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The Political Role of the Councillor

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PREFACE

The ANC councillor capacity building programme

During the twelve months preceding the 5 December 2000 local government elections, the African National Congress (ANC) conducted an assessment of the performance of each of its councillors. Many felt that this process was flawed, as it was never clearly outlined to councillors what would be expected of them. The ANC and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) then decided to develop a capacity building programme for all ANC councillors. This programme would ensure that councillors had access to the information they needed and knew what would be expected of them.

The ANC 2000 Local Government Elections Manifesto provided a guide to the issues that needed to be addressed in the support materials. These included:

- improving services to all communities;
- providing a free basic level of services like water and electricity to every household;
- creating jobs in communities where people live;
- working for social and economic development;
- building safety and security in our communities; and
- fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS.

The Manifesto went on to state that councillors should regularly report back to their constituencies, should fight corruption in tendering, hiring and other government functions, and that they were obliged to declare all their assets and business interests. If councillors violate any of the above or the code of conduct for councillors, they will be recalled.

Stages of the project

The first step in the development of the programme was the development of a set of materials based on the issues highlighted in the Elections Manifesto. The following modules have been developed:

- The Legislative Framework of Local Government

- Free Basic Municipal Services
- Improving Service Delivery
- Local Economic Development and Job Creation
- Social and Economic Development
- Safety and Security
- Fighting HIV/AIDS
- The Political Role of the Councillor
- Gender
- Budget and Finance

The second step would be to publish the above materials and make them available to councillors as a guide to performance.

Conclusion

The ANC is currently setting up local government accountability structures which are meant to provide, in a structured manner, opportunities for ANC councillors to remain accountable and in touch with ANC structures and voters. During the course of the year, the ANC will also finalise the process for councillor performance audits in time for a mid-term performance review of all ANC councillors. Some of the issues that will be considered during the performance assessments are:

- How has the council performed in terms of meeting its development objectives: integrated development planning? the budget? financial viability? and local economic development?
- How has the individual councillor performed in terms of: implementation of ANC policy and programmes? loyalty and discipline as a cadre of the organisation? participation in council and caucus? constituency work? accountability to ANC structures? observation of the code of conduct for councillors?

The process has not yet been finalised, but would comprise a combination of strategies including data collection, self assessment, peer assessment and assessment by ANC constitutional structures.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The councillors

Councillors are representatives of the people and owe their primary loyalty to those who voted for them. This may be in their personal capacity, and/or because of their political affiliation if they are ward councillors, and/or as members of a particular party if they are elected from their party lists. In any case, it is the duty of councillors to act at all times in the best interests of the residents and of the municipality as a whole.

The Constitution stipulates that anyone who can cast a vote in a local government election can stand for office. There are, however, several exceptions, and the following people are not eligible:

- anyone who is under the age of 18;
- anyone who works for a municipality (unless exempted by the provincial minister for local government);
- unrehabilitated insolvents;
- anyone declared to be of unsound mind by a court;
- anyone who has been convicted and sentenced to more than 12 months' imprisonment since 1996 without the option of a fine; and
- members of national and provincial parliaments and other municipal councils.

Once elected, ward councillors must realise that they represent all the individuals and stakeholders in their ward, no matter what their background, political views or for which candidate they voted. Stakeholders include businesses, community organisations, religious organisations, schools, youth groups, and associations representing the elderly.

The responsibilities of councillors are described in the Municipal Structures Act, which also contains a Code of Conduct.

Councillors may be called upon to serve on various committees, known as standing committees. Standing committees are formed to ensure that the various functions of the council are performed in accordance with the Constitution and the legislative framework for local government. Many preliminary decisions are taken in standing committees, and many policies are formulated there. They may be regarded as the basic workplace of the council.

Councillors must act in the best interests of all the residents in their municipalities, not just those who voted for them.

The main role of councillors is to ensure that the objectives set out in Section 152 of the Constitution are achieved. The council is also obliged to review annually the needs of the community, how it goes about meeting those needs, its own priorities, and its overall performance in achieving targets. It also has to develop mechanisms for consulting individuals and community organisations to identify their priorities and needs.

In short, the responsibility for good governance and effective implementation of programmes lies with the elected councillors.

1.2 A break with the past

The local government elections held on 5 December 2000 were the first fully democratic local elections in South Africa.

The development
of democratic
local government
has posed many
challenges.

The evolution of developmental local government has been uncharted territory, and has posed many challenges for both councillors and officials. This has resulted in a great deal of friction. From the outside, both groups are perceived as belonging to one organisation that is there to meet public needs. From the inside, councillors and officials have very different perceptions of their roles, functions and status.

Councillors have seen their role as developing policy and giving direction to the administration. However, given the relative inexperience of some of the councillors who entered the system in 1995, in practice it has often been the officials who have known what is required in the local government environment and who have outlined what policies should be adopted.

The challenges posed by the 1995 local government elections and the transformation that ensued have not made things easier.

It is often difficult for councillors to understand the exact nature of their role. It is not enough to attend council meetings once a month to hear departmental reports that do not deal adequately with the service delivery problems facing communities. Nor is it easy to redirect resources to under-served areas when insufficient revenue is collected from such areas to maintain and service new investments. Within the many different tasks and procedures of local government, councillors must define their role as members of a council involved in community consultation, policy-making and decision-making.

Councillors should also understand the kind of assistance they will receive from officials. Councillors and officials must find a way of working together to make the most of limited resources, and understand that they are working towards the same end even though their roles are different.

The duties of councillors are determined to some extent by legislation. However, legislation covers only the formal duties, and merely provides the framework within which councillors can interact with the community and the

appointed officials. Officials, on the other hand, take their cue from the policy framework that is determined by the council. This is not as clear-cut as it appears; quite often officials, drawing from their experiences with the electorate, are able to identify policy gaps and how they could be filled. The processes of policy-making and implementation are closely interrelated, and in practice require close co-operation between all those involved.

Councillors are involved in various processes regarding the formulation of new policies on a wide range of issues. Councillors are responsible for translating visions and strategies into policies. Some examples of policy statements are:

- a decision about the standard level of service to be provided to all residents in a given financial year; or
- an affirmative action policy that may set certain targets – for example, that within two years senior management must be representative in terms of race and gender.

Policy formulation is usually the result of a long process of analysis, advice and political discussion about strategies and approaches.

Councillors show political leadership in the way in which they monitor implementation. This involves giving guidance to appointed officials, calling for regular progress reports, and holding them accountable for their actions. Councillors are also responsible for ensuring that organisational resources are applied towards the direct achievement of policy objectives.

1.3 New challenges

The progression for local government from being only service-oriented to being developmental places tremendous pressure on the relationship between councillors and officials. They must rely on each other's skills and competencies in order to fulfil their mandate. This new competency for local government carries many risks, and is not necessarily embraced positively by all councillors and officials.

Among other things, it means acknowledging that the local authority cannot function alone. It is necessary to harness the resources of all stakeholders, and to plan together to utilise these resources to the benefit of the area. This means that councillors have to be conscious of the identity of various stakeholders and what they do. Do any of the stakeholders have strong partnerships with the council? Are they community groupings, private sector, finance institutions, small and medium-sized entrepreneurs, government agencies, or ordinary citizens? Who lives and works in the area?

The council's mandate to integrate and deliver services comprehensively

Councillors and officials have to find new ways of working together.

and equitably will not be carried out without the following:

- a common understanding of the problems the area faces;
- acknowledgement of limitations and resources;
- a clear vision and understandable targets;
- the support of the community; and
- a commitment as a single council.

