

# New administration values input and has plan to fix NMB

IN response to recent letters to the editor regarding a lack of service delivery by the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality, the new administration values the many inputs that we receive from our residents.

While we acknowledge that a number of criticisms are less than flattering, we take them on board seriously and to heart as constructive criticism in our combined efforts to fix Nelson Mandela Bay.

When the current political leadership took office in August 2016, we did so with enthusiasm and a commitment to making NMB better for all our residents.

The cold reality, however, is that in spite of our eagerness to fix the city as quickly as possible, we inherited a broken administration.

Certain departments within the municipality continue to bleed with inefficiency.

Staff morale was almost non-existent in many instances. Of even greater concern was the fact that, according to calculations by national Treasury, the administration was set on a one-way path to bankruptcy within three financial years.

During his first few weeks in office, executive mayor Trollip discovered among others the following realities:

- A fifth qualified audit opinion from the auditor-general was imminent;
- Investigations into irregular expenditure to the value of R3-billion needed to be dealt with;
- The debtors collection rate was at an

all-time low of 87% against a budgeted 94%;

- Water losses and non-revenue water was standing at 43% and it took the administration in excess of 60 days on average to attend to a reported leak;

- The previous administration had failed to implement several directives from the Department of Water Affairs to impose urgent water restrictions;

- The supply chain directorate was exposing the institution to massive adverse risk due to inadequate controls being in place over many aspects of our tender processes;

- There was virtually no budget to establish the Metro Police and the existing plan would have bankrupted the city;

- A change in the ATTP-policy by the previous administration was not adequately budgeted for and would have resulted in an estimated R500-million deficit on the budget;

- Several contractors and service providers were discovered to be defrauding the institution, some to the value of tens of millions of rands;

- There were 23 000 households that had water connections but had no water meters, 13 000 households that had no

## In my View



Retief Odendaal

electricity metres but who were connected to electricity, some 14 000 bucket toilets that had to be eradicated, 25 000 illegal electricity connections, nearly 10 000 outstanding billing queries and a staggering R21-billion infrastructure backlog.

In order to turn Nelson Mandela Bay around, we are working hard to give the administration a total systems overall. We are facing some massive challenges, some of which may take years to fix.

Mayor Trollip has pulled no punches in making it clear that he will stop at nothing to achieve the three primary objectives of our manifesto promise: stopping corruption, creating jobs for our residents and improving service delivery to all.

Since assuming office he has set aside a number of dubious contracts, instituted several forensic audits and suspended a number of officials.

In addition, he has implemented the following turnaround strategies in a number of directorates and achieved the following:

- Budget and treasury: Stricter credit control measures have been imposed to improve the collection rate, which has significantly improved to just below the budgeted 94%.

Severe cost cutting measures across all directorates have been implemented in order to reduce non-core service delivery expenditure in our efforts to limit the extent of the adjustments budget deficit.

Supply chain directorate systems have been refined in order to prevent corrupt activities and the director of supply chain management has been suspended.

A vigorous campaign to attend to billing queries has resulted in a 40% reduction of the backlog to around 6 000 queries.

The ATTP-policy has also been amended to ensure that individuals who can actually afford to pay for their municipal services no longer get a free ride.

- Economic development, tourism and agriculture: All Expanded Public Works Programme processes are being overhauled to ensure a fair allocation of work opportunities not based on political affiliation.

We are in the process of establishing a jobs desk that will ultimately see the creation of 20 000 job opportunities for the youth over the next three years.

- Infrastructure and engineering, electricity and energy: Increased spending in

order to curb water losses has reduced the average turnaround time to attend to leaks to an average of 13 days.

Significant funding has been made available to eradicate the inhumane bucket toilet system in the new financial year.

Council also resolved to obtain loan funding to address some of the serious infrastructure maintenance backlogs in water and electricity infrastructure. A programme has been developed in terms of which all households without water and electricity metres will soon see these metres installed.

- Safety and security: The establishment of a fully fledged Metro Police has taken place to assist with by-law enforcement. The force now consists of 111 members, with further intakes planned within the new financial year. Senior posts for executive director for safety and security, chief traffic officer and director of security have been advertised, with interviews imminent.

- Human settlements: A total review of the housing list is under way in an effort to undo the many previous fraudulent transactions that occurred within the housing directorate.

A Municipal Land Planning Tribunal has been established and meets regularly to fast-track land planning applications.

- Public health: The rollout of a weekly solid waste collection service to all communities in NMB has finally been implemented. The War on Waste programme has been launched to address the ongoing problem of illegal dumping.

- Corporate services: More than 600 vacancies in the metro have been filled over the past eight months. Among these, many young interns and graduates have been employed so they can get work experience.

More than 400 unemployed learners have been put through our Unemployed Learners Skills Development programme to give them a much-needed boost.

A telecoms audit has been started which in the first weeks has already slashed telephony costs by more than R2-million per annum.

The above list covers only a few of the interventions undertaken in the past 8½ months since assuming office.

We completely acknowledge and accept that there are still many service delivery problems plaguing the institution and we understand the frustrations raised.

We want to reassure the residents of Nelson Mandela Bay we have a plan to address all of our institutional problems; we have the will and remain fully committed to fixing this city.

*Retief Odendaal is MMC for budget and treasury, NMB*

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