

Public Works DG meets organised labour

The newly-appointed Public Works Director-General, Mr Mziwonke Dlabantu and organised labour representatives have resolved to develop a framework agreement to guide the implementation of the Service Delivery Improvement Plan (SDIP) that seeks to rebuild DPW.

The agreement will clarify principles, scope and establishment of an engagement structure to be made up of joint union and employer Steering Committee. The agreement will be negotiated and finalised within two weeks.

It was resolved that the Departmental Bargaining Chamber will also play an active role in the process of restructuring as it is a legal and legitimate bargaining structure. It was also decided that a communication protocol on SDIP matters should be developed.

These far-reaching decisions were taken at a special information briefing with branch and national representatives of trade unions Nehawu, Public Service Association and Popcru at Birchwood Hotel in Boksburg, Gauteng on 21 February.

Mr Dlabantu said DPW experienced many complex challenges, both internal as well as external. Most of these challenges pre-dated the existing leadership of the department and had not been adequately addressed over the past several years.

“The report of the Auditor-General speaks to the need for a serious review of the management systems in the department. The Special Investigating Unit has also conducted investigations regarding alleged irregularities,” said Mr Dlabantu.

In response to this situation, the Department initiated the development of a change strategy in January last year. The strategy and its high level project plan defined the organisational review and renewal that would ensure compliance with the Department’s mandate and satisfactory audits. It was essential service to its client departments and that the department is also at the centre of job creation stressing that it cannot therefore, dare to fail.

He said if the department does not have proper processes and systems, it won’t be able to deliver on its mandate. The DG also told the meeting that the gathering is part of a series of meetings between the department and the trade unions, where the unions will be briefed on progress and get to make input.

“It is important that we establish a concrete communication with our stakeholders especially the trade unions, our social partners,” said Mr Dlabantu.

SDIP Team Leader Mr Dhaya Govender presented 18 projects that are aimed at improving the DPW business processes and systems.

Speaking on behalf of organised labour, Nehawu’s December Mavuso said the parties agreed that there was a need to improve service delivery in DPW and address all the rot and structural deficiencies that led the Department to dominate the newspaper headlines.

Mr Mavuso said DPW must show appreciation of the support of the leadership of the unions who always sent a high delegation to engagement with DPW. However, he said it must be clear from the onset that the gathering was not an official consultation meeting, but just a meeting to discuss issues.

“To us, a process like this is a change process because there may be a change of positions and so forth. Therefore whether we like it or not, this is a change process. The Labour Relations Act compels the employer to follow certain processes and therefore this cannot be a gentlemen’s agreement,” said Mr Mavuso.

He proposed that within two weeks, a structure of engagement should be established to facilitate engagement on matters relating to SDIP.

“The framework will guide the process, so that we clarify what we are trying to give. This is an important step to take, as it will help us answer questions like: What are the principles and objectives of the process and what will be the scope of application? Is it a wholesale restructuring? Or is it going to affect some branches of the department?” explained Mr Mavuso.

He said the framework must include the department’s undertaking that there would not be job losses or changes in the human resource organogram. “Should there be any changes; the framework ought to be clear on what processes need to be followed.

Mr Mavuso also said the framework must also clarify what will be the structure of engagement. “One of the things we want to strongly propose is the steering committee at a principal level that will oversee this process. There might be other structures like the Departmental Bargaining Council (DBC) and its role in the whole process should be clarified,” he said.

He proposed that a special DBC should be convened in two weeks so that the unions could detail proposals on the legal framework.

He emphasised that the communication protocol was also very important. “We are representing people. We don’t want to confuse the public about what is happening in this process. The Department shouldn’t send confusing messages as well as the union,” he said.

The meeting resolved that since the restructuring of the department was made public, there was no proper consultation with labour that took place except the briefing session with the minister in November 2012. The Labour Relations Act requires that the employer when contemplating restructuring must ensure that meaningful consultation takes place with unions.