The relationship between councillors and officials must be a positive one in order to promote efficient service delivery.

The new demarcation and consolidation of local government boundaries means that municipalities that are not viable are being clustered with those that are viable. This, it is hoped, will bring about strong local government. The amalgamation of areas into a single entity has its own problems. If councillors and officials from the affected municipalities do not face these problems together, the transformation of local government could be delayed. The reduction in the number of councillors and the advent of new local governance structures puts pressure on the remaining councillors to do more with less. If the relationship between councillors and officials is not a positive one, there is a risk of poor service or no service at all, particularly in peri-urban and rural areas.

2. TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

2.1 What do these terms mean?

'Transparency' and 'accountability' are words that have been used frequently in the past few years. The danger is that they will become mere mantras, chanted for effect but having no substance. The very essence of meaningful democracy is that there is openness and real accountability in governance. Part of accountability is holding regular elections, but because of the time between elections additional mechanisms are required.

Section 41 of the Constitution states that all spheres of government – including local government – must provide effective, transparent, accountable and coherent government for the Republic as a whole. This is a benchmark which a court may use in considering the activities of a sphere of government. In addition, Section 160(7) of the Constitution states that municipal councils must conduct their business in an open manner. They may close the sitting of the council or a committee only if '...it is reasonable to do so having regard to the nature of the business being transacted'.

At first glance, it appears that councils and committees have *carte blanche* to

go into closed session, but this is not the case. First of all, in terms of Section 41, there is the requirement for spheres of government to be transparent and accountable. Secondly, it must be reasonable to go into closed session. Reasonableness is difficult to interpret because it allows for subjective opinion, but 'reasonable' should be seen as being what is 'reasonable in particular circumstances'. Thirdly, the power to debate and decide behind closed doors and the notion of reasonableness are qualified by the words 'having regard to the nature of the business being transacted'. This means that every time a council or committee wants to go into closed session its members must ask themselves certain questions:

- Is it reasonable to do so?
- In a democratic and open society, should this particular item of business be decided behind closed doors?

In a democracy, the principle of accountability is closely linked to transparency. Transparency is the creation of openness and access so people can see what is going on in government and society. Government has a duty to make information available to communities; similarly, communities have a duty to obtain that information. Government cannot be accountable if communities have no way of finding out what government is doing.

The Open Democracy Bill provides details on what transparency means in South Africa. Mechanisms to ensure government accountability and transparency include:

- report-backs by members of Parliament or local councillors to their constituencies;
- reports by parliamentary committees to Parliament or by local standing committees to their council;
- open meetings which members of the public can attend;
- reports to the Auditor General;
- special commissions of enquiry;
- access to parliamentary records, council records and minutes of meetings;
- guaranteeing freedom of the media; and
- publishing laws, ordinances and by-laws.

Accountability relates to one's ability to account for one's decisions and actions. Officials in public institutions like government, schools, universities and hospitals have a duty to answer to the public for their policies, actions and decisions. Developmental local government requires a political leadership which creates opportunities to account to the community over and above regular elections.

Meaningful
democracy requires
local governments
to be open about
what they do and
ready to account
for their actions.

Increased accountability ensures that the actions of the council reflect the aspirations of the community, increases the legitimacy of the council and deepens local democracy.

Councillors are elected to represent local communities on municipal councils, to ensure that municipalities have structured mechanisms of accountability to local communities, and to meet the priority needs of communities by providing services equitably, effectively and in a sustainable fashion within the means of the municipality.

In fulfilling this role councillors must be accountable to local communities and report back at least quarterly to constituencies on council matters, including the performance of the municipality in terms of established indicators.

One of the primary tasks of councillors is to ensure that the municipality as a whole is accountable to the people it serves. As public representatives elected by the people, councillors spend much of their working day monitoring accountability and reminding the administration that it is there to make a difference to the lives of the public.

Therefore, in order to ensure a high standard of public service, councillors must be vigilant and efficient. With local government, there is the advantage of a direct linkage between an elected representative and a definable constituency. A greater degree of accountability is possible because of this direct link. It is much easier to identify the public representative of a ward and therefore easier to hold him or her accountable. Mechanisms are being put in place to help councillors ensure accountability, and one of these is the establishment of performance management systems.

2.2 Performance management

Although performance management has long been a feature of working life in the private sector, it has only recently become fashionable in public sector organisations in South Africa. The Municipal Systems Act regulates performance management in municipalities and sets out a number of guidelines for the establishment of effective systems.

Two broad categories of performance management are of importance to local government. The first seeks to monitor and evaluate the performance of individual staff members. This marks a break from the past, where in many instances promotions and salary increases were not linked to merit and good work, but were assumed to be something to which public servants were automatically entitled. Modern individual performance management systems aim to recognise diligence and hard work and to ensure that municipal staff are productive and contribute to the goals of the municipality. They are meant to reward staff members who work hard and to help create a culture of excellence in organisations.

The performance of individual councillors and officials and of local government as a whole must be monitored.

While most staff performance evaluation will take place within the organisation, councillors will have to oversee the overall functioning of the system and play a hands-on role in the performance appraisal of the municipal manager and other top management. Councillors themselves are not evaluated through this system, as they are subject to the ultimate form of performance management – if they do not perform they will not be re-elected!

The second kind of performance management system relates to the overall functioning of the municipal organisation. It seeks to measure performance through a range of different indicators, and councillors have an important role to play in this regard.

Performance management is being seen as increasingly important because not all municipalities are living up to their promises of delivering quality services to local residents. Apart from capacity problems, there is no coherent system to monitor the performance of municipalities, to benchmark them against other municipalities, and to empower communities to hold their councils accountable. While national and provincial spheres of government have already introduced performance management systems, this is only now being extended to local level.

A good performance management system could include the publication in newspapers of service standards and targets that have been set, and an annual report by the municipality setting out the extent to which these were met. The system will also help national and provincial government to anticipate real problems that may be developing within municipalities. For instance, while the Constitution empowers provincial government to intervene in the running of municipalities if they are not fulfilling their functions, intervention often comes at a very late stage. By acting as an early warning system, performance management can ensure that municipalities do not experience complete collapse before assistance is forthcoming from other spheres of government.

A good performance management system means that standards and targets must be set.

2.3 Accountability and good governance

Community action to ensure accountability and good governance can include:

- efforts to be well-informed about government policies and plans;
- attendance at report-back meetings;
- requesting constituency reports if these are not forthcoming;
- lodging complaints with the appropriate structure about abuse of power;
- refusing to pay bribes;
- voting in elections; and
- organising lobbying or protest campaigns.

3. CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCILLORS

3.1 Introduction

Councillors are expected to behave in certain ways.

A Code of Conduct has been established in order to ensure that councillors fulfil their obligations to their communities and support the achievement of the municipal objectives set out in Section 19 of the Municipal Structures Act. In terms of Section 13(4), each councillor must be furnished with a copy of the Code when taking office.

Following is a summary of the provisions of the Code of Conduct, and not the Code itself.

3.2 Attendance at meetings

Councillors must attend each council meeting and any meeting of a committee of which they are members, unless leave of absence is granted in terms of an applicable law or the council's rules. If councillors do not attend a meeting or fail to remain in attendance, the council may impose a fine. Councillors who are absent from three or more consecutive council or committee meetings must be removed from office. Each council must have standard procedures which comply with the rules of natural justice for imposing fines on councillors or removing them from office.

