



DEPARTMENTAL **BUDGET VOTE**

2026

HON. T.Z MOKOENA

COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS(VOTE 8)

**TUESDAY,
05 MAY 2026**

**Dr Cingo Secondary
School, Kroonstad**

#FSBudgetVote26



cooperative governance
and traditional affairs
Department of Cooperative Governance
and Traditional Affairs
FREE STATE PROVINCE



A **FREE STATE** 
THAT **WORKS** **FOR ALL**

Corporate Governance and Traditional Affairs - Budget Vote Speech –
2026/2027: Vote 8

Honourable Speaker

Honourable Premier of the FS

Honourable Members of the Executive Council

Honourable Members of the Legislature

Modulasetulo wa ntlo wa marena Morena Neo Mopeli

Matlatsa modulasetulo wa ntlo ya marena Kgosi Moroka

Morena e Moholo wa Bakoena Morena Moremoholo Mopeli

Morena e Moholo wa Batlokoa Merana Mota

Marena ohle a teng tsatsing lena

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

Bomme le Bontate

INTRODUCTION

Speaker, today we present the Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs Budget Vote to this house, and to the people of the Free State in general. The budget speech vote is not just a statement of budget estimates only, but an outline of the policy options indicative of the work we must do to turn local government around. The Constitution of the Republic directs both National and Provincial governments, by legislative and other measures, must support and strengthen the capacity of municipalities to manage their own affairs, to exercise their powers and to perform their functions. We play a supportive role, regulatory and as well as interventionist role when municipalities fail to execute their constitutional mandate.

Contrary to perceptions, municipalities are not branches of cogta but a sphere of government whose relationship with us is well-defined in law and the general regulatory framework. Despite some occasional flares up here and there, the Free

State Local Government is now experiencing increased administrative and political stability that is a critical condition for sustained service delivery.

The President of the Republic in his state of the nation address, declared 2026 “**The Year of Decisive Action to Fix Local Government and Transform the Economy**”.

This call is more relevant to the province as municipalities continue to confront disruptions on the provision of some basic services that are compounded by challenged bulk services infrastructure where sewer leakages, water interruptions are a common occurrence. In response to these the government has adopted a hands-on intervention approach with specific focus on administrative capacity, service delivery infrastructure, revenue enhancement measures, improving Auditor-General’s outcome and the general economic enhancement measures.

Speaker, we have also invoked Section 139 interventions in those areas where service delivery is compromised, and the local leadership is oblivious to the suffering inflicted upon our people. To date, we have invoked Section 1391b in Masilonyana, Nala, and Nketoana, where we have sent our teams with effective, decisive intervention powers. The Mohokare Local Municipality, due to problematic conduct of councillors, qualifies for Section 1391b, the provincial government can never fold arms where communities are subjected to collapse in service delivery, including the provision of electricity. The year 2026 marks the end of the current term of councils where the elections of municipal leadership are now set to take place on the 4th of November this year. Government is working together with IEC to prepare for these crucial elections.

Speaker, the Free State government will be working with various sectors of society to mobilise for improved voter turnout in these coming elections. We need our people to register and vote for councillors that must work for them to deliver services to communities.

2026/2027 BUDGET ALLOCATIONS

Honourable Speaker, the department’s budget allocation for the 2026/2027 financial year amounts to **R483.541 million** which represents a **6.2% increase** from the R455.2 million of the 2025/26 financial year. **R183 million is set aside to**

consolidate administrative capacity of the department, whilst **traditional institutional management receives R75,351 million**. This amount will not allow Cogta to fulfil the mandate of the new traditional handbook in terms of support for traditional leaders as they execute their work. A further engagement with Treasury is need here. The **provincial house of Traditional Leaders will receive R17.5 million** to run its affairs. Speaker cogta will directly build places for the two principal traditional leaders and R 5million is set aside for this purpose (hare sa romeletsa).

