

BUDGET VOTES **2024**



**TUESDAY,
20 AUGUST
2024**

Hon. K.M Makume
Finance



Fourth Raadsaal, Bloemfontein



treasury
Department of
Treasury
FREE STATE PROVINCE





Honourable Speaker

Honourable Premier and Members of the Executive Council

Members of the Legislature

Local Government and Traditional Leadership

Director General of the Province

Heads of Department

Distinguished Guests,

Hon. Speaker, when I stood before this house on the 1st of August to present the budget vote for the Department of Economic, Small Business Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs, I dedicated my speech to the victims of femicide and gender based violence. Today, as we conclude the budget vote debates of the 2024 Appropriation Bill I dedicate this budget speech to all the women out there who build up other women, who live bravely, who are both tender and fierce, who are strong, compassionate, unique, powerful and ambitious, who fight for more and achieve so much more for themselves, their families, this provincial government and the entire province of Free State. I salute you, the grandmothers, the mothers, the sisters, the movers, the shakers the home makers that love us, take care of us and shape us. Stand tall and stand proud for all that you are ... phenomenal women!

Hon. Speaker, while we celebrate the achievements of women in South Africa and the critical role they play in our society during women's month we remain deeply aware of the scope and extent of inequality when it comes to women's economic participation. It is for this reason that we will work closely with departments to achieve the target that we have set to allocate at least 40% of public procurement spend to women-owned businesses. We are delighted to share that all our departments have embraced and are implementing the new Preferential Procurement Policy, which for the first time provides an opportunity to accounting officers of various state institutions to include, among others, ownership of women in business as a specific goal. Hon. Speaker, I believe that with the commitment that the accounting officers of our provincial government has shown to implementing this Policy we will be able to drastically improve from the 12.22% of procurement spend that currently goes to women-owned businesses.

Hon. Speaker, the President in his Opening of Parliament Address pronounced the following three priorities for the 7th Administration:

- Firstly, to drive inclusive growth and job creation,
- Secondly, to reduce poverty and tackle the high cost of living; and
- Thirdly, to build a capable, ethical and developmental state.

The Provincial Treasury, as the custodian of public financial management in the province plays a key role in supporting the provincial and local government to deliver on these priorities. The Department will continue to engage and coordinate relevant stakeholders, encourage and persuade political and administrative commitment to good governance and clean administration and further support and enable employees in the public sector to discharge their duties in a manner that will lead to governance excellence. This will be done without neglecting our duty and responsibility to enforce the above if needs be.

Hon. Speaker, this budget vote speech aims to provide a brief overview of our performance during the previous financial year and outline our plans and programmes for the 2024/25 financial year.

Provincial Treasury has been appropriated an amount of **Three Hundred and Sixty-Seven Million Nine Hundred and Thirty-Seven Thousand Rand** (R367.937 million) which has been allocated as follows:

PROGRAMME 1: ADMINISTRATION

This programme provides leadership and strategic management and ensures that appropriate support services are provided to all other programmes of the provincial treasury.

Honourable Speaker, we believe that to help build a capable, ethical and developmental state, we have to start with ourselves. The Department currently has a vacancy rate of 18%, which is unacceptable if we want to provide effective oversight and support. The Department will therefore embark on filling key vacant positions.

At the same time we will be reviewing and rationalizing the organizational structure to ensure that it is aligned to our strategy and that we position the department to be resilient and adaptable in an ever-changing world.

Hon. Speaker, the proverb that the shoemaker's children always go barefoot, does not apply to Provincial Treasury in terms of financial management and accountability. I am happy to report to the house that the Department maintained its clean audit status for the 2022/23 financial year, and when we table the Annual Report for 2023/24 next month members will see that we are indeed on the right track. This is a three-year record of clean administration at our department. We indeed practice what we preach!

The Administration Programme has been allocated an amount of **One Hundred and Twenty-Eight Million Two Hundred and Sixty-Two Thousand Rand** (R128.262 million)

PROGRAMME 2: SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Hon. Speaker, the Sustainable Resource Management Programme is responsible for ensuring that there is improved fiscal sustainability in provincial departments and public entities. This huge responsibility is implemented through the various sub-programmes or directorates, namely, Economic Analysis, Fiscal Policy, Budget Management, Public Finance, Compensation and Infrastructure.

Hon. Speaker, we operate against a backdrop of the global economy facing downside risks occasioned by, amongst others, geopolitical tensions, high inflation rates and a high cost-of-living crises. Global growth is estimated at 3.2 percent this year and is projected to increase to 3.3 percent in 2025.