3.3 Personal interest and personal gain

Councillors must disclose to the municipal council, or to any committee of which they are members, any direct or indirect interest which they or any close associates may have in any matter before the council or committee. Councillors must withdraw from council or committee proceedings when such a matter is considered, unless the council or committee decides that the interest is trivial or irrelevant. Councillors who, or whose close associates, stand to acquire any direct benefit from a contract concluded with the municipality must disclose full particulars of such benefit at the first municipal council meeting at which it is possible to make such disclosure.

These rules do not apply to an interest or benefit which councillors or close associates will gain in common with other residents of the municipality.

A 'close associate' includes a spouse, a partner who lives with the council-

lor as if married, a business associate, or a close family member. Councillors may not use the position or privileges of, or confidential information obtained through, their office for private gain or to benefit another person improperly.

Except with the prior permission of the municipal council, councillors may not:

- be party to or benefit from any contract for providing goods and/or services to the municipality;
- be party to or benefit from any contract for performing any other work for the municipality; or
- obtain a financial interest in any business of the municipality.

If more than one-quarter of the councillors object to prior permission being given, such permission may only be given with the approval of the provincial MEC for Local Government.

Councillors must, within sixty days of being elected or appointed, declare in writing to the municipal manager any of the following interests which they hold:

- shares/securities in any company;
- membership of any close corporation;
- interest in any trust;
- any directorship;
- any partnership;
- other financial interests in any business undertaking;
- any employment or remuneration;
- any property interests;
- any pension;
- any subsidies, grants or sponsorships by any organisation; and
- gifts above a prescribed amount.

Any change in the nature or detail of councillors' financial interests must be declared in writing annually to the municipal manager. The municipal council must determine which financial interests should be made public, considering both the need for confidentiality and the public interest.

Full-time councillors may not undertake any other paid work, except with the consent of the municipal council. Such consent shall not be withheld unreasonably.

Councillors may not request or solicit or accept any reward or gift or fa-

The financial interests of councillors must be open to scrutiny.

your in respect of:

- voting or not voting in a particular way at any council or committee meeting;
- persuading any council or committee with regard to the exercise of any power, function or duty;
- making a representation to any council or committee; or
- disclosing any privileged or confidential information.

Councillors may not use, take, acquire or benefit from any property or asset owned, controlled or managed by the municipality, where they have no right to that property or asset.

3.4 Disclosure of information

Confidential
information must
not be disclosed
by councillors.

Without the permission of the municipal council or one of its committees, councillors may not disclose any privileged or confidential information of the council or committee to any unauthorised person. 'Privileged or confidential information' includes any information:

- which the council or committee determines to be privileged or confidential;
- which was discussed in closed session by the council or committee;
- which if disclosed would violate the right to privacy of any person; or
- which is declared to be privileged, confidential or secret in terms of law.

The above prohibition on disclosure does not, however, detract in any way from the right of any person to access to information in terms of national legislation.

3.5 Intervention in administration

Except where provided by law, councillors may not:

- interfere in the management or administration of any department of the council, unless mandated by the council to do so;
- give or purport to give any instruction to any council employee, unless authorised to do so;

- obstruct or attempt to obstruct any council employee from implementing any decision of the council or a committee;
- encourage or participate in any conduct which would cause or contribute to maladministration in the council.

3.6 Duties of municipal council chairpersons

If a municipal council chairperson, on reasonable suspicion, is of the opinion that any provision of the Code of Conduct has been breached, the chairperson must:

- authorise an investigation of the facts and circumstances of the alleged breach;
- give the councillor involved a reasonable opportunity to reply in writing in regard to the alleged breach;
- thereafter report the matter to a municipal council meeting; such a report must be open to the public; and
- report the outcome of the investigation to the provincial MEC for Local Government.

The chairperson must ensure that each councillor is given a copy of the Code of Conduct when taking office. A copy must also be available in every room or place where the council meets.

3.7 Breaches of the Code of Conduct

A municipal council may investigate and make a finding on any alleged breach of the Code, or establish a special committee to make such investigation and finding and to make appropriate recommendations to the council.

If the council or a special committee finds that a councillor has breached a provision of the Code, the council may:

- issue a formal warning to the councillor;
- reprimand the councillor;
- request the provincial MEC for Local Government to suspend the councillor for a period;
- fine the councillor; and/or
- request the MEC to remove the councillor from office.

Certain actions must be taken if a councillor breaches the Code of Conduct.

A councillor can
be suspended or
removed from
office.

Any councillor who has been warned, reprimanded or fined may, within fourteen days of being notified, appeal to the MEC in writing and set out the reasons for the appeal. A copy of such appeal must be provided to the council. Within fourteen days of receiving such copy, the council may make any representation regarding the appeal to the MEC. The MEC may, after considering the appeal, confirm or set aside or vary the decision of the council and inform the councillor and the council of the outcome of the appeal.

The MEC may appoint a person or a committee to investigate any alleged breach of a provision of the Code, and make a recommendation on whether the councillor in question should be suspended or removed from office. If the MEC is of the opinion that the councillor has breached a provision of the Code, and that such breach warrants a suspension or removal from office, the MEC may:

- suspend the councillor for a period and on conditions determined by the MEC; or
- remove the councillor from office.

Any investigation of councillors must be made in accordance with the rules of natural justice.

4. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CONSTITUENCY

4.1 Introduction

Local government elections are held at least every five years, and that is the main opportunity for people to be elected as councillors. Councillors can be elected either as ward councillors or as proportional representative councillors from a political party list. Anyone who is eligible to vote in a municipal election may stand for election as a councillor, with some exceptions (see section 1.1).

To stand for election as ward councillors, the Municipal Electoral Act specifies that candidates be nominated either by a registered political party or by any person who lives in the municipality and who is a registered voter in that municipality. If candidates are nominated by a political party, they stand as representatives of that party, and if nominated by an individual they stand as independents.

4.2 Relating to community structures

Once elected, councillors must realise that they are no longer private individuals and that people will watch their actions and judge them accordingly.

Councillors have a responsibility to play a leadership role in their communities and a duty to abide by the municipal Code of Conduct for councillors. This includes serving and representing everyone in the constituency regardless of their political affiliation, and avoiding any circumstances where there could be a conflict of interest.

In cases where the community is in dispute with the council itself, individual councillors should be careful not to attack the council but rather to express the concerns of residents in a way that will help to resolve the problem.

People who choose to stand for election should also realise that they are making a commitment to uphold the law at all times. Councillors should always pay their taxes and should be up-to-date with their municipal accounts. Any criminal acts – such as being involved in assaults, intimidation or drunken driving – will reflect badly not only on themselves, but also on their political parties and on the council.

Councillors who are successfully elected usually have been involved in community structures in their wards. These include political parties, civic and ratepayer organisations, Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) forums, religious and sporting bodies, and action groups. Once elected, councillors must form ongoing relationships with these kinds of organisations. In most wards, residents channel their grievances through these community structures.

Ward councillors and committees can only be successful if they understand the communities and the people they represent. To be effective it is necessary to go to the people, to learn from them, to understand their conditions, and to work for change at a pace that they can accept.

Key things ward councillors should know about their constituency include:

- *the people in their ward and the problems they experience:* Councillors should use meetings, interviews and official sources to obtain information relating to:
 - people's practical needs and problems;
 - issues about which they are concerned;
 - their hopes for the future; and
 - their attitudes towards and opinions about council plans and proposals.
- *the physical environment:* Ward councillors should record what exists and what is planned for the future, and focus on aspects such as:
 - types of housing;
 - basic services like water, sanitation, electricity, schools, roads;
 - essential services like hospitals, clinics, ambulances, fire-fighting and police services;

Once elected, councillors become public figures.

