ADDRESS BY ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY MAYOR, CLLR. CYRIL XABA, ON THE OCCASION OF THE ETHEKWINI SERVICE EXCELLENCE AWARDS, 5 JUNE 2026

- Programme Director
- The Speaker of Council: Cllr Thabani Nyawose
- The Deputy Mayor: Cllr Zandile Myeni
- Whip of Council: Cllr Sinegugu Sishange
- Members of the Executive Committee (EXCO),
- Honourable Councillors,
- The City Manager: Mr Musa Mbhele
- All Senior Managers of the City,
- Distinguished Guests,
- Esteemed Award Nominees and Winners,
- Hardworking Public Servants of eThekwini,
- Good afternoon.

It gives me great pleasure to be part of this significant occasion, the eThekwini Service Excellence Awards, which honours and recognises employees who have made outstanding contributions to improving service delivery.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is easy to trivialise service awards as merely ceremonial events that consume time and resources. However, the true significance of occasions such as the eThekwini Service Excellence Awards lies in their recognition of the people who form the engine room of our municipality. These dedicated employees work tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that services are delivered.

So, we are here today to shine a bright light on the women and men who transform policy into practice, who turn blueprints into bridges, and who ensure that the lights come on, the taps run clean water, and the waste is collected – day in and day out. These awards matter because service delivery is not just a concept; it is the daily dignity of our people.

It is important, at this stage, to consider the question: What is service excellence?

It is the feeling of a resident receiving their first formal electricity connection. It is the relief of a family in a new house knowing that sanitation and clean water are not luxuries, but rights. It is the confidence of an investor seeing well-planned town layouts, reliable digital infrastructure, and safe, smart city systems.

From the roads that carry our commuters and tourists to the manufacturing hubs that drive our economy – every single service touches a human life. And every single service depends on a skilled, motivated, and continuously learning public servant.

This brings me to the central message of my address this afternoon: the urgent imperative for eThekwini to build and continuously strengthen a skills pipeline – not for its own sake, but to underpin a genuinely diversified economy.

Municipalities cannot deliver 21st-century services with a 20th-century workforce. Therefore, continuous learning, therefore, is the bedrock of

service excellence. It is no longer sufficient to qualify once and rest on that laurel. In the next few years, many routine administrative and operational tasks will be augmented or transformed by robotics and automation. This is not a threat – it is an opportunity to upskill our workforce.

It is encouraging, therefore, to note that an increasing number of employees in this city are pursuing further studies, and some are even obtaining PhDs. This is a development we must celebrate. We need a deliberate system to crystallise this intellectual power into tangible results for our citizens.

We must harness that expertise to produce an incrementally improving City – a City that compares favourably to the world's leading municipalities. Let our scholars become our problem-solvers. Let their research translate into better water management, smarter transport systems, more equitable town planning, and more responsive citizen services.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is another truth we must confront. A city that delivers excellent services must be a city that is financially viable – and that spends every rand with discipline and integrity. We cannot build a

skills pipeline, finance climate resilience strategies, or maintain our infrastructure without adequate funding. This is why I am placing fiscal sustainability at the heart of our service excellence agenda.

EThekwini must continue to demonstrate thought leadership by becoming increasingly self-sustainable. That means three urgent priorities:

First, increasing our revenue collection.

Second, identifying new revenue generation sources.

Third – and this is non-negotiable – fiscal prudence. A self-sustainable city is not only a city that earns well; it is a city that spends well, without waste, without leakage, and without theft.

We must root out fraud and corruption, wherever they rear their ugly heads. You will agree with me that every rand stolen from the municipality is a rand stolen from a family waiting for a home, from a child waiting for a safe road to school, from a community waiting for clean water.

I want to assure you that we will pursue the corrupt with the full might of our systems and the law. A self-sustainable city is a dignified city. It takes ownership of its financial future – and that requires the same innovative, learning-oriented mindset that we are celebrating today, alongside an uncompromising commitment to honesty and accountability.

To every public servant here today: I ask you to embrace continuous learning as an act of professional patriotism. Make eThekwini a model of how a municipality can harness human talent, emerging technology, climate responsibility, fiscal discipline, and social solidarity to deliver dignity, development, and delight to every resident.

I congratulate all nominees and winners. You make our city work. You give our citizens hope. And together, we will build a smarter, safer, greener, kinder, and more service-excellent eThekwini.

I thank you.