Our domestic economy is still faced with structural constraints such as electricity load reductions and logistics inefficiencies, in terms of port and rail, which undermine economic performance. Hon. Speaker, we strongly believe that the initiatives implemented by our government, amongst other, the establishment of the Energy Action Plan (2022) to address the challenges of load-shedding in the country and the development of the Freight Logistics Roadmap (2023) to remove the logistics binding constraints will assist in improving economic growth.

The South African economy is estimated to grow by 0.9 percent in 2024 and increase to 1.9 percent in 2025. Similarly, the Free State economy is projected to grow by 0.8 percent in 2024 on the back of the construction, transport and finance industries. The provincial economy is further estimated to trend around 1.3 percent in 2025. The challenge Hon. Speaker, as noted by the Minister of Finance, is that the pie is not growing fast enough to meet our fiscal and developmental needs.

We are pleased that amid the fiscal headwinds brought by, amongst others; fiscal consolidation, unfunded wage agreements and post Covid-19 challenges, we have been able to steer this fiscal ship towards steady waters. However, Honourable Speaker, we are not out of the woods yet and we will continue working closely with other departments to ensure that budgets are deployed effectively.

Hon. Speaker, as I said before, our economy is not doing well and that has serious implications for our fiscus. **We therefore have to do all in our power to ensure that the limited resources at our disposal translate into tangible services to our communities.** Our role as Provincial Treasury remains to ensure the effective, efficient and ethical implementation of budgets and the associated priorities, which is critical for the improvement and sustainability of socio-economic development, as guided by the relevant prescripts such as the PFMA and Treasury Regulations. We want to reassure the house that we will continue to strengthen our monitoring and that, working closely with the Legislature Committees, we will continue to hold departments accountable in relation to ethical utilization of the limited financial resources.

Hon. Speaker, we must recognize the challenging economic environment we continue to face as a province. Despite our concerted efforts, we are still navigating through turbulent times. In this context, cost containment measures are of utmost importance and strategically imperative as part of attaining fiscal sustainability for the province. These measures have resulted in immediate cost savings and fostered a culture of fiscal responsibility and efficiency within the provincial government. By embracing cost containment measures and fostering a culture of innovation and accountability, we can navigate these turbulent times and lay the foundation for a more resilient and prosperous future for the Free State. **We must build and institutionalize the culture of doing more with less.**

Hon. Speaker, mobilization of additional provincial revenue remains critical for the province, we cannot only survive on the national allocations to the province. Provincial Treasury, through its coordination and monitoring role, has succeeded in assisting the departments to attain their respective revenue targets. The teamwork between Provincial Treasury and the departments, including the Free State Gambling, Liquour and Tourism Authority (FSGLA), has resulted in an increase in revenue collection for the province in 2023/24. We will continue working hard to ensure that this trend is sustained over the 2024/25 MTEF.

Hon. Speaker, in the 2024/25 financial year the province is investing more than R5.1 billion in infrastructure projects. This is an enormous amount of money which, if deployed correctly, will assist in igniting the economy and creating work opportunities. We have taken deliberate steps to strengthen our monitoring of the implementation of infrastructure projects — we are happy to report to the house that our infrastructure directorate is fully operational, and we aim to fill all the vacant positions by end of the third quarter of 2024/25 financial year. **This unit exists to ensure that the rand spend matches the infrastructure work on the ground.** We will share our monitoring results and insights with both administration and oversight bodies. **The days of paying for work not yet done and getting away with it are over.**

The Programme has been allocated an amount of **Sixty-Two Million Two Hundred and Thirty-Eight Thousand Rand** (R62,238 million)

PROGRAMME 3: ASSET AND LIABILITIES MANAGEMENT

The Asset and Liabilities Management Programme is responsible for providing policy direction, facilitating the effective and efficient management of assets, liabilities and financial management systems.

Hon. Speaker, this programme monitors and supports departments to comply with supply chain management prescripts. Since the roll-out of the Preferential Procurement Regulation (PPR 2022) the Provincial Treasury conducted several working sessions with departments, entities, and service providers to address the implementation thereof. The Programme furthermore assisted departments to work towards achieving the allocation of 40%

procurement spend towards designated sectors, particularly women owned businesses, through Specific Goals and the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP).

