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SERVICE DELIVERY

Why the Master's Office fails its clients

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OLD computers, problems with accessing emails, and poor network coverage have emerged as some of the reasons officials at the Master's Office were unable to respond to their clients.

Now, the Department of Justice has procured a new set of computers for the officials and wants to upgrade the network at the offices throughout the country.

This became possible after the Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) recently turned to the justice and correctional services portfolio committee, asking it to intervene in the long-standing service delivery failures in the Master's Office.

It cited a lack of leadership, lack of service delivery, correspondence being unanswered, email correspondence not being used, phones not being answered and officials not being reached.

The LSSA has since tabled a 10-point plan to the department stressing the importance of improving communication.

In its bid to address problems at the Master's Office, the Department of Justice said it had developed five pillars of intervention.

These included fast-tracking modernisation and identification of the need to roll out a toll-free centre equipped with functionalities such as email, WhatsApp, SMS, and reference number issuance.

The department said it had rolled out an online system for registration of deceased estates.

LSSA's national deceased estates committee chairperson, Hussani Goga, said the fundamental issue was the platform for communication.

"I don't think this has been meaningfully addressed. If everything is said, it is meaningless. How do you communicate to the practitioners and the public? They should embrace emails immediately," he said.

Goga said there should be directives ordering officials at the Master's Office to use emails.

It has since emerged that the computers at the Master's Office were old and officials rarely used them because of poor network connection, among other reasons.

"We have challenges with our email system. We are sorting that one. We are procuring computers. We have a target of three months," he said.

Chief information officer Jabu Hlatshwayo said the issue of computers was very important because the reason behind some of the email challenges was that the devices officials were using were too old.

"In some cases due to network challenges, it becomes difficult for users to have email updates and respond on time. It does not look like officials catch up with email backlogs. We have upgraded bandwidth."

Hlatshwayo also said they were in the process of purchasing computers for the Master's Office.

"We identified all users with challenges. We are doing emergency procurement of 150 computers. We should have them in December or January," he said.

Hlatshwayo said that out of the 500 computers procured for the department, 50 would be sent to the Master's Office from next Monday.

Justice and Correctional Services portfolio committee chairperson Bulelani Magwanishe said that even if many computers were bought, as long as people did not read and respond to emails, the computers would be of no use.

"The starting point is for people to be responsible. Managers should inculcate that the culture of people who are not responding to emails should not be part of the public service. Everything starts there," he said.



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