- post and telecommunications;
 - sport, parks and other recreational facilities;
 - municipal facilities (pay points and service centres);
 - shops, markets and banking facilities;
 - factories;
 - places of worship;
 - community halls; and
 - access to transport.
- *community life*: Councillors should be aware of what else is happening in the community. They should record and be up to date about:
 - political organisations;
 - school governing bodies;
 - community and local development forums;
 - civic, religious, and business organisations;
 - constituency offices for Members of Parliament and Members of the Provincial Assembly; and
 - sport and cultural clubs.

In order to build good relationships with these structures, it is advisable to keep in close contact with them. This can be achieved, for example, in the following ways:

- including them on a mailing list of council publications;
- ensuring that the mayor's office has their contact details so that they are invited to relevant mayoral functions;
- inviting them to ward meetings;
- encouraging them to contact councillors about their civic concerns;
- inviting representatives to attend monthly council meetings; and
- circulating reports to them about issues and planned projects that affect their membership or the area.

4.3 Representing the community

The mandate of ward councillors is to present the views of the community they represent in council. This may be on an administrative or a political level.

Good councillors will always take up community problems and concerns with the relevant municipal officials. These may be problems with drainage, municipal accounts, cleansing, traffic congestion, or the maintenance of sport facilities. Residents may also have concerns relating to policy or council decisions in general. Councillors should take up these matters with their party caucuses or committees of council; if they are independent councillors, they may raise these issues at monthly council meetings for debate.

Good councillors will follow up these issues to check that they have been

Good councillors keep in touch with individuals, structures and organisations in their communities, and take up issues that concern them.

dealt with and then report back as soon as possible to the residents or organisations concerned.

4.4 Representing the council

Councillors have a broader responsibility than just to their wards. Consequently, when they are addressing ward meetings or meeting with representatives of organisations, they must try to put their council's decisions into a wider context. This means explaining the reasons why some decisions have been taken in the context of the needs of the municipality as a whole.

Councillors also have a duty to report to their communities about issues that are not so popular, such as payment for services, why ward requests cannot be met, and service delivery shortcomings. Councillors who do not address these issues in an open and honest way will find that the community will not support them at the next election.

Councillors are responsible for explaining decisions of the council to the community.

4.5 Councillors and political parties

4.5.1 The role of the caucus

In South Africa, local government is organised along party political lines, although it is possible to be elected as an independent councillor. This is why the role of the political caucus is an important part of the way councils function.

Most caucuses meet on a weekly basis to discuss what is happening in the committees and in the administration. It is within caucuses, rather than in the council chamber or committee rooms, that most of the debate around policies and projects takes place.

The role of the caucus is to give all the councillors from a particular party a chance to present information and to be informed about the more technical aspects of proposals. The caucus usually then decides how to approach an issue, who will debate the matter in council and committee meetings, and what points should be made.

This approach helps to maintain party discipline, though some would argue that it prevents individual councillors from representing the concerns of their wards where these conflict with their party's policies. Within each caucus, whips are appointed to run the caucus meetings and to ensure that all councillors are kept up to date. Whips also play an important role in ensuring that members of the caucus operate professionally and that there is a quorum of

councillors when an issue is being debated or voted on.

4.5.2 Relationships with other political parties

One of the biggest challenges within a local government system based on political party representation is that councillors have to work closely in committees with colleagues from other political parties.

Representatives
of different
parties have to
work closely
together in council,
putting aside their
party political
differences.

According to Nomaindia Mfeketo, a councillor who has been both mayor and chairperson of the Executive Committee in Cape Town, this is one of the major obstacles for a new councillor to overcome. The reality is that councillors have to overcome their own personal feelings and work with councillors from very different backgrounds and experiences. Some of these may be people who have had years of experience in municipal affairs, and new councillors have much to learn. It is the same with officials from the old order, who may be technically very competent. Mfeketo says the secret of building a successful council is to work in as co-operative a manner as possible in order to achieve effective delivery of services and amenities.

Since the first democratic local government election, some councils have become so divided by factions that effective functioning has become impossible. Councillors who allow this to happen are doing the electorate a great disservice and are undermining democracy in the country.

4.6 Councillors and wards

Ward councillors are directly elected to represent and serve the people in specific wards. There are usually between 3 000 and 20 000 voters in a ward. The job of ward councillors is not simple, and effectively representing the interests of voters in one ward can sometimes cause conflict in the council. Most ward councillors are also members of political parties and have a dual accountability to both their party and the voters. The party has a responsibility to look after the whole area and to consider all residents. This means that ward councillors from a party cannot put the interests of people in the ward above the party's policies for the municipality as a whole.

Ward councillors should make sure that the interests of the people in their wards are represented as properly as possible. They should stay in touch with the issues in their areas, understand the key problems, and monitor development and service delivery. In committees, caucus and council meetings, ward councillors should act as spokespersons for the people in their wards.

Ward councillors function as direct links between the council and the voters. It is their responsibility to make sure that voters are consulted and kept informed about council decisions, development and budget plans, and any

council programmes that will affect them.

Ward councillors are also the voice of the municipality in the wards. People will bring all kinds of problems and issues to them and expect that they will be addressed immediately. Ward councillors should take this role seriously. Where possible, people should be given advice and assistance to solve their problems. Some issues may have to be taken up with municipal officials. In many cases problems cannot be solved by the municipality and people have to be referred to other services.

Councillors should work closely with ward committees.

To be effective, councillors must be familiar with the role of ward committees. It is not possible for one ward councillor to stay in touch with up to 20 000 people. Ward committees are set up to increase the participation of residents in democratic decision-making. The main role of ward committees is to make sure that voters are involved in and informed about council decisions that affect their lives. Ward committees should play a very important role in making democracy come alive at the local level.

Ward committees should be set up in such a way that they can reach almost every sector and every area in their wards. Their main tasks are to communicate with and to consult the community. When council has to make important decisions about development plans, budget priorities or the kinds of services that have to be delivered, the community should be consulted. Ward committees are best placed to organise this consultation in a simple and meaningful way.

Ward committees also play a role in informing communities about council plans, programmes and decisions. People must be informed about new processes, and learn how to use them.

It is important for ward committees to understand that any decisions made in ward committee meetings are not binding on ward councillors. The political power in a local area rests with the formal council meeting and binding decisions can only be made there. For ward committees to be effective, they must have a co-operative relationship with their councillors.

Although ward committees do not have any formal powers, and cannot force council to do anything, they may make submissions directly to council or through ward councillors. They must use every possible avenue to influence council decisions.

A ward committee should be elected by the community as a whole and may not have more than ten members. The election should be an open and transparent process. Every member should be allocated specific responsibilities. A committee member could be given responsibility for a sector (such as youth or the religious sector) or a geographic area (such as a particular village or group of streets). Portfolios like those for council committees can also be allocated to different ward committee members.

Ward committee members are volunteers and are not paid for their services. They should be active members of the community, whose are motivated

by the interests of a particular sector or area. Ward councillors should chair ward committee meetings.

The municipality should provide some support or training to ward committees in terms of administration, organisation, venues and so on. When ward committees call public meetings or need to communicate with the community in other ways, the council should provide financial support.

5. CAMPAIGNS AND LOBBYING

5.1 Campaigns and projects

5.1.1 Running campaigns and projects

Campaigns and projects are ways of building partnerships between the municipality and the community.

Running campaigns and projects is an important part of the work of councillors and community leaders. Campaigns and projects are the best way of building partnerships between municipalities and their local communities. They are used to mobilise and empower people to work for improvements in their community, and contribute to a culture of people working together to help themselves.