Hon. Speaker, Provincial Treasury conducted several outreach programmes over the past years to guide local businesses on how to conduct business with the State. This was done to assist them to further enhance compliance in terms of different legislative requirements, introduce them to different programmes available to the community so to enable participation within the mainstream economy. Over the past financial year more than 500 local small businesses were supported in this manner. To ensure that more of our money is spent in the province, we further provided onsite support to Free State based businesses that are intending to transact with the State by registering them on Central Supplier Database (CSD). The Department will continue with this programme during the 2024/25 financial year.

Hon. Speaker, Provincial Treasury offers assistance to departments in the form of probity assessments or quality assurances. These are conducted at either bid specifications phase, which is prior to advertising, or at bid evaluation stage to assist departments to reduce bid cancellations due to SCM irregularities that will contribute to ballooning irregular expenditure.

Hon. Speaker, we noted that capacity constraints results in departments taking longer than expected to advertise bids and further delays awarding work to the deserving service providers. The above result in high amounts of unspent conditional grants, and unnecessary delays in implementing projects. To strengthen the implementation of supply chain management in departments and entities, the Provincial Treasury intensified its monitoring by moving from reporting only on procurement plans to include assessments and critically analyzing those procurement plans. In addition, the Department uploads bids on behalf of all provincial departments on various legislated websites. Key compliance reports are tabled in forums such as the Forum of Heads of Departments (FOHOD) and the Provincial Executive Council to enable oversight and accountability on the performance of those Procurement Plans. We further report on the progress made in the achievement of provincial targets through the implementation of the Specific Goals and RDP programmes.

We are confident that the passing of the Procurement Act will address some of the challenges experienced within SCM as it contains key principles such as the following:

- To leverage Government procurement policy to promote broad socio-economic objectives.
- The Procurement Act aims to be a single framework regulating public procurement and to prescribe a framework within which preferential procurement must be implemented.
- Identified risks within public procurement caused by corruption, state capture and fraud within the system.
- Addresses issues of acting with integrity for those stakeholders involved in the process and produces confidence in public procurement.
- Provision is made for codes of conduct for officials, bidders, suppliers, members of the Tribunal and other persons involved in a procurement process.
- Addresses undue influence and interference in a procurement process.
- Provision is made for automatic exclusion of specified persons from submitting bids, e.g. public officer bearers and employees in public administration.
- Provision is made for bidders or suppliers to be debarred from doing business with government if they engage in undesirable behaviour such as providing false information in a bid or any other document submitted to a procuring institution in connection with a procurement process or contract.
- It seeks to address the fundamental Constitutional provisions of protection or advancement of persons, or categories of persons, disadvantaged by unfair discrimination.
- Allowing the Public Procurement Office to investigate any procurement-related matter for purposes of establishing any non-compliance with the Act.

The Programme is allocated **Sixty-Nine Million and Ninety-Five Thousand Rand** (R69.095 million).

PROGRAMME 4: FINANCIAL GOVERNANCE

The role of the Financial Governance Programme is to promote accountability through substantive reflection of financial activities of the province as well as compliance with financial norms and standards. The Programme currently has two sub-programmes, namely Accounting Services and Provincial Risk Management and Internal Audit.

Hon. Speaker, all provincial departments, public and trading entities submitted the Annual Financial Statements and related documents in terms of sections 40 and 55 of the PFMA by the end of May 2024 to the Auditor General. Although the detailed audit outcomes and reports from departments and entities are confidential and will only become public information once tabled in September, we are thrilled to announce that for the first time in 9 years the provincial PFMA (provincial departments and entities) audit outcomes do not have any Adverse or Disclaimer Audit opinion. Hon. Members allow me to thank my colleagues in the Executive Council and their HODs and CFOs for their cooperation in attending our bilaterals, even on weekends, to address issues raised by the Auditor General. Your hard work has borne fruit. Ten of the 13 Provincial departments/Legislature were able to obtain either a clean or unqualified audit opinion for the 2023/24 financial year. Two departments improved from a qualified opinion to an unqualified with findings audit opinion and one entity improved from an adverse audit opinion to a qualified audit opinion with findings.

Though we announce the above progress, the road ahead is still long and needs much effort and commitment from all stakeholders. We will continue to work hand in hand with departments and entities to improve their audit outcomes for the 2024/25 financial year.

