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Premier takes action to fix local government

Two million rand will be pumped into the Provincial Training Academy to improve the quality of leadership and skills development



North West is no stranger to the challenges of limited financial resources and a shortage of skilled administrators at local government level. There have been a number of service delivery protests and the municipalities are constantly battling crises.

These are issues that Premier Supra Mahumapelo is well aware of, and he tackled them head on in his State of the Province Address.

“The state of performance of municipalities is of concern,” he said. “When the fifth administration assumed office in May last year, 15 municipalities were in intensive care, as reported by the auditor-general. Through dedicated intervention and leadership seven have been rescued; eight still require ongoing attention.”

One of the biggest headaches is the Ngaka Modiri Molema District Municipality, which embarrassingly includes the provincial capital Mahikeng. The municipality has limped from one crisis to the next, including the arrest of the district mayor, speaker, and two other officials on charges of fraud, and most recently the attaching of council vehicles for a R10-million outstanding debt. The council itself was dissolved and placed under administration by the provincial government last year.

Mahumapelo said this intervention had made a difference following the appointment of an administrator and acting municipal manager, with a chief financial officer to be appointed in the near future. He said this turnaround strategy was expected to show results within a year.

The provincial government has adopted a carrot-and-stick approach by introducing the Provincial Local Government Awards. "These awards will be held within the spirit of Batho Pele principles, Back to Basics and encouraging clean administration," the premier said.

This scheme will recognise excellence in financial management, basic service delivery, governance and administration, local economic development and public participation.

A further step toward improving the performance of local municipalities is that R2-million will be pumped into a Provincial Training Academy this financial year to improve the quality of leadership and skills development.

These initiatives will dovetail with the premier's Setsokotsane (whirlwind) initiative, which aims to respond to the challenges facing the poorest of the poor through an inclusive programme of action. Mahumapelo said that this initiative will benefit further from an "unprecedented Ward-based Planning Model" that will be integrated with the Provincial Annual Performance Plans and municipal Integrated Development Plans.

"A consolidated infrastructure budget for the province, inclusive of all provincial departments and all 23 municipalities ... exceeds R100-billion over the Medium Term Expenditure Framework," said Mahumapelo. "This budget will be used to fund construction of roads, water and sanitation, schools, health infrastructure, houses, agriculture and arts and tourism infrastructure across all 383 wards in the province."

Mining giant Lonmin has committed an additional R400-million for investment over the next four years; Impala Platinum has pledged R931-million.

Lonmin will be investing in bulk water supply in the greater Lonmin communities, the erection of high-mast lights in informal settlements in the Marikana area and upgrading gravel roads in and around its operations and nearby communities.

The bulk of Impala Platinum's commitment — R700-million — will be used to develop housing over the next five years in Freedom Park informal settlement near Rustenburg. The remainder will be invested in general infrastructure.

"We challenge other mining houses and companies operating in Bokone-Bophirima (North West) to counter this commitment and join the *saamwerk-saamtrek* (work together) revolution," the premier said. "We thank the multitude of the people of this province for embracing our initiatives of Setsokotsane and Bua le Puso (speak to the government) since their introduction. On 1 April 2015 we are entering the implementation phase of Setsokotsane, which will cover all municipalities in every quarter for the remaining years of this administration."

Bua Le Puso is an initiative by the provincial executive committee to bring government to the people and provide a direct and immediate response to concerns about government services.

Mahumapelo said the feedback received thus far was encouraging and had exceed expectations.

“Bua le Puso is not a temporary service delivery blitz,” he said. “It is a permanent public engagement platform [set] to continue for the entire term of government. The commitments made during the inaugural speech in June last year will continue to form an important, integral part of our five-year programme going forward.”

On the issue of housing, Mahumapelo said more than 2230000 houses had been built since 1994, and the housing backlog of 2370000 units was being addressed.

“Measures are being put in place to cater for people who are not serviced under the RDP programme, and who cannot access the bond market. In order to mitigate against financial constraints, the province will be embarking on alternative building methods in order to achieve more with the limited resources at our disposal.”

Monitoring and evaluation take centre stage

Premier Supra Mahumapelo has taken it upon himself to ensure that his government gets a clean bill of health as far as governance is concerned. He announced in his State of the Province Address that his office would play a central role in the monitoring and evaluation of government service delivery and accountability.

“The intention is that all programmes in the Office of the Premier should be reviewed to focus their activities 80% of the time on monitoring and evaluation,” he said. “Following successful completion of the reconfiguration process, Professor Job Mokgoro will be redeployed to head a new unit in the Office of the Premier to focus on public service transformation with specific mandate on issues of efficiency, professionalism and monitoring and evaluation.”

The province has struggled to uphold governance and administration standards at provincial and local government level, with forensic investigations currently being made into the departments of health, public works and roads, the North West Parks and Tourism Board and the Potch Agricultural College. Three local municipalities are also under investigation.

The Premier said his office was still consulting with all relevant law enforcement agencies on the establishment of a Forensic and Fraud Unit within his office.

“Fraud and corruption impede the proper functioning and efficiency of the public service and hamper delivery of services to the people. It is our commitment that by the middle of the next financial year we would have finalised [the Forensic and Fraud Unit],” he said.

He added that the MEC for finance, economy and enterprise development would announce a detailed plan for the physical verification of all public servants in his upcoming budget speech.

Another measure to improve the monitoring and evaluation process is the establishment of an integrated ICT platform that will create an interface between all stand-alone ICT programmes in provincial and municipal governments.

An issue that has plagued provincial government for some time is the alleged mismanagement of the so-called “D Account”, into which mining companies in the province have paid royalties that are due to traditional authorities.

Mahumapelo said that while the investigations by the public protector were still ongoing, it had been decided to decentralise the account so that each beneficiary community has its own account.

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