

Minister embarks on a 'listening campaign' – 2011 Lekgotla

By Nthabiseng Mampuru

"I am listening," those were the words of Public Works Minister, Thembelani "Thulas" Nxesi at the Lekgotla that took place from 17 to 19 November at the St. Georges' Hotel in Pretoria.

The Minister was addressing the senior managers of the Department of Public Works at the Strategic Planning Session (*Lekgotla*) held with the purpose of producing a road map that will extricate the Department from its current dire situation which has seen the organization grappling with intense scrutiny by both the Auditor-General, the Special Investigations Unit and the Public Protector.

Logically the objectives of the *Lekgotla* were among others:

- To reposition the organization to make a meaningful contribution to the New Growth Path of government
- to contribute to service delivery by cost-efficiently responding to the needs of the clients
- to produce an environment conducive for performance characterized by high work ethic, compliance, and good governance

The Minister challenged the managers to forward their inputs because he believed that the Department and the Ministry was fundamentally united in a common goal which is to make the Department work better in delivering services to the clients.

He added that for the three weeks he has spent in the Department, it was like a rollercoaster ride because no sooner than he was sworn in as the Minister of Public Works, he was bombarded with complaints from the Members of Parliament (MP's) and other clients inquiring about accommodation.

The Minister says that he noticed that when it comes to the leasing of buildings, the Department has become the price setter (negatively so) in the market place because it tends to pay more than it should, adding that in their deliberations during the *Lekgotla*, managers need to reflect on the management of leases.

On the question of corruption, the Minister issued a stern warning: "I respect labour laws but will not tolerate corruption regardless of what your status in the Department is." He remarked that corruption undermines the public trust in government institutions and that it is also a betrayal to people, particularly the poor because the money that was supposed to be helping the poor goes to people who are in high positions and who earn a lot of money. "When you defraud the government, you defraud the poor, and society must deal with you heavily when there is proof," he exclaimed.

In his concluding address, the Minister remarked, "I have to see what works and what doesn't work. That is the reason why I embarked on a listening campaign. But I cannot listen forever, I have to act so there will be a transition from the listening phase to the informed planning phase.

The starting point will be to review the values and ethos of the Department, the major plans and priorities,” the Minister said.