Honourable Speaker, to enhance the quality of the Annual Financial Statements and consequently the quality of Consolidated Financial Statements in the 2023/24 financial year, the Provincial Treasury has embarked on, among others, the following activities:

- The quarterly interim financial statements of all departments and bi-annual financial statements of public entities, trading entities, the Housing Fund and Legislature were assessed, and detailed assessment reports were provided to the Accounting Officers and CEOs with clear guidance on rectifications to be done. Overall 883 findings were raised in respect of the statements of departments and 190 in respect of those of

entities. Departments and entities were able to resolve 96% and 92% respectively before the financial statements were submitted for auditing.

- Work files were simultaneously submitted to Provincial Treasury and assessments were done to determine completeness in terms of the minimum requirement checklist.
- CFO forums were held by the Acting Provincial Accountant General as part of Provincial Treasury's oversight role to improve on the audit outcomes of departments and entities.
- Reconciliation was performed between departments and the Provincial Revenue Fund to detect material misstatements.
- Ten departments and two trading entities submitted journals to be processed based on Provincial Treasury's assessments and AGSA's preliminary findings. It was important to process these journals to improve the completeness and accuracy of the Financial Statements submitted to AGSA and Provincial Treasury by end of May 2024.
- Assessment reports are also forwarded to Chief Audit Executives and Chairpersons of Audit Committees for their information and enhancement of their oversight role.
- Monthly assessment letters are issued to HODs of Departments and CEOs of entities on the Key Control Matrix (KCM) and monthly and quarterly combined reports are submitted to the MEC: Finance, Tourism and Economic Development to forward to Executive Authorities for intervention, if required.

Hon. Speaker, good financial governance is necessary to ensure that public funds and financial assets and liabilities are managed transparently, accountably and with integrity in the interest of government's goals and objectives. We will therefore continue with our monitoring and oversight activities in this regard.

With regard to Risk Management, Provincial Treasury effectively coordinated training and webinars in partnership with the Institute of Risk Management South Africa (IRMSA) and the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE), utilising the corporate membership funded by the Provincial Treasury.

Risk Management Committees, established in the province in 2010, continue to operate with external independent chairpersons to ensure objectivity in discussions. Meetings, aligned with the approved Risk Management Charters, occur quarterly to oversee the implementation of Risk Management and provide feedback to relevant Accounting Officers/Authorities. Representatives from the Provincial Treasury actively participate in these committees, offering guidance and real-time advice on Risk Management matters.

Provincial Risk Management will continue to evaluate the maturity level of Risk Management in departments and public entities and determine to what extent does risk management assist management to make informed decisions, emphasizing its role as a tool to enhance the efficient and effective achievement of objectives.

Recognition of anti-fraud and corruption awareness days, such as Africa Anti-Corruption Day on July 11, Anti-Fraud Awareness Week in the Second Week of November, and International Anti-Corruption Day on the 9th of December, will be a priority in our pursuit of entrenching ethics in the province.

Hon. Speaker, to emphasize that we put our money where our mouth is, I am pleased to share with the house that the acting head of our own risk management unit, who is already a certified business practitioner, recently received an internationally recognised PECB Certified ISO 22301 Lead Implementer certificate. This certificate shows that one has the professional skills and practical knowledge to implement a Business Continuity Management System based on the requirements of ISO 22301. This achievement makes Mr Mashibini the first official in the province to hold this prestigious and globally recognised certificate.

In our continued endeavour to maximise the performance of Internal Audit Activities and capacity building initiatives, the Provincial Treasury, in conjunction with the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation successfully held a planning, performance, monitoring and evaluation session for Internal Auditors and Chief Audit Executives on the 10th of August 2023.

Hon. Speaker, Audit Committees are instrumental to the improvement of sound financial management in our institutions. Departments and public entities have appointed these governance structure to perform their respective oversight mandates to assist on enhancement of sound governance on various aspects of departments and entities'

functions. Furthermore, an Audit Committee chairperson's forum provides oversight on transversal functions in the province.

The current shared audit committees term ends in October 2024 and the recruitment process for the new shared audit committees is underway that will see the establishment of new shared audit committees during the 2024/25 financial year.

The Institute of Internal Auditors has finalised the Global Internal Audit Standards (GIAS) which were issued out on 9 January 2024 and will be effective on the 9 January 2025. As a result, Provincial Treasury is actively creating awareness about the GIAS and there is a need to align Internal Audit Functions' Strategic Documents to these standards. Capacity building sessions are being put into place to ensure compliance and effective implementation.