A further R132 million which makes 24% of our budget is set aside for local governance support. From this allocation we have set R22 million for municipal service delivery support that includes Mafube, MAP and others. Additional R20 million set aside in terms of section 154 municipal support programme and Xhariep is included here. Development and planning receive R70,1 million and this will allow us to support the water laboratory with R2,5million, disaster with R10million and cleaner city campaign receiving R5million. We can report that we have already secured five emergency vehicles for districts and processes are advanced to secure two new fire trucks for Maluti a Phofung municipality whose fire fighting capacity is compromised.

2026/27 Budget summarised

PROGRAMME	Allocated amount.
Administration	R183.022 million
Local Governance	R132.458 million
Development and Planning	R 70.112 million
Traditional institutional Management	R 75.351 million
House of Traditional Leaders	R 17.598 million
TOTAL	R483.541 million

A CALL TO ACTION, WE DARE NOT FAIL

2026 is declared as the year to fix local government and make the economy work. In line with this clarion call the department is determined to respond to the challenges that befall the local sphere of government in the province. To achieve improved appreciation of our role as Cogta, it is important that we clarify our relationship to local government and explain the legislative expectations from us. Our relationship with municipalities is not based on some overeagerness to usurp the powers and functions of municipalities. This is also not based on some uncontrollable sense of self-importance and desire to satisfy personal need for recognition.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa clearly states that “in the Republic, government is constituted as national, provincial and local spheres of government, which are distinctive, interdependent and interrelated”. Furthermore, the Constitution puts emphasis on cooperative governance, and the department is charged with the responsibility of being the single window of coordination of government affairs.

Section 154 of the same Constitution goes further to place a responsibility on national and provincial governments to **“by legislative and other measures, support and strengthen the capacity of municipalities to manage their own affairs, to exercise their powers and perform their functions”**.

Honourable Speaker, the same Constitution, in Section 155(6), charges me in my capacity as the MEC responsible for local government with the responsibility to **“provide for the monitoring and support of local government in the province”**. This naturally is required to be done without encroaching on the right of municipalities to manage their affairs. Section 139 of the Constitution makes provision for the relevant provincial executive to intervene in the affairs of the municipality where the municipality **“cannot or does not fulfil an executive obligation in terms of the Constitution or legislation”**.

Speaker, as illustrated above, as the Department, we have three (3) basic responsibilities towards local government, which is to support, monitor and to intervene where municipalities cannot or do not perform their Constitutional

responsibilities. The intervention in municipalities is done for one and only purpose, to assist them to live up to their Constitutional obligations.

INACTION IS NOT AN OPTION.

The recent State of Local Government report, which culminated into twelve out of twenty-three municipalities being identified as dysfunctional, is a matter of serious concern. The report demonstrates a situation in desperate need for intervention. This, Honourable Speaker, is a challenge that if we fail to respond to it, our people will forsake us.

The State of Local Government report reflected a need to assist municipalities to improve their Political, Administrative, Service Delivery and Financial capabilities. One of the immediate challenges that municipalities face is the need to professionalize their operations. The Municipal Staff Regulations promulgated in 2021, is a clear guideline towards professionalizing local government, ensuring that, amongst others, Public-Office bearers offices are staffed by competent and qualified officials. This is to ensure that we curb bloated staff establishments and high employee costs.

Local government is a sphere of government closest to the people, and the deployment of those responsible to this sphere must reflect that importance. We all challenged here to make it a point that the capacity to exercise oversight is not compromised. The political parties equally have the responsibility to deploy those with capacity to lead these municipalities with full appreciation and understanding of the responsibility at hand.

MUNICIPAL FAILURE TO CARRY OUT CONSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATIONS.

