STATEMENT BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR CYRIL XABA DURING THE SITE VISIT OF SAKHITHEMBA HOMELESS SHELTER, 29 OCTOBER 2025

We appreciate the opportunity to update the residents of eThekwini on the state of the Sakhithemba Homeless Shelter in Ilovu.

As we are all aware that homelessness in eThekwini Municipality has become a critical issue, particularly within the Central Business District (CBD). Current shelters are insufficient, leaving many individuals exposed to the elements and vulnerable to safety and health risks.

At the same time, there are privately owned shelters within the CBD which are also experiencing overcrowding due to the significant increase in the numbers of homeless people living and sleeping on the streets. This situation poses significant threats to public health, safety, and the economic viability of the Durban CBD.

It is important to highlight that this intervention is not only limited to providing shelter and housing solutions, but it also offers pathways out of

homelessness – informed by reliable research, advocacy, and policy development.

A number of factors have exacerbated the situation including rapid urbanisation, poverty, inequality, exclusion, and unemployment. This is also compounded by dysfunctional households, absent and or abusive caregivers, lack of accommodation and overcrowding.

Homeless people are found living under bridges, on the dunes, on pavements and in abandoned buildings. They have become synonymous with drug addiction, crime, and grime.

At the present moment, the city does not have municipal owned homeless shelters to provide transitional accommodation for those in desperate need except one for women (Strollers). As such homeless shelters are provided privately by enterprising individuals for commercial purposes. The city also does not have any approved guidelines for homeless shelters nor a policy dealing with homelessness, notwithstanding the policy development process that is underway.

During the process of seeking solutions, the city has identified a municipal owned property located in the south. Sakhithemba has in the past been leased by YMCA as a halfway house for the parolees. The lease expired in July 2014 which provided opportunity for the city to explore its intentions of caring for the homeless within its boundaries.

We wish to emphasise the fact that Sakhithemba will operate as a transitional shelter to provide for the homeless persons and those who are drug users who are awaiting or already participating in rehabilitation programmes.

This is in line with our vision as eThekwini Municipality of “being the most caring and liveable city”. To achieve this, a critical review and development of policies that will facilitate the achievement of this vision are required.

Hence, it is of paramount importance for us to assist those who live on the street who have intentions to change their lives for the better. This is a progressive approach in dealing with homelessness through various interventions that will foster integration into society.

CAPACITY AND SERVICES AT THE SHELTER

This facility will accommodate a maximum of 1000 people. The admission to the shelter will be through a comprehensive screening process which will be undertaken prior to admission. The screening will take place at the Drop-In-Centre located in the CBD.

Service provision at Sakhithemba will include social services programmes and psychosocial support such as life skills, counselling, reunification and reintegration, skills development, and job readiness training. Residents within the shelter are expected to take part in all programmes intended to help them to become independent, including programmes provided outside the facility.

Sakhithemba will cater for homeless people who are over the age of 18 years. Abused women and men will be referred to Khuseleka shelters supported by the Department of Social Development.

The duration of stay will vary, generally from three to six months, but may be as long as a year or two. It is on the basis of these preconditions that Social Housing Department within the city can facilitate the provision of the stepdown accommodation (subsidized housing options) for the homeless people who are motivated to lead a normal, productive and independent life.

The city intends to facilitate partnerships with non-governmental actors who are already operating in the space.

The funding requirements associated with operational costs and management of the facility are at R7 150 000 annually which includes meals, clothing, and skills development training.

PROGRESS ON CONSTRUCTION

Work is approximately 70% complete, with steady advancement across all components and contractors are now operating on double shift to meet the targeted completion date of the first week of December 2025.

We are confident that this initiative will contribute towards our vision of making eThekwini the most caring and liveable city.