Councillors will win much support through such active involvement in people's problems. When councillors are prepared to do more than just talk about people's problems, it is indicative of a caring attitude.

Many issues can be taken up in local campaigns or projects. It is useful, therefore, to prioritise before deciding on which campaign or project to support. The following questions could serve as a guide:

- Does the issue affect many people?
- Are there clear goals?
- Can the campaign or project be completed? (That is, is it realistic and well-planned?)

5.1.2 Communication is the key

We are living in the age of information, and councillors have many ways of keeping in contact with people and organisations in their wards. All ward councillors should produce a newsletter at least four times a year, reporting back on progress in the ward and on issues and concerns raised by the resi-

dents. Copies may be distributed door-to-door in the ward, and can be left in municipal outlets such as libraries, clinics, community halls and shops.

In some of the larger councils, councillors have set up e-mail newsletters, which report on council information. This direct form of communication requires very little effort from the recipient and is sure to become more common in future. However, not everyone has access to computer technology and it is important to ensure that formal communication does not exclude some sectors of the community.

The Constitution requires all spheres of government to be accountable. This means that public representatives such as councillors have to be available to members of the public and communicate regularly with them.

Councillors should make it known that they are available to see residents and hear their concerns. Several times a year, councillors should organise a public meeting that serves as a general report-back on what they and the council as a whole have been doing. A good time to do this is when the budget has been announced so that residents can be informed about the plans for the ward for the next twelve months. Community organisations can be approached to provide refreshments. Businesses in the area can be asked to sponsor or take advertising space in a more comprehensive newsletter.

Councillors should also use the local media to communicate. Relationships should be built with journalists working for community newspapers and community radio stations. Simple press releases should always be provided when there is going to be a meeting; the letter pages of community newspapers can also be used to disseminate information. These ways of communicating do not incur any costs.

Councillors need to use as many ways as possible to keep in touch with their constituents.

5.1.3 Tips for campaigning or running a project

A successful conclusion to a campaign or project depends on certain actions being taken, including some or all of the following:

- Once an issue has been chosen and broad aims developed, organisations and key players should be consulted to ensure that there is popular support for the issue.
- As many organisations and individuals as possible should be involved in the campaign or project committee.
- Local business and government should be involved wherever possible.
- A communication strategy must be developed. It should include the main objectives (message), the slogan, the methods and the media that will be used. Slogans should be clear and inspiring. They should summarise the main message of the campaign, yet be short enough to fit on a poster.

- A clear action plan must be developed. The action plan must include a strategy for obtaining publicity through public speaking or the media.
- The phases of the campaign or project should be worked out, and an appropriate budget drawn up. Funds should be raised as early as possible.
- The campaign or project should raise the profile of the councillor and the party in the community.
- It is always necessary to report back to the community.
- Every campaign or project should be evaluated regularly. It is possible – and necessary – to learn from mistakes.

5.1.4 Campaign through networking

Community outreach work means communicating with the people in the area. This work is best done through various organisations, since most people belong to churches, clubs, and so on.

Networking means staying in touch in an ongoing way with organisations and key individuals who can affect councillors' work. Networking can serve many purposes, and can help to:

- build alliances to strengthen work;
- stay in touch with developments in the area;
- get access to information that will help the work of councillors;
- influence other organisations to support certain issues; and
- influence individual decision-makers.

Systematic networking should be an ongoing part of the work of councillors. It is best to gather the names of organisations and individuals, their contact details and their areas of interest. Councillors should divide these contact lists into categories or topics – for example, housing or crime – according to current areas of work or interest.

5.1.5 Influencing delivery of other government services (ensuring votes)

Local government is responsible for many basic services. However, certain functions – like clinics, schools and public transport – are the responsibility of national and provincial government.

Local councillors will often receive complaints about services that are outside their area of responsibility. People may complain about the way schools are run, for example, or the state of the clinic in the area. It is important that issues which are genuine local concerns are taken up with the relevant depart-

It is important that councillors establish networks of contacts with individuals and organisations in their municipality.

ment. Councillors can take such issues to the council or to other levels of government. Following are some examples of what can be done:

- The local clinic is only open during working hours, and it is not convenient for working women to go there. The council approaches the provincial MEC for Health and negotiates longer hours for two days a week.
- The pension pay point has no facilities, and old people stand in the sun for hours. The council asks the Department of Welfare to move the pay point to a council hall where people can wait inside.

Councillors can set up community consultations around issues like health and invite people responsible for health care to participate, so that the civil servants become more sensitive to the needs of people. By doing this, votes can be won for the next election.

5.1.6 Intervening on local issues and development

Ward councillors and ward committees should participate in local campaigns, take up local issues at other levels of government, and get involved in solving local problems. It is important to work with organisations that are already active in the area. Councillors should get involved in local development projects and, where possible, use their influence to remove obstacles to such projects.

5.1.7 Co-operating with other spheres of government

Councillors should work closely with provincial and national politicians and officials so that they can access resources to solve local problems. Not all problems can be dealt with by local government, but ward councillors will be the first to know about them and should take action. For example, information that a local school has no textbooks should be made known to provincial government.

Councillors should work closely with other spheres of government to solve local problems.

5.1.8 Helping welfare and other organisations

Councillors should assist with fundraising events, welfare activities, and other community actions. Ward councillor can use their influence to assist organisations by accessing business people, funders and government support.

5.2 Lobbying

5.2.1 What is lobbying?

Lobbying can be used to convince someone with decision-making power to support solutions to local needs.

Lobbying means persuading someone with decision-making power to support a position. Councillors lobby people in power to obtain something wanted by the people they represent. Lobbying can be used to influence anyone with power, as the following examples illustrate:

- Parents can lobby the school governing body to provide aftercare at school.
- Shoppers can lobby the manager of a supermarket to stay open longer hours.
- Civic organisations can lobby the council to write off arrears.

Lobbying is mainly used by organisations to persuade politicians to support their position. Councillors can lobby committees, the mayor, other spheres of government, and so forth. Lobbying methods include:

- phoning people;
- making submissions;
- writing to individuals;
- meeting decision-makers;
- inviting decision-makers to meet people in the area; and
- asking influential and powerful people to speak informally to decision-makers.

5.2.2 Basic rules for lobbying

When engaging in lobbying, councillors should:

- be clear about the issue, facts and their position;
- use lobbying only for important issues that will improve life in the community;
- ensure that their position is the right one before they begin lobbying;
- analyse who has the power to make a decision on the issue, and target that individual or group;
- analyse which individuals and organisations can influence the decision-makers and mobilise them to support the issue;

- mobilise grassroots organisations that represent those who vote for people with political power;
- analyse the opposition's position and develop counter-arguments – they may be lobbying the same person;
- think about how the decision-maker can benefit from agreeing with the lobbied position – most decision-makers will agree more easily if they are shown that they will look good or get some credit.

Councillors should never use blackmail or bribery, or even gifts and favours, to persuade someone – that is corruption, not lobbying.

5.2.3 Lobbying methods

Various lobbying methods can be used in one campaign, but they should be chosen with care, as the situation dictates which will be effective.