We have intervened in those municipalities identified as being unable or unwilling to fulfil their constitutional obligations. We have invoked Section 139(1)(b) in Masilonyana, Nketoana, Nala municipalities, where we assumed responsibility for the relevant obligation to the extent necessary to maintain essential national standards or meet established minimum standards for the rendering of a service. At the same

time, we have also invoked Section 139(5)(a) and (c) in Tokologo, Matjhabeng and Mafube Municipalities respectively to impose financial recovery plans.

Speaker, the Court declared that Ngwathe Municipality be dissolved in line with Section 139(1)(c) of the Constitution. As the department, we recognise the reality that the municipality has exercised its democratic right to appeal the decision. From where we are sitting, we would appreciate a situation where the matter is thoroughly engaged with and to find options where we can exercise other legal instruments available as opposed to dissolution. Speaker, contrary to dissolution, we prefer either a provincial or national intervention to help the municipality resolve its problems. Our view, which we will express in the courts, is strengthened by the reality that we are six months towards local government elections and by law no by-elections may take place during this period.

Matjhabeng is a municipality under that is under 139 5a&c financial recovery intervention as directed by the courts. The provincial government, together with the national treasury, has finalised the recovery plan and put measures in place for implementation. Speaker, the municipality must fully cooperate with the intervention team, as persistent refusal leaves us with no option but to approach the courts for a harsher decision. The adopted FRP terms and implementation protocols are clear on the role of the intervention team and the political management committee as now established should help to get things right.

SUPPORT AND CAPACITY BUILDING: SECTION 154

Honourable Speaker, in line with section 154 of the Constitution, to help municipalities perform their mandate, we have provided administrative support to municipalities and improve capacity through seconding personnel that is paid for by the department. We have done this in municipalities like Kopanong, Mohokare, Letsemeng, Mafube, Maluti-a-Phofung, Tswelopele and Moqhaka.

We have further made financial support to municipalities, amongst others, to improve their financial systems and service delivery. To this end, R27 million has been made

available to improve service delivery in the following municipalities: Mafube, Mohokare, Kopanong, Nala, Tokologo, and Masilonyana.

In Mafube, we strengthened the administration with the secondment of the Municipal Manager, Chief Financial Officer, and Director Technical Services. The section 139 team has also been strengthened with the appointment of the Lead EXCO Representative. Mafube is a subject of our focus, and to this the department had several engagements with the municipality on improving service delivery and addressing administrative challenges.

Whilst we applaud the performance of those municipalities that demonstrate improvement since the support provided, we, however, must mention our disappointment in some who systematically find ways to undermine the support that we provide. We must mention that despite the support that we provided, Mohokare and Moqhaka are municipalities that seem to be resolved to undermine the support we provide. These are municipalities that one would identify as clear candidates for section 139 1b intervention.

Speaker, in collaboration with the National Department of Cooperative Governance, the Provincial Treasury, and other sector departments, we have developed the Municipal Support Intervention Plans (MSIP), with the focus to turn around the state of municipalities in the province. Municipalities are also directed to develop their turn-around plans in a project management format with measurable deliverables and timeframes.

Honourable Speaker, Cabinet has identified and focused on turning around ten (10) municipalities in the whole country, three (3) of those municipalities are in the Free State, which are Mafube, Kopanong and Maluti-a-Phofung. The national Department of Cooperative Governance has developed a Municipal Performance Turn Around Strategy (MPTAS) for these municipalities. Implementation of this (MPTAS) is monitored strictly by Inter Ministerial Committee chaired by the Minister of the Department of Cooperative Governance.

PROFESSIONALIZING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The amendment to the Systems Act in 2022 to make the senior managers as identified in section 56 was a conscious effort to stabilize and professionalize local government. The main objective is to ensure that the atmosphere in local government is professionalised with a depoliticised senior management. In the beginning, the department experienced both reluctance and resistance to adherence of recruitment regulations, but we are now encouraged that municipalities are beginning to appreciate their responsibilities, and there are signs that we are turning the corner with an upward movement on the concurrences we issue on the recruitment processes. To this end, Setsoto local municipality has managed to fill both the post of the CFO and community services director in line with regulations, whilst Metsimaholo local municipality, despite the advice received, acted contrary to the regulations. In the coming days, the department will exercise its options, including legal avenues if no solution is found here.

