billing crisis was being sorted out, but nothing has happened yet," said Hoosen.

Another councillor, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said they were re-

ceiving about 200 complaints a week about billing in the Phoenix area.

"The community is always complaining about this and the issue largely revolves around the estimation of the bills. These bills are estimated for months at a time and hardly ever read.

"You can imagine if you are a pensioner who had been paying R900 a month, all of a sudden you are charged around R3 500," he said.

ANC councillors in Mayville and the uMlazi areas said they had received no complaints.

The city said it assessed cases on their merit and did not deal with customers through third parties.