As part of ensuring that there are adequate processes to increase accountability and effective implementation of consequence management, Provincial Treasury embarked on a process for the appointment of panels of professional experts during 2024/25 that will focus on the following four functional areas:

- Internal Audit;
- Risk Management and internal Control;
- Forensic Investigations and unwanted expenditure; and
- Annual Financial Statements.

The appointment will enable Provincial Treasury to timely assist departments and public entities with execution of the above areas to ultimately realise sound financial management and good financial governance.

This Programme is allocated **Thirty-Two Million Nine Hundred and Twenty Thousand Rand** (R32.920 million).

PROGRAMME 5: MUNICIPAL FINANCE MANAGEMENT

Honourable Speaker, let me now turn your attention to Local Government Finance. As we traverse the difficulties in local government, it is critical to comprehend the myriad benefits that efficient municipal finance provides to our citizenry. Amongst other benefits, are the

bolstering of infrastructure and public services to stimulate economic development and improve our residents' quality of life. Hon. Members, effective financial management is the cornerstone of a thriving municipality.

However, we must not be oblivious of the challenges that we are confronted with, especially with municipalities that are in financial distress. Honourable Members, it is imperative to outline that a great number of our municipalities in the province are under financial distress, which makes it difficult for them to continue providing basic services and upholding public confidence. Clearly, by collaborating and putting creative ideas into practice, we can ensure that our municipalities continue to be robust and serve the needs of our people. Let us embark on this journey to comprehend how we can harness the power of municipal finance to build a brighter future for the Free State province.

Hon. Speaker before I sketch the plans and priorities for the financial year under review, let me first articulate how we have performed in the previous financial year.

The province has attained eight (8) funded budgets in the 2023/2024 municipal budget cycle through rigorous budget engagements with all our municipalities in the province. The attainment of funded budgets will enable our municipalities to be self-sustainable and provide much needed basic services to communities as well as to meet their financial obligations including payments to the creditors within the stipulated timeframes.

Targeted support on Revenue and Debt management has been provided to the following municipalities: Setsoto, Maluti-A-Phofung, Nketoana, Moqhaka, Tswelopele, Tokologo, and Mohokare on several revenue value-chain elements.

An Intergovernmental Debt Steering Committee (IGDSC) has been established, comprising of Provincial Treasury, COGTA, SALGA, Department of Education, and Department of Provincial and National Public Works and Infrastructure. The primary purpose of this Committee is to render support with intergovernmental debt to municipalities by government departments, as well as Section 21 schools.

A total of ten (10) local municipalities in the Free State Province are participating in the Eskom Debt Relief. These municipalities are: Matjhabeng, Tswelopele, Masilonyana, Nala, Moqhaka, Ngwathe, Dihlabeng, Nketoana, Phumelela, and Maluti-A-Phofung. In terms of

the programme's objectives and conditions, Eskom would write-off one-third of its arrear debt and interest as of 31 March 2023 if all conditions are met.

Honourable Speaker, I must point out that municipalities that participate in Eskom Debt Relief would also benefit from a Smart Meters Program. This means that such a municipality would be provided with a set number of smart meters (electricity and/or water) to aid in debt collection.

With regard to Supply Chain Management, seventeen (17) out of twenty-two (22) delegated municipalities in the Free State have established Disciplinary Boards, which will enable them to address matters of financial misconduct. Furthermore, municipalities have been capacitated on various elements of SCM with a view to assist them to enhance compliance as well as to enhance service delivery.

The National Treasury Procurement, Infrastructure and Knowledge Management (PINK) Capacity building Program funded by the Swiss State Secretariat of Economic Affairs (SECO) support started in 2019 and has resulted in positive outcomes on SCM at Setsoto, Moqhaka, Tswelopele and Metsimaholo municipalities wherein the internal controls have been intensified.

Our Accounting and Asset Management subprogramme has offered technical assistance to improve financial sustainability and has ensured compliance with the yearly reporting framework. This has resulted in enhanced compliance with the submission of financial statements for auditing from **14 municipalities submitting financial statements on time for the 2021/22 audit to 19 municipalities in the 2022/23 audit**. Kopanong and Tokologo municipalities improved from disclaimers to qualified audit opinions.

On risk management and internal audit, all twenty-two (22) municipalities were assessed for capacity in September 2023 as well as for functionality in March 2024. Both Risk Management and Internal Audit Forums were hosted in a bid to capacitate the Risk Practitioners, Internal Auditors and members of their committees. Induction sessions were also held for newly appointed Audit Committee and Risk Management Committee members.