The review of both the Appointment Regulations of Senior Managers and the Performance Regulations will be undertaken later this year. The province will have an opportunity to make inputs before the final Regulations are promulgated by the Minister. The review must be undertaken to further strengthen the recruitment of capable, quality, and professional managers our municipalities so badly need. As a result of the quest to professionalise the sector, we have ensured that only senior managers that meets all the competency requirements are appointed. The relationship between strong management and service delivery cannot be denied any longer.

FINANCIAL PERFORMANCE

Speaker, the Auditor General has given yet another negative verdict on the performance of the municipalities in our province, and it is not a good reflection. Yes, the number of municipalities that have submitted their annual financial statements for consideration by the Auditor General has improved. In 2024/2025 financial year, two municipalities and one municipal entity namely Nala, Maluti-a-Phofung together with MAP Water submitted their AFS after the deadline of the 31st of August.

Whilst Nala local municipality requested to submit their statements a bit later because of instability in the institution, Maluti a Phofung local municipality submitted their statements later to correct the recurring disclaimer audit opinions that they been receiving for the previous eight consecutive years. They showed a commitment to submit the AFS not only for malicious compliance but to improve the audit record of the municipalities.

For the financial year 2024/2025 as the Free State, we do not have even a single municipality that has achieved a clean audit opinion. We have municipalities that have continuously received Unqualified audit opinions, and they are thus challenged to improve their audit to a clean audit. We are convinced that Xhariep, Lejweleputswa, Fezile Dabi, and Thabo Mofutsanyana District Municipalities, along with Tswelopele, Setsoto, and Phumelela municipalities, can improve their audit performance from unqualified to clean audits.

Kopanong has demonstrated that with the support provided by the department, the audit outcomes can be improved. Since the Section 154 support in 2022, Kopanong has continued to improve its performance and the number of paragraphs on material irregularities has decreased considerably. Honourable Speaker, today, we congratulate Dihlabeng municipality for improving their audit performance from qualified to unqualified report. We say to them that the challenge is to move from qualified to clean audit opinion, it is doable. Maluti A-Phofung is awaiting the Auditor-General (AG) to finalise their audit and we are hoping for improved and reduced findings on audit report paragraphs that should pull them out of disclaimer either now or in the next audit cycle.

As part of the efforts to push the province towards a clean audit we have established a joint effort led by the Premier, Cogta and Treasury that works with AG in the province. This teams will work with identified municipalities to enforce audit action plans as adopted.

CREATING ENABLING ENVIRONMENT FOR LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Honourable Speaker, the province, through the Department monitors and supports municipalities in the implementation of Local Economic Development with the aim of eliminating economic challenges and creating an enabling environment for local economic growth. The department assisted municipalities in developing and adopting the LED Strategies. The aim of LED strategies is to ensure that municipalities create an enabling environment that will ensure local economic growth. Through their LED strategies, municipalities are encouraged to use their available economic infrastructure like old factories buildings to attract investment and create sustainable jobs.

Honourable Speaker, over the past two years, township spaza shops have drawn the attention of the country as there were reported cases of food-borne illnesses. The prevalence of illicit and non-compliant food represents a significant threat to the health, safety, and security of the community at large.

Effectively, intervention measures were outlined, including those that relate to the local government sector. Municipalities are expected to register businesses and the Department, together with DESTEA and SALGA, are playing an oversight role by monitoring the progress on the registration of businesses in the municipalities.

Promulgation Township Economies By-laws is paramount to the success of all the LED strategies. Currently, the challenge due to the lack of Township Economies By-laws promulgation is evident in the disproportionate number of business applications received and approved from foreign nationals. The number indicates that the country and indeed municipalities in the province, must strengthen and properly screen business applications, and ensure that South African residents are prioritised.

