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'SEXUAL HARASSMENT'

Deputy mayor 'should say why he should not be suspended'

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THE political rift in the scandal-prone municipality of Theewaterskloof is widening after a report found there was prima facie evidence in a sexual harassment complaint lodged against deputy mayor John Michels.

Michels was accused of making inappropriate remarks at a female subordinate. But Michels, a member of the GOOD Party, dismissed the allegations, saying they were "malicious fabrication".

The report, by Kruger and Blignaut Attorneys, says: "We confirm that we consulted with the principal complainants in this matter and found prima facie evidence that councillor Michels may have transgressed the code of conduct for municipal councillors, as determined by the Municipal Structures Act.

"The alleged transgressions arose after complaints of sexual harassment of a female staff member and interference in the placement of EPWP (Expanded Public Works Programme) staff were reported. It contravenes the code of conduct.

"The alleged list of transgressions are not comprehensive, and may be amended once we are instructed to draw up a charge sheet ... it is recommended that the councillor be afforded an opportunity to state reasons as to why he should not be suspended ... Michels failed to respond to our invitation to consult with him."

The complainant, who cannot be named due to the nature of the allegations, said the latest incident occurred in August, the same month the government declared National Women's Month.

"The last incident was on Mon-

day, August 22, 2022. He came to the office and made an inappropriate statement," she said.

"When I told him it was inappropriate to make such statements, especially in the workplace, he got cross and stepped out. He would tell me I look 'oulik' and 'lekker' as usual, and come tap me on the back. This has happened on numerous occasions in the workplace.

"I notified my husband and my husband then approached him to confront him. He then decided to go to social media and everywhere else to belittle me. They (the municipality) need to do their investigation because this happened in the workplace. I want him to acknowledge that what he has been doing to me is wrong," she said.

Michels told *Weekend Argus* on Friday that he hadn't seen the report.

"How is that you, the journalist, have the report before me?" said Michels.

"Shouldn't they keep me updated? I will bring this under the attention of my legal team ... But to answer your question, I am still very much innocent," he said.

GOOD Party national chairperson Sam Shabane said the party's internal probe of the matter was still under way.

"The investigation on John is ongoing. We are awaiting a final report which will guide us on the way forward," said Shabane.

"We take sexual misconduct very seriously. GOOD condemns every (incident of) GBV (gender-based violence). We will always listen to victims and be their voice. The GOOD Party is led by a woman, Minister Patricia de Lille, who is a champion of the emancipation of women and their empowerment," Shabane said.