- *support base*: It is important never to lobby alone. Organisations or individuals who support the cause should be mobilised. While politicians are always sensitive to organisations, they also respond well to appeals from many individuals. Letters and submissions are useful methods of going about this task.
- *letters*: While letters are the easiest lobbying method, they are not always the most effective. Many people in positions of power have administrative staff who read and summarise their mail. This means that the target person may never see the letters written as part of a lobbying campaign. Letters should be as personal as possible. Different organisations and individuals should not send exactly the same letter. The following section on submissions provides a format that may also be used for letters.
- *submissions*: These are usually made to committees or chairpersons of committees. It is important to structure submissions so that important points are made effectively. A submission should contain the following information:
 - the name of the group or organisation and their contact details;
 - the topic or issue that the submission is about;
 - the reason for making the submission (e.g. the concern, how the person or organisation is connected to the issue, and their expertise or experience with the issue);
 - the specific actions the committee is being asked to take;
 - reasons why the committee is being asked to take this action – here the facts can be outlined and main points made as briefly and accurately as possible;
 - reasons why the recommended action will be good for the interests of the committee – for example, how it will improve the quality of service, save money or generally please the committee's constituents; and

There are many lobbying methods, and the situation determines which ones are best to use.

- an offer of further information or face-to-face meetings.
- *aides, personal assistants and secretaries*: Most decision-makers have support staff that deal with their documents, do research, and prepare briefings and programmes. Sometimes it is more important to influence these people than their bosses. Councillors should spend time building relationships with them and explaining their issues. This will usually result in easier access to the decision-maker.
- *meetings*: It is useful to request face-to-face meetings with decision-makers. They can be visited in their offices or invited to attend a meeting in the community. The importance of the meeting must be stated clearly, and an agenda and a list of possible outcomes from the meeting provided. It is also important to stress the benefit for the decision-maker – for example, ‘This meeting will provide you with the opportunity to make direct contact with more than 100 people from your constituency and to hear their concerns about the issue’.
- *inspections*: Decision-makers can be invited to make on-site inspections wherever appropriate – for example, to look at the poor condition of a school. Media publicity for these inspections should be solicited.
- *phone calls*: As many people as possible should phone, fax or e-mail the decision-maker. As many as possible of these messages should come from influential and well-known people. Since it will not always be possible to speak to the decision-maker directly, all callers should leave a clear and detailed message.
- *meeting the leaders of organisations*: Councillors should develop a systematic plan to meet all the key people and organisations on their contact lists, to discuss their problems and programmes. Ward councillors should also visit government departments and key civil servants to assess their service delivery in the area. As a matter of courtesy, appointments should be made beforehand. Most organisations and civil servants will gladly meet with ward councillors.
- *community report-back meetings*: All voters should be invited to regular report-back meetings. The ward councillor should briefly outline the key council plans and programmes for the area. Officials who can answer questions and describe progress should also attend the meeting. There should be time during the meeting for people to raise problems and concerns. All important issues that come up should be noted, and a way found to report back to the people who raised them.

- *forums*: Forums where people are encouraged to ask questions and discuss issues are very effective for those who do not want to listen to long speeches. It is best to target a specific group or issue – for example, pension problems of the elderly, new taxi ranks for taxi drivers, facilities for youth. Councillors should be present at the forum to give important information, to listen to people’s ideas, and to respond to their questions. The inputs should be short.

- *house meetings*: These are best for people who are not strong supporters. They provide a chance for a councillor to speak to twenty or thirty voters in an informal setting. Many undecided voters will not come to a big meeting because they do not want to associate themselves publicly with a party. In a house meeting it is easier for them to ask questions and discuss their fears. Speeches should be kept very short – the main aim is to have a discussion. House meetings can be called in two ways:
 - people in a street or a specific area can be invited to the house of one of their neighbours; or
 - a specific target group – such as teachers – can be invited to attend a meeting at the home of a person they know and trust.

- *publicity tables*: Publicity tables can be set up at places like shopping centres or taxi ranks. Ward councillors and committee members should be there to talk to people. They can ask people what problems they experience in the area, and discuss solutions and what council is trying to do about these problems. Media attention is a powerful persuader: the more publicity that can be harnessed, the better. It is often helpful to make individual contact with a reporter who is interested in the issue.

- *popular events*: Sport and cultural events attract many people from the community as well as the press. Ward councillors should attend soccer matches, concerts and other events, and use the opportunity to speak to voters. Publicity tables can be set up at such events as well.

- *Community events*: Ward councillors must attend community events that are important to local people. They can range from funerals and weddings to the opening of a new shopping centre to a school concert.

6. PERSONAL MANAGEMENT ISSUES

6.1 The image of councillors

As unfair as it may seem, people are often judged initially on their appearance and the way they present themselves rather than on their qualifications, enthusiasm or good ideas. It is important to dress appropriately, because what councillors wear may count against them. Poor image projection may result in losing the respect of important stakeholders.

Expensive clothing is not necessary. However, councillors should always be neatly dressed in western or traditional clothing. When choosing clothing, councillors should consider their audience. Items of clothing that may be interpreted as representing a certain political line or ideology should be avoided. It is advisable to wear comfortable clothing, especially during monthly council meetings or lengthy committee meetings.

The image people like ward stakeholders, colleagues in council and officials have of councillors is also influenced by the way councillors conduct themselves in the course of work. One of the basic rules for being effective as a councillor is to be prepared, especially for meetings. Members of committees must stay up to date with all aspects of committee work. Councillors must follow debates at provincial and national level, and be aware of the interests and actions of the private sector and civil society. One of the best ways of doing this is to read as many newspapers as possible, and to cut out and file relevant articles.

In order to appear effective, it is better for councillors to concentrate on one area and to develop expertise in it, rather than to know a little about many areas.

Councillors should ensure that they have the relevant documents at hand when raising matters at meetings, and quote accurately from them. Often debates become heated, but a calm and reasoned approach is best. Councillors must resist the temptation to become emotional in arguments, as well as the temptation to attack individuals who disagree with them. This is difficult if opponents come from a different ideological background. However, more will be accomplished and greater respect from colleagues will be earned if councillors know what they are talking about and communicate in a calm, authoritative manner.

Councillors are
judged as much
by their
appearance as
by their actions.

6.2 Managing time

Councillors should make every effort to be on time for meetings and appointments. This may be difficult, especially if earlier meetings over-run their scheduled times, or if family or business commitments have to be met.

If an invitation to attend a function or meeting is accepted, every effort should be made to arrive on time. Councillors who realise they will be late for a meeting or appointment should phone ahead to inform the other participants. This is professional courtesy. Cancellations should be made in good time, and only if absolutely necessary.

A very useful habit for councillors to establish is to make a list in the evening of everything that needs to be done the next day. The names and contact details of meeting participants should be noted, as well as what reports or documents will be needed. During the course of the day, items can be added to the action list as the need arises.

By organising the day beforehand, councillors will be able to make the most effective use of their time. An hour each day could be set aside for returning phone calls and writing memos and notes. This is less time-consuming than trying to reach people throughout the day.

Councillors should keep a diary, and on Sunday nights take the time to plan the week ahead. Planning should not be left to the last minute, or councillors will be late or arrive at meetings unprepared.

Balancing all the demands on a councillor's time can be very difficult.

6.3 Balancing work and family life

6.3.1 Coping with the pressure

One of the hardest things for councillors to do is to draw the line between work and family time. Ward councillors often find that people expect them to be available at all times to help with their problems, even in the evenings or over the weekends.

The best way to deal with this is to communicate regularly with residents – at ward meetings or by way of notices or newsletters. Residents can be informed about what telephone numbers they should use, including after-hours numbers in the case of emergencies such as floods, blocked drains or power failures.

Councillors should set aside certain times of the week – one afternoon a week, perhaps, or one Saturday morning a month – when they will be available at a community centre or library in the ward to meet residents and hear their

concerns.