We call on municipalities to have a standing council item on economic growth and regular reporting on approvals and rezoning that required by many investors. Investments incentives schemes that involve rates reductions or waivers, use of municipal land or factories that are idling or deserted. Together with destea we must finalise a framework that will guide municipal economic growth in a focused manner.

PROVISION OF FREE BASIC SERVICES

Speaker, all local municipalities in the province have indigent policies and the department has supported the development of credible indigent policies and monitored the implementation of both the indigent policies and registers. The municipalities, as well as the Metro, are updating the indigent policies and registers. We have ensured, in the previous financial year that a communication strategy is developed and implemented on the provision of Free Basic Services by the municipalities, and is tailor made for each municipality.

PROVISION OF BASIC SERVICES

Speaker, our municipalities appear to be battling with a sustained provision of services in areas of refuse removal, road maintenance, water, and sewer spillages including cleaner cities. As we put pressure and support for uninterrupted services, we must also be firm that communities must pay for services. Municipalities are struggling because the **majority of our people are not paying for services**. It costs money to treat water; it costs money to treat sewer and yes, it costs money to maintain roads and close potholes.

Baahi ba lokela ho patala ditshebeletso tsa bo mmasepala. Metsi, ditsela, ho tloswa ha matlakala le ho hlwekisa dibaka tsa rona di hloka tjhelete. Ba mmasepala ba tshwere ka boima hao osa lefe ditshebeletso. The culture of non-payment destroys bokgoni ba ha fana ka disthebeletso. Municipalities must enforce payment of services, including taking action against those able to pay but are simply refusing. Hao osa kgone ho lefa ingodise hore obe karolo ya indegent registers. We can no longer allow the culture to continue it destroys our municipalities.

I am happy that Treasury is now going to take money from those departments that are not paying municipalities. In the same vein all councillors, Members of the Provincial Legislatures (MPLs) and all officials of government must pay and update their accounts. We must develop mechanisms to monitor and chase after those not paying.

COMMUNITY WORKS PROGRAMME (CWP)

Honourable Speaker, Community Works Programme remains one of the strategic job creation programmes in government and is implemented in all municipalities in the Free State, creating 19 500 job opportunities. The Department has supported municipalities of Fezile Dabi district in establishing partnerships around recycling with organisations linked to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries, and Environment. Furthermore, all municipalities have been provided with cleaning and greening tools for the cleanest and greenest municipality competition. Through the visible service delivery strategy, we delivered **CWP working tools to the tune of eight million rands.**

We have successfully coordinated the cleanest and greenest municipality competition for the 2025/2026 financial year, supported the creation of job opportunities through the Community Works Programme (CWP), and established partnerships between municipalities and different stakeholders to enhance the delivery of basic services.

USING SPATIAL PLANNING TO MAKE PEOPLE'S LIVES BETTER

Honourable Speaker, spatial planning was used by the government of the past to entrench separate development. We as the province are committed to addressing these imbalances, assist in facilitating security of land tenure, create job opportunities, improve access to social amenities, and ensure that the quality of life of our people is enhanced. As a result, and as promised in the previous financial year, there is speedy approval of developments in our municipalities, Provincial Spatial Development Framework was drafted and various Municipal Spatial development Frameworks drafted and continuously implemented.

I am pleased to inform the House that all Municipal Planning Tribunals (MPTs) in the province have been appointed and are fully functional. Speaker, we will continue in the new financial year to provide necessary resources for improving the functionality of the MPTs. As promised, we have appointed a Provincial Advisory Board that will assist in facilitation of applications that have provincial impact. We also assisted the municipalities of Mohokare, Tswelopele and Phumelela to implement their Spatial

Development Frameworks (SDFs). Spatial Development Frameworks are one of the planning tools that provide direction for future development in municipalities. In this financial year, the department supports SDF implementation for Letsemeng, Mafube, and Tswelopele. We will continue with the review of Letsemeng and Maluti a Phofung Spatial Development Frameworks. In this financial year, the Free State Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Bill will be enacted. This Bill addresses spatial planning matters in the entire province.