On Municipal Interventions, the Provincial and National Treasuries alongside National and Provincial COGTA continued to monitor the implementation of financial recovery plans in the affected municipalities, **however I must indicate that this is one of the key areas where**

the province should enhance capacity to bring about much needed change in these municipalities.

Hon. Speaker, I must emphasize that the road ahead is still tough as we are still faced with municipalities without full time municipal managers, chief financial officers and other senior managers. Hon. Members, we cannot have our communities continue to live in squalor while we have municipalities with slow expenditure on conditional grants, sluggish implementation of financial recoveries, lack of implementation of consequence management and non-compliance to SCM and other prescripts.

With regard to our plans for the 2024/25 financial year, the Provincial Treasury alongside COGTA will offer technical assistance to all 22 designated municipalities in the 2024/2025 municipal budget cycle with a view to ensure that our municipal budgets are sustainable and relevant. Furthermore, the Provincial Treasury will submit consolidated reports on the budget process to identify areas that must be strengthened in order to improve credibility of our budgets.

Hon. Members, supply chain management plays an vital role in terms of igniting the economy in our local government as well as to improve basic services to our citizenry, thus in order to uphold confidence in our respective communities, we will continue to capacitate municipalities on different elements of SCM. We will further collaborate with other relevant stakeholders (COGTA and SALGA) on topics of common interest such as training of Municipal Public Account Committee (MPAC) Members and Disciplinary Boards.

Hon. Speaker at the beginning of my tenure as MEC for COGTA and Human Settlements, I spoke about my wish for a fora which would facilitate collaboration between COGTA, Provincial Treasury and municipalities in addressing audit matters. It finally came to fruition this year with District Audit Action Plan forums that took place during June 2024, with the purpose of monitoring progress made by municipalities in addressing the previous audit qualifications. Furthermore, the Provincial Treasury, in collaboration with COGTA, established a platform to monitor and assist municipalities with disclaimer audit opinions. Hon. Speaker, I am convinced that in the same way we eliminated disclaimer audit options in the PFMA environment, we will be able to eliminate it in these municipalities within the next 24 to 36 months if we work together. I want to go further Hon. Speaker and say that I am convinced that we will soon have some municipalities with clean audits too.

Hon. Members, it is our quest that the Mayors and Executive Mayors and Members of Mayoral Committees (MMCs) for Finance are briefed on audit processes on monthly basis with a view to solicit support where there are bottlenecks and monitor progress thereof.

As part of supplementary academic support to enhance audit outcomes Provincial Treasury will continue with master classes, where topics around the most common findings from the previous audits are discussed.

District mSCOA Steering Committee Forums will be resuscitated to improve on the implementation of Municipal Standard Chart of Accounts (mSCOA) and ensure that there are roadmaps in all municipalities. National Treasury is currently busy with the consultations for regulating the 15 business processes, and municipalities are urged to take part in these consultations.

In order to enhance financial governance within the municipalities, the Provincial Treasury will continue with the assessment of key performance indicators as well as to afford support to municipalities on Internal Audit and Risk Management. The sub-program will also enhance municipalities' capacity on internal audit and risk management, focusing on both activities and committees of internal audit and risk management.

The Municipal Finance Management Programme is allocated **Seventy-Five Million Four Hundred and Twenty-Two Thousand Rand** (R75.422 million).

CONCLUSION

Hon. Speaker, financial management is not just about numbers and budgets; it is about shaping the future of our province and improving the lives of our people. By harnessing the power of effective financial management, we can build a Free State that is resilient, inclusive, and ready to embrace the opportunities of tomorrow.

Hon. Members, as we look to the future, let us reaffirm our commitment to strengthening financial management and governance in the Free State Province. Let us prioritize investments that build resilience, promote sustainability, and enhance the quality of life for all residents. Together, we can create a vibrant, prosperous province where every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

Speaker, as we conclude the budget votes allow me to acknowledge and appreciate the support of the Premier and Members of the Executive Council, the Presiding Officers and members of the Public Accounts and Finance Committee for their support during the annual Appropriation Bill process.

I must also extend my appreciation to our public and private sector partners for their continued support of the work of Provincial Treasury.

I wish to thank the Head of the Provincial Treasury Mme Masechaba Sasing, together with the senior management and all the officials for their commitment to ensure that the Department executes its legislative mandate. Thank you also to the staff in my office for their hard work and support.

Thank you to the African National Congress for entrusting me with the steering of the provincial fiscus.

Allow me to also thank my family for their continued support.

Hon. Speaker, Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you.