An answering machine at home is a useful investment, so that councillors can relax without being interrupted by calls that are not urgent. Of course, all the calls should be answered at a suitable time.

Being a councillor does not imply sole responsibility for all the problems in the area. People will approach councillors and ask them to use their influence to assist in their businesses, to jump queues and to short-cut municipal processes such as plan approvals or tender procedures. Councillors should not yield to this pressure as it will cause them unnecessary stress and create undue bad feelings between them and the people.

6.3.2 Managing stress levels

Keeping stress
under control
is essential.

One of the negative effects of public life and a busy schedule is the experience of stress. This manifests in feeling overwhelmed, anxious, fatigued, unable to cope, short-tempered, or being unable to sleep properly. It is important to recognise the symptoms of stress and to deal with them. Some stress-beating tips are listed below:

- Councillors should not overload their schedules by trying to do too much. They will start to feel that they are under-performing because they are not able to give enough attention to council, work and personal matters. It is better to do less work well than much work poorly. Every appointment should be diarised, but not every invitation has to be accepted.
- Time to relax with family and friends is invaluable.
- Councillors should take care of their health by eating properly and avoiding too many stimulants such as tea, coffee, alcohol and tobacco. It is important to get enough sleep and regular exercise.
- Councillors should share their worries with people around them, especially fellow councillors and sympathetic officials. It is not necessary to solve the problems of the community, town or city alone.
- A sense of humour makes it much easier to cope with a busy life.

6.3.3 Enjoying family life

It is very difficult for councillors to cope with being public representatives without support from their immediate family members. Husbands, wives and children of councillors will find it difficult to take second place at times. They will be resentful if they experience the 'public property syndrome' – that their councillor spouse or parent is more available to others than to his or her own family. This is natural.

Councillors should talk to their families about their work as councillors, its

challenges and achievements. Family members can be invited to council meetings and ceremonial occasions so that they are aware of the important role being played by their spouse or parent in civic life.

It is most important to set aside time that is just for the family. Distractions during this exclusive family time should be avoided.

It is also a good idea to activate the telephone answering machine during mealtimes so that the family has an opportunity to talk without interruption about their day and their experiences together. Family holidays should be taken regularly, if possible out of town so that time can be spent together where no one knows the councillor.

If the children or spouse begin to show obvious resentment towards the councillor's official role, it is advisable seek professional counselling in order to find resolutions that are acceptable to all family members.

6.4 Managing finances

Without good management and record-keeping, councillors may find that their expenses are more than the allowance which they receive. Councillors must keep tight control of home telephone expenses and travelling costs. One of the most important things to remember is that the income as a councillor is only there for a few years. So, for instance, if a councillor wishes to buy a car to make it easier to travel around the ward and municipal area, the debt incurred should not outlast the term of office. New councillors must also ensure that they do not neglect to manage their existing financial affairs properly.

As public representatives, councillors are expected to play a leadership role in their communities and in society in general. Non-payment of municipal and other accounts, failure to submit tax returns, and other financial mismanagement could negatively affect the image of councillors as well as that of the council and political party.

If councillors discover that they are losing control of their financial situation, it is important to consult a financial advisor or bank manager.

In terms of the Code of Conduct, councillors have to provide the municipal manager with a statement of their financial interests when taking office. They should ensure that this is done promptly, as the public and the media will be monitoring councillors to see that they are working in an ethical way.

Councillors are expected to provide a good example of financial management.

6.5 Developing personal skills

There is a range of skills that enable councillors to be more effective and to as-

sist their rise through the ranks of their organisation.

6.5.1 Public speaking

For councillors, public speaking is one of the most basic skills that needs to be mastered, whether they are addressing a ward report-back meeting, speaking at a committee meeting or engaging in political debate at a full council meeting.

Councillors who do not feel confident should start slowly, prepare well and keep their input simple, short and to the point. Having a written speech makes public speaking less nerve-racking and will ensure keeping to the time allocated and the subject being addressed.

There are many ways to improve delivery in order to sound authoritative. Councillors should avoid irritating mannerisms that might distract the audience. Consulting a company that specialises in voice coaching and public speaking can be considered.

Here are some guidelines:

- Councillors should research the topic about which they will be speaking.
- It is advisable to make brief notes about what is to be delivered as a reminder of things that should not be left out.
- The speech should be brief and precise. It should cover the necessary ground and still leave time for questions and comments.
- Being presentable is a sign of respect.
- Humour makes a speech flow and it relaxes an audience, but should not be overdone. Relevant jokes should be chosen. Jokes that use sexual innuendo or those that target ethnic, religious or gender differences should be avoided.
- The speaker should enunciate loudly and clearly. There is nothing as frustrating as not being able to hear what a speaker says. If the venue is in the open air or in a large hall, a sound system should be organised as well as technical support to make sure that it works properly.

6.5.2 Mastering meetings

One of the most important aspects of council work is attending meetings, both within the organisation and with community leaders and other groups. Becoming skilled at chairing and participating in meetings increases councillors' influence and will help to save valuable time. Some guidelines for councillors to follow are given below:

- *purpose of the meeting*: Why has the meeting been called? Is it worth calling people together for this purpose? The councillor should discuss the purpose

A councillor cannot be effective without good public speaking skills.

with the development committee or any other important stakeholders. This gives recognition to the democratic structures elected by the community.

- *agenda*: What issues are going to be discussed? Who will be speaking on what and for how long? Times for specific items should be allocated and adhered to.
- *venue*: Where is the meeting to be held? Is the venue accessible to all those who should or want to attend? Is it a closed or open venue? Are chairs or a sound system required? What else is needed to make the meeting a well-organised one and a success? Will disabled people be able to access the venue with ease?
- *date and day*: Is the day chosen appropriate for the community? Calling a meeting on Friday at 12 noon in a Muslim community will be ineffective, as will Sunday morning in communities where Christianity is the dominant religion.
- *time of the meeting*: The time of the meeting is critical and depends on the kind of venue chosen. A meeting should be called for a time that is convenient for working people and women who have childcare and household responsibilities.
- *chairing the meeting*: As many people as possible should have a chance to speak. Even the nervous ones should be encouraged to participate. If many hands go up, the chairperson should note their names. The chairperson should ensure that one or two participants do not dominate the meeting. A skilled chairperson who adheres to the agenda can ensure that the meeting achieves its objectives and that participants will be prepared to give up free time to attend the next meeting as they know it will be productive.

Many aspects have to be taken into account when planning a meeting.

6.5.3 Managing the media

Communication is one of the key elements in municipal life. In fact, important concepts such as the Integrated Development Plan and public participation are mandatory in terms of the legislative framework for local government.

The media are an important channel through which the council and councillors communicate with residents and organised stakeholders such as business. Managing the media, and understanding how the various forms work, is crucial to personal images of councillors. There will always be negative reports in the newspapers and on radio and television, but if councillors engage with the media when there are positive or 'good news stories', they will be able to balance the negative coverage.

It is important to understand how the media functions in order to use it effectively.

Because members of the media are often not familiar with how council works or with the background to a particular issue, they need to be guided by councillors. In turn, councillors should be guided by the Constitution and other laws which encourage freedom of expression and the free flow of information. The public accountability of councillors will, for the most part, be tested through the media, so it is best to approach interactions with them in a positive way. Guidelines for managing the media include the following:

- Councillors should be proactive and learn which newspapers, newsletters, and radio stations serve the area.
- Councillors should make a point of meeting journalists covering municipal events. In future it may be necessary to publicise something or cover an important meeting, and a personal relationship with journalists will help to achieve this.
- Comments and observations in response to journalists' questions should be brief.
- If asked to comment on a controversial issue, councillors should tell the media that they will fax a statement or call them back. This allows for the chance to do some checking and to consult colleagues, cutting down on the possibility of misunderstandings.
- If a newspaper or radio station covers an issue in an inaccurate way, councillors should call the news editor or editor and ask for an opportunity to put forward their side of the story. They should be polite but firm – they have the right to reply. With this approach, councillors can often turn a negative story into a positive one for council.

