

Violent protests rock Letsemeng

● Protests misguided, says mayor

By: Thapelo Molebasts

Letsemeng Local Municipality Executive Mayor Thandiwe Reachable says the violent public protests that rocked Koffiefontein this week were misguided and triggered by unruly and ill-formed residents.

Addressing the media shortly after the two-day protests, Reachable said the municipality was caught off guard by the sudden demonstration.

“We only became aware of the unhappiness of the community on Wednesday during a community meeting,” Reachable noted.

The meeting held at the Walter Sisulu Multi-Purpose Community Centre was to discuss the hiring of local labour for the upgrading of the Dithlake stadium. However, the meeting erupted into an uprising, much to the surprise of the mayor and other political leadership from the municipality.

The chaos saw the plant and assets of the appointed contractor damaged by some community members, who also went on to destroy property, including residential houses, and burning a local crèche.

Police were called in to stabilise the situation.

Reachable said R13 million had been allocated for the upgrade of Dithlake Stadium and not R20 million as per the business plan submitted and allegations made by some community members.

“The municipality encourages members of the community to come forward with any information or evidence to prove the alleged corruption and take it to the necessary authorities so that the allegations can be investigated,” she said.

The mayor added the municipality had taken note of the issues raised by the residents, including high unemployment, especially among young people.

The agitated residents were also demanding jobs at Petra Diamonds and that the company’s profits should filter down to them as local communities to empower them.

During a council meeting held on August 28, 2018, the municipality resolved to investigate the ownership of land the mining is operating.

It also resolved to assist the Letsemeng community with the legal processes to obtain a

legal mining permit once the ownership of the land has been determined.

Reachable said the municipality organised two empowerment workshops for local mining group ‘Klipkoffie’, now known as ‘Koffiefontein Community’, on the application processes for mining permits.

It also coordinated roundtable discussions with Petra Diamonds to investigate the ownership of the land which was in question by the Letsemeng Community.

This led to the appointment of two professional land surveyors with a clear mandate to do an application to the Surveyor General on this matter on September 11, 2018.

A follow up meeting was held a week later to get feedback on the subject and it was confirmed the land belonged to Petra Diamonds, according to records at the Deeds Office.

In the spirit of transparency, the findings were communicated with all stakeholders in the meeting but was not well accepted by the “Koffiefontein community”.

Having expressed their dissatisfaction, it was resolved that Petra Diamonds and the community explore other avenues to reach consensus on the matter.

The municipality is still of the view that it will engage the mine to look for a lasting solution which will benefit both the mine and the community.

The mayor said the municipality had taken a solution-driven approach to this matter and has clear intentions to bring mutual beneficiation for all relevant stakeholders.

Reachable reiterated her commitment to serving her constituency, saying, “We will always strive to find means and ways to avail ourselves to serving and attending to issues relating to service delivery.”

She pleaded with residents to practice maximum discipline and refrain from burning and destroying community facilities and assets.

“The municipality strongly condemns any unwarranted behaviour and the destruction of municipal buildings and wish that the perpetrators face the full might of the law.

“We promote and encourage that constructive democratic processes be explored to engage on



Caught off guard . . . Letsemeng Local Municipality Executive Mayor Thandiwe Reachable

matters that affect the community,” she noted. She further pleaded with the demonstrators not to infringe upon the constitutional rights of other residents to access basic services.

“We are doing everything in our powers to contribute to job creation within our municipal jurisdiction. We’re exploring all possible avenues to create more job opportunities for our people,” Reachable said.

The municipality was fully supporting the Community Works Programme which had created in excess of 1000 jobs throughout all municipal wards.

Through the Expanded Public Works Programme the council has created a further 70

full time jobs.

Reachable said the municipality is also taking skills development of the youth in the area seriously. The programme currently has 120 apprentices in different skills development areas.

The council has also appointed more than 20 interns from different institutions of higher learning including the local Motheo FET College in the area.

“We will continuously embark on initiatives aimed at creating job opportunities in the area including the empowerment of local SMME’s who must in turn also hire more local people to assist the unemployment burden which confronts the municipality,” she emphasised.