



PRESS STATEMENT

City of Harare Billing System Needs to be upgraded now!

04 October 2013! The Harare Residents Trust (HRT) is alarmed at the level of incompetence and chaos management being demonstrated by the City of Harare's department responsible for billing consumers of municipal services. It is becoming clearer by the day that the city's management is unwilling to change its management approaches when it comes to improving service delivery in particular revenue generation.

By creating this scenario of uncertainty among citizens paying their hard-earned money for municipal services, the City of Harare employees are robbing the council of an opportunity to raise more revenue in order to provide essential services to the people. Law abiding citizens who have always paid their debts are puzzled by the inconsistency in billing. They do not understand how the City of Harare's billing system functions. They cannot keep up with the spiralling debt, yet they will be paying at the end of every month. This is happening despite the debt cancellation in June 2013, which should have provided the council with an opportunity to review their system and ensure that residents are motivated to pay for their services.

Through community coordinators, stationed in the various communities of Harare, the HRT has realised that hundreds of residents are disgruntled by the billing system of council, which undermines the confidence building intervention of the government in debt cancellation. Instead of building on the debt cancellation to strengthen its relationship with communities in order to realise budget projection targets, the billing system is most discouraging.

The HRT continues to urge residents to pay for municipal services rendered, but the City of Harare has to be flexible in its handling of public affairs through setting up of a transparent and accountable billing system that reflects availability and non availability of services during a given month. Below are the key areas that must be attended to by the council as a matter of urgency;

The Due date:

- 1. 7th due date-** In the past, the City of Harare used to use the 7th of every month as their due date. The City fathers unilaterally decided to change the due date and put the last day of the month as the new due date, inconveniencing residents in the process. This decision on the part of the City managers was never communicated to the residents. What this means is that any amounts paid after the last day of the month will possibly attract interest.
- 2. The BIQ System-** the BIQ System was introduced in 2007 in low density areas and 2008 in high density areas. The BIQ system is subject to manipulation through the journal voucher system, auto credit, and rampant hacking of accounts by senior management, who have unhindered access to server passwords. This system is privately owned by a Mr Danny from South Africa.

Sample Cases of Shambolic billing

- a. **Warren Park D** – A Warren Park resident with account number 240005084000008 had his September bill reflecting \$111.00. When he went to enquire at Rowan Martin Building, the headquarters of the city treasury department he was told that his bill was \$37.00. The resident made his payment at Warren Park District hall on 03 September 2013. On the same account there is administration charge of \$5.00, which is normally charged on households without title deeds. Ironically, he has title deeds.
- b. **Rugare-** A Rugare resident reported that she made a payment of \$94.00 at Rowan Martin on 04 September 2013 but her statement came with the money still showing as debt. Upon enquiries at the Treasury department she was told the payment will reflect at the end of September.
- c. **Sunningdale-** A resident was overcharged and his current bill for June 2013 was \$163.42. But when the resident raised a complaint through the HRT his bill was reversed to \$81.42, showing a deliberate trend of bill manipulation by the City of Harare.

The impact of the poor billing system

1. Residents now distrust the city's billing system, and this discourages them from settling their bills, as nothing changes whether or not they pay on time. Residents desperately want to lead debt-free lives but this is proving to be a nightmare. This will make them stop paying, or resort to erratic payments. When residents stop paying their bills, or partially pay, it means the City of Harare will have pressure from its creditors, and service delivery is affected.
2. Residents who do not use council water receive bills with a basic water charge but additional charges are added showing an interim charge of us\$0.80cents on statements, especially in low density areas.

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