7. COUNCILLORS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

7.1 Introduction

Councillors are required by law to be the chairpersons of ward committees. However, this entails far more than chairing meetings. Members of ward committees see councillors as leaders because:

- they were elected by the majority of people living in the ward;
- they have local government experience;
- they have decision-making powers as members of council; and
- they have direct access to influential people – the mayor and senior officials.

Ward councillors exercise an important leadership function by co-ordinating and managing the activities of ward committees to ensure that they fulfil their role. Ward committee members lead in their communities and need to learn basic methods for handling conflict.

An important part of managing any group is dealing with conflict. The members of any organisation – whether an NGO, a CBO, a political party, a business or a government – need to have ways of keeping conflict to a minimum and of solving problems caused by conflict before they becomes major obstacles to work. Conflict management is the process of planning to avoid conflict where possible and organising to resolve conflict where it does happen, as rapidly and smoothly as possible.

Councillors have to be skilled in dealing with and diffusing conflict. It is essential, therefore, that councillors understand the common causes of conflict.

Councillors must learn to manage conflict.

7.2 Common causes of conflict

There are many types and causes of conflict. Some are listed below:

- *organisational conflict*: Causes or sources of organisational conflict can be many and varied. The most common causes are:
 - scarcity of resources;
 - different attitudes, values or perceptions;
 - disagreements about needs, goals, priorities and interests;
 - poor communication;
 - poor or inadequate organisational structure;
 - lack of teamwork; and
 - lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities.
- *conflict between individuals*: People have different styles of communication, ambitions, political views, religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds. In our diverse society, the possibility of these differences leading to conflict between individuals is always there, and we must be alert to preventing and resolving situations where conflict arises.
- *conflict between groups of people*: Whenever people form groups, they tend to emphasise the things that make their group ‘better than’ or ‘different from’ other groups. This happens in the fields of sport, culture, religion and the workplace, and can sometimes change from healthy competition to destructive conflict.

- *conflict within a group of people*: Even within one organisation or team, conflict can arise because of individual differences, ambitions or rivalry between sub-groups or factions. All leaders and members of the organisation need to be alert to group dynamics that can spill over into conflict.

7.3 Stages of conflict

Councillors should be alert to signs of conflict, and be ready to diffuse it.

In order to manage conflict, it is essential that councillors understand how conflict develops. If leaders can identify the conflict issue and how far it has developed, they can sometimes solve it before it becomes more serious. Typical stages of conflict include:

- *potential for conflict exists*: People recognise that lack of resources, diversity of language or cultural differences may result in conflict. For example, ward committee members from a certain village may feel discriminated against if the council has no plans for projects in their area while other villages benefit from projects.
- *latent conflict*: A competitive situation could easily spill over into conflict. This may occur at a political rally or in the workplace where there are obvious differences between groups of people. For example, a meeting called to address the future of an informal settlement has the potential for conflict between informal settlers and land-owners.
- *open conflict*: Conflict can be triggered by an incident – for example, the municipality cuts off the electricity supply of people not paying for the service.
- *aftermath conflict*: A particular problem may have been resolved but the potential for conflict still exists. In fact, the potential may be even greater than before if one person or group perceives itself as being involved in a win-lose situation. The disputes in the taxi industry are a good example. Some taxi owners believe that their livelihoods have been threatened by the resolution of the conflict, as they no longer have sole control over routes.

In ward committees, councillors and members should be alert to signs of conflict between colleagues, so that they can be proactive in reducing or resolving the conflict. Typical signs may include:

- members not speaking to each other or ignoring each other;

- members contradicting and insulting one another; and
- members deliberately undermining or not co-operating with each other, to the detriment of the team.

Similarly, leaders and members can identify latent conflict between groups of people in the organisation or the community and plan action before the conflict becomes open and destructive. Signs are:

- cliques or factions meeting separately to discuss issues, even though they affect the whole organisation;
- one group being left out of organising an event which should include everybody; and
- groups using threatening slogans or symbols to show that their group is right and others are wrong.

7.4 Resolving conflict situations

There are various methods of resolving situations that have reached the stage of open conflict. It is important for councillors to understand these methods, so that they can decide which one will work best for them in their specific situation.

Conflict can be resolved in various ways.

- *conciliation*: The dictionary defines conciliation as 'the act of procuring good will or inducing a friendly feeling'. For example, ward committee members who hold opposing views that have led to conflict within the committee can be brought together in a less formal meeting to discuss the issues and find common ground.
- *negotiation*: This is a deliberate process, conducted by mandated representatives of groups. It is designed to reconcile differences and to reach agreement by consensus. The outcome is often dependent on the power relationship between the groups. Negotiations often involve compromise – a group may win one of their demands and give in on another. Negotiation is often used by union and management representatives to solve workplace conflicts. Political and community groups also often use this method.
- *mediation*: When negotiations fail, the parties often call in an independent mediator. This person or group will attempt to facilitate settlement of the conflict. The mediator plays an active part in the process, advises both or all groups, acts as intermediary, and suggests possible solutions. In contrast to arbitration (see below), mediators act only in an advisory capacity – they

have no decision-making powers and cannot impose a settlement on the conflicting parties. Skilled mediators are able to gain the trust and confidence of the conflicting groups or individuals.

- *arbitration*: An independent person is appointed to act as adjudicator (judge) in a dispute, and to decide on the terms of a settlement. Both parties in the conflict must agree beforehand about who the arbitrator should be and that the decision of the arbitrator will be binding on them. Arbitration differs from mediation and negotiation in that it does not promote the continuation of collective bargaining – the arbitrator listens, investigates the demands and counter-demands, and makes a decision. People or organisations can agree on having either a single arbitrator or a panel of arbitrators whom they respect and whose decision they will accept as final.

7.5 Being an effective mediator

Ward committee members and councillors sometimes have to mediate between different groups. An effective mediator needs certain skills in order to achieve credibility and results. These include:

- the ability to gain the trust, acceptance and co-operation of conflicting parties;
- the capacity to think clearly in order to identify the real problems and offer practical solutions;
- being knowledgeable about the organisational structures, strategies and attitudes of the conflicting parties, as well as any relevant laws or agreements;
- tactfulness and diplomacy;
- powers of persuasion and strong character, in order to nudge the participants progressively towards an agreement.

7.6 Building teamwork and co-operation

Teamwork and co-operation are essential to the effective functioning of any organisation.

Councillors should know that teamwork and co-operation are essential in an organisation that aims to be effective and efficient. The best teamwork usually comes from having a shared vision or goal, so that leaders and members are all committed to the same objectives and understand their roles in achieving those objectives.

Important behaviours in achieving teamwork and minimising potential conflict include a commitment by team members to:

- share information by keeping people in the group up to date with current issues;
- express positive expectations about each other rather than doubts or cynicism;
- empower each other – publicly crediting colleagues who have performed well, and encouraging each other to achieve results;
- build team spirit by promoting good morale and protecting the group's reputation with outsiders; and
- resolve potential conflict by bringing differences of opinion into the open and facilitating resolution of conflicts.

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