Honourable Speaker, we will continue to capacitate municipalities and traditional leaders on spatial planning and land use management, ensure that the development applications are attended to timeously, support with land use management, provide support with the provision/maintenance of Geographical Information Systems, and ensure that the Municipal Planning Tribunal has regular meetings.

DISASTER MANAGEMENT AND BUILDING RESILIENCE OF THE STATE

Honourable Speaker, disaster Management remains a critical enabler in building a capable, resilient, and developmental state. In the Province, the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters ranging from floods, veld fires, and severe storms to infrastructure failures and emerging health risks continue to expose systemic weaknesses within local government. Municipalities, as the sphere of government closest to the people, are at the forefront of disaster response. However, persistent challenges, including limited institutional capacity, inadequate planning, ageing infrastructure, and non-compliance with legislative frameworks, continue to undermine their ability to prevent, prepare for, and respond to disasters effectively.

In response to the national and provincial call for decisive action to fix local government and transform the economy, the Department, through the Provincial Disaster Management Centre, will implement a focused, results-driven programme to strengthen municipal disaster management capabilities and reduce disaster-related risks.

To strengthen municipal and institutional capacity the department will in the 2026/27 financial year will intensify support to municipalities to ensure compliance with the

Disaster Management Act (Act 57 of 2002) and the National Disaster Management Framework.

This will include:

- Supporting municipalities to establish and fully operationalise Disaster Management Centres or designate functional disaster management units.
- Ensuring the appointment and capacitation of dedicated Disaster Management Focal Persons in all municipalities.
- Providing structured technical support for the review, alignment, and council adoption of Disaster Management Plans, ensuring integration into Integrated Development Plans (IDPs); and
- Strengthening governance through Provincial Disaster Management Advisory Forums (PDMAF) and district-level coordination platforms.

Speaker, we are committed to building a capable and professional disaster management system. The department undertakes to engage in the following:

- Roll out targeted training and capacity-building programmes for municipal officials, including disaster risk reduction, incident management, and emergency coordination.
- Support municipalities to align operations with national standards such as SANS 10090, thereby improving fire safety and emergency response capability.
- Strengthen Incident Command Systems (ICS) and Joint Operations Centre (JOC) functionality to ensure coordinated, multi-sectoral responses; and
- Facilitate participation in national and international training platforms, including specialised programmes such as Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) and emergency management training.

In addition to the above, the department will ensure that the following activities are actively implemented enhance Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Resilience,

strengthen Fire Services and Emergency Response Capability, improve disaster funding, recovery, and accountability, strengthen fire services and emergency Response Capability and Contribute to Economic Transformation and Development

RESPONDING TO SERVICE DELIVERY: OPTIMIZING GRANTS USE.

Honourable Speaker, the Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) continued to contribute towards municipal service delivery in the province. During the 2025/26 Municipal Financial year which will come to an end by 30 June 2026, an amount R 784 526 000 was allocated to Municipalities towards the Municipal Infrastructure Grant. An amount R 336,488 million (43%) from the total allocation was spent by 30 December 2025. A further amount of R4,9 million of the total approved 2024/25 MIG roll over of R39m was spend by 31 December 2025.

These amounts were spent by Municipalities on the following infrastructure services: Water: 23%, Sanitation: 30%, Roads and Storm water: 28%, Sport and Recreation: 9%, Project Management Units: 5%, High Mast Lights: 2%, Specialized Vehicles: 2% and others such as Solid Waste Disposal and Cemeteries: 1%.

