

# editorial

## Politics of change: Keeping the genie in the bottle?

Over the past weeks, the impact of the leadership change in the African National Congress on government has become patently visible. The most important change was obviously manifested in the resignation of the President, three provincial premiers and a number of national Cabinet members, including the Minister for Provincial and Local Government. These significant developments have raised critical questions about the impact that the politics of change will have on local government.

It is clear that the political recall of an office bearer who was elected on a party ticket is constitutionally permissible. In fact, it may very well be the appropriate response to heal divisions in a political party. It is also clear, from the way in which the transition has been handled at national government level, that there is no place for alarmist predictions as regards the impact on national and provincial governance. However, there is cause for concern when it comes to local government. One can only hope that the politics of allegiance to national leaders does not become the sole driver for the political recall of municipal office bearers. There are two reasons why this warning is apposite.

Firstly, the emergence of a new generation of municipalities with a distinct mandate must mean that 'local politics should be about local politics'. The recall of local politicians should therefore be based on substantive reasons that concern local politics. If it somehow becomes compulsory for all leadership changes in national or provincial party echelons to be 'cascaded down' into local government, municipal politics will be nothing more than another platform for national politics. The municipal polity should be an arena where political parties contest municipal battles, not one where national battles are replicated.

Secondly, instability in a municipal council comes at a high price in service delivery; perhaps even higher than the price paid for instability in national or provincial government. One of the reasons for that is the manner in which municipalities, as bearers of both legislative and executive authority, are constitutionally configured. Effective decision-making during municipal council meetings is essential for service delivery. A council that fails to meet fails to serve its community. A council meeting where politicking squeezes out the opportunities to deal with policy issues does little to advance development. Finally, not all municipalities have covered themselves

in glory when it comes to managing local political transitions; a change in political persuasion or emphasis in the municipal council quite often leads to the council revisiting appointments in the administration and a prolonged 'inward focus' in the municipality.

It is for these reasons that it is hoped that the political instability will not spill over into local government. The leadership displayed by the new Minister for Provincial and Local Government in this respect will be of immense value. The *Local Government Bulletin* congratulates Mr Sicelo Shiceka, MP, on his appointment. His impressive record in the service of local government provides ample assurance that he is the right person for this important position.

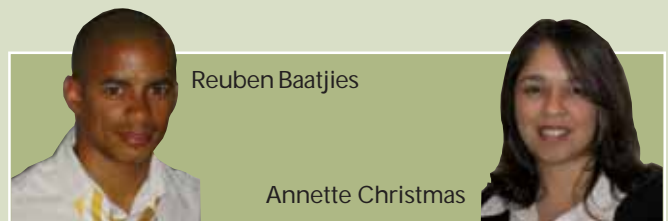
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On a personal note, the Local Government Project has also undergone some changes. The *Local Government Bulletin* bids farewell to its Managing Editor, Reuben Baatjies. Mr Baatjies has been an excellent Managing Editor and has been responsible for ensuring the high editorial quality and attractive appearance of the *Bulletin*. The Local Government Project wishes him all the best in his new position at the Western Cape's Department of the Premier. Annette Christmas takes over as Managing Editor and no doubt looks forward to continuing the tradition of service and knowledge-sharing with our readers.

Professor Jaap de Visser  
Editor



Mr Sicelo Shiceka, MP



Reuben Baatjies

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