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Politicians 'pocket' salaries

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Following on the heels of the severe seven-day water crisis, and adding to residents' outrage, a second scandal broke on Sunday, 27 July, when Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Dean Macpherson confirmed allegations of serious abuse within the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) in Matjhabeng.

It was revealed that politically connected individuals, including former councillors and current office bearers, were receiving inflated monthly salaries of over R31 000, more than ten times the standard EPWP stipend.

Coreen Malherbe, DA caucus leader in Matjhabeng, says these revelations point to blatant corruption and political patronage, completely undermining the core purpose of the EPWP, which is to provide short-term, skills-based work opportunities to unemployed South African citizens. In response, Minister Macpherson ordered an immediate halt to all EPWP fund transfers to Matjhabeng Municipality pending a full-scale investigation.

"The DA in Matjhabeng condemns this brazen abuse of public funds. While families struggle to survive, those entrusted with governance have enriched themselves at the expense of the poor and vulnerable.

Funds meant to provide dignity and opportunity were diverted to serve the self-interests of a corrupt political elite.

The DA remains committed to fighting for transparency, clean governance, and a municipality that serves its people—not its politicians."

The EPWP scandal has caused a national outcry. On Monday irate and infuriated EPWP grassroots level workers flocked around the municipality in confusion.

Macpherson suspended the programme pending a full investigation.

He said the allegations reinforce the urgent need to reform the EPWP to remove any possibility of corruption and political patronage.

It is alleged that former councillors and current political office bearers are receiving salaries from the EPWP payroll.

He stated that the EPWP was established to

provide short-term, skills-based work opportunities to unemployed South Africans, not as a vehicle for political patronage.

"The EPWP is an essential lifeline for many in communities across the country, including in Matjhabeng, and it would therefore be wholly unacceptable if any politician or official is found to have used the programme for personal benefit. We simply cannot turn a blind eye when serious allegations of abuse are raised, which is why I have instructed the Department to suspend EPWP fund transfers until a formal investigation can be completed," he said.

He added that the allegations further reinforce his view that the EPWP must be reformed to eliminate any possibility of abuse and ensure that intended beneficiaries fully benefit from the programme, free from political interference.

■ Following a bruising two days last week (24 and 25 July) of fielding difficult questions from members of the Portfolio Committee on Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Premier MaQueen Letsoha-Mathae made a promise to Dr. Zweli Mkhize, the chairperson of the committee, that the rot in local government would be rooted out.

"Do not accuse us of overreach when we act against failing municipalities," she said.

There will be consequences against failing municipalities and the premier will not entertain talk of interference from the leadership of the affected institutions.

The premier further committed that consequence management against officials found to be in contravention with the law will be applied.

"People often resort to the same old tired excuse that political battles are waged against them when they are supposed to account.

"That will not fly and we will act, and act hard, against anyone found to have contravened the law.

"Mayors, municipal managers, speakers and the entire leadership of our municipalities will be expected to account to the Executive Council. People are receiving salaries with nothing to show for it and we cannot be expected to keep quiet. Action will be taken," said Letsoha-Mathae.