OUTLOOK ON THE 2026/2027 MUNICIPAL FINANCIAL YEAR

The Municipal Infrastructure Grant (MIG) allocated an amount of R 949,469 million towards the implementation of municipal infrastructure projects within the 18 receiving Municipalities for the 2026/2027 Municipal financial year. According to the Municipal MIG implementation plans received from the 18 Local Municipalities it is envisaged that the grant will be spend on the following project categories: Water: 29%, Sanitation: 28%, Roads and Storm water: 24%, Sport and Recreation: 8%, Project Management Units:5%, Solid waste disposal: 3%, Specialized Vehicles: 2%, Sidewalks and Cemeteries:1%. It is further envisaged that an estimated 2500 temporary job opportunities will be created within the 2026/2027 MIG financial year.

Through Vaal Central Water Wastewater Treatment Plants in Matjhabeng and Maluti a Phofung Local Municipalities are receiving due attention during the current and next financial year. This is part of Ministerial Intervention to support Municipalities to improve on their service delivery mandate. Bucket Eradication is also being

implemented by Department of Water and Sanitation in the three Municipalities of Nketoana, Setsoto and Tokologo. As a province we face backlog of 160 thousand non flushable sanitation we need to eradicate. This was placed firmly on the table during the national cabinet visit to the province and further engagements with treasury, Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) and national cogta will follow soon.

READINESS FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS

Honourable Speaker, the forthcoming local government elections, require the department to promulgate Section 12 Notices, which will determine the size and format of municipalities across the province. The size and form of municipalities will have to take into cognisance the will of the electorate and should be able to reflect participatory democracy. Speaker part of our preparations must anticipate the possibilities of hung municipalities that will require coalitions. We therefore intend to ensure that the will of the electorate is adequately reflected through the section 12 notices.

The Department will also engage in consultations with the Municipal Demarcation Board, as mandated by Section 85 of the Municipal Structures Act, regarding the initiation of the process to amend the current adjustment of the division of functions and powers between District and Local Municipalities. In further preparation for the 2026 Local Government Elections, the Department will provide several support initiatives aimed at assisting municipalities. These initiatives are intended to ensure that Municipal Managers and Councillors are adequately prepared to perform their duties and to conduct the procedures of the first council meeting effectively.

As we manage the transition we must deal with the re-determination of municipal boundaries, transitional measures as duly enjoined to do so by legislation that involve a range of legal, administrative, and financial considerations that requires careful and coordinated attention. All municipalities without exception are expected to prepare and table Handover Reports by not later than 15th September 2026 to enable the incoming Councils to have Reports on the 5-year performance Report

Additional support measures will include the provision of Training Packages, whereby Municipal Managers will receive comprehensive guidance on how to conduct the inaugural council meeting. Additionally, the Department will attend and monitor all first council meeting proceedings to offer guidance and support as required. Post-election, the Department will continue to aid municipalities concerning the Local Government Legislative Frameworks to ensure compliance and effective governance.

Speaker, as we navigate the complexities of community engagement, let us leverage the Municipal Systems Act's provisions to develop robust processes for handling concerns and complaints. By doing so, we will build trust and address issues proactively. The Department is committed to continue supporting municipalities in this effort, providing guidance and resources to help mitigate potential disruptions and foster constructive dialogue.

Let us collaborate to create effective platforms for engagement, address grievances, and strengthen community relationships. To this end, we encourage municipalities to establish rapid response teams that will deal with emerging service delivery challenges. These teams must report technically to the Accounting Officer and politically, Mayors must take full responsibility and report to councils about the interventions.

As we approach the local government elections, we will prioritize ward-based education programmes to raise awareness and encourage participation in the elections processes. Community Development Workers will be crucial to this effort – let us deploy them to reach communities, especially potential first-time voters, and ensure they are informed about the elections and their role in shaping local democracy.

Speaker, with the elections on the horizon, the Department will be assisting municipalities with the review of Public Participation policies, Standard Rule and orders, Framework for the payment of out-of-pocket expenses, guidelines for the disestablishment and re-establishment of ward committees we're gearing up for the establishment of new ward committees within 120 days after the elections.

The Department will support municipalities with the establishment process and provide training for new members. Let us ensure these committees serve all people in their communities, remaining impartial and focused on community needs rather than political interests.

In setting up these committees, we must ensure that our ward committees are sector-based to strengthen accountability and representativeness. The current administration as well as the new municipal councils, should consider reviewing and potentially increasing the Out-of-Pocket payment for members to support their important work.

TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS

The department, working together with the National Department of CoGTA, has stepped up efforts to improve the conditions of service and support provided to traditional leaders. For quite some time the country had no clear framework for enabling government comprehensive support to traditional leaders. Today we can indicate that the handbook for traditional leaders provides a comprehensive legal basis that outline how this support is undertaken in terms residences, security for traditional leaders, traditional councils' office accommodation and vehicles. Speaker we are happy to report that we have finally managed to secure descent vehicles for principal traditional leaders in the province.

There is a new storm raging in the province in the build up to the forthcoming Local Government Elections, that is, the mushrooming of "fake, illegal traditional leaders". My office has been inundated with correspondences addressed to different municipalities by these fake persons, masquerading as traditional leaders, seeking recognition and resources from those municipalities.

I wish to state it categorically clear, it's only the Premier and the President that has power and authority to recognise traditional leaders, and any person claiming to be a traditional leader must showcase his traditional leadership status by producing a recognition certificate from either the Premier or the President.

Honourable Speaker, customary initiation is practised by many people in our province, as there is both males and females undergoing this process. Thus, the customary initiation's safe practise is critical in ensuring the preservation of this culture. It is, however concerning that despite the strict oversight by government and other stakeholders, this age-old cultural practice is marred with challenges such as Commercialisation, Unregistered Schools, Unregistered Traditional Surgeons/Care givers, Injuries, and Frequent deaths.

In the recent Summer Customary Initiation Season, there were 13 187 initiates in registered initiation schools, and 154 in illegal schools sadly, seventeen initiates died at different initiation schools during this season. We cannot allow the initiation school practitioners to turn the customary initiation practice into a culture that is killing the people. The establishment of Provincial Technical Committee, comprising of all government sector departments and organised local government together with the partnered with CATHSSETA (Train young unemployed graduates and customary Initiation Practitioners in Hotspot areas) is one of the response measures undertaken here.

CONCLUSION

Speaker, the work to reposition municipalities in the province requires political will and buy in from all stakeholders if we are to move faster and consolidate service delivery. This is key requirement in both distressed and dysfunctional municipalities as experienced in the province. Today we have a basket of consolidated intervention measures between both national cabinet and the provincial executive council. This are indicated by the inter ministerial cluster on local government where we participate as the province and this has enabled the national cabinet to receive reports and make regular decision on all issues local government. The Free State cannot slack behind as the cabinet has a legal right to intervene if we refuse to act.

Our efforts are consolidated and municipalities are responding except a very few and in the next few months, we will begin to see results as the AGs reports begin to indicate that despite general slow progress, we do have upward movement with reduction of findings paragraphs, as in Dihlabeng upward movement, Mafube

improvements on internal controls, etc. We have also achieved political and administrative stability in the majority of municipalities, and Mohokare should be stabilised in the coming days. We are working with DWS to stabilise treatment plants in many areas, improving MIG performance and functionality of key oversight committees such as MPACs and audit committees. Our work is cut out, and we dare not fail.

Finally, let me express my gratitude to the COGTA HOD and the senior management for the hard work we have undertaken. Thanks to municipal leadership that serves our people despite the daily difficulties confronted. The ANC is my organisation that understands that our work here is about the people and nothing else. The Premier of the province, Mme Letsoha Mathe.

Finally, I thank my family, the kids, and my beloved partner for both support and understanding of the very demanding schedule of the work we do.

No retreat, no surrender, we shall never tire to serve our people