

GEORGE MUNICIPALITY

OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR

**ORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING 28 JANUARY 2021: BY THE EXECUTIVE
MAYOR OF GEORGE MUNICIPALITY: ALD LEON VAN WYK**

SPEAKER

ALDERMEN

COUNCILLORS

ACTING MUNICIPAL MANAGER

DIRECTORS

OFFICIALS

MEMBERS OF THE MEDIA

It is an honour to address you at this first Ordinary Council Meeting for 2021 as we commence our business for 2021.

On behalf of Council I wish to formally welcome Acting Municipal manager, Dr Michele Gratz and Acting Director: Community Services, Mr Allen Pause to their first Council meeting. They commenced service on 4 January and have already made significant contributions to the Administration in this first month. The MM has provided the necessary direction that is required of an institution the size of George Municipality to ensure that we can restore service delivery standards to the level both ourselves and our residents expect. Strategic decisions are being made as we tackle management, budget, cost containment, infrastructure and related issues.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on George and the Municipality. The peak of the second wave of the pandemic in the Garden Route has thankfully passed; in George we experienced cumulative peak numbers of 2173 active cases on 15 December. The number of active cases has now declined to 471 as at 27 January. The total number of deaths reached 379 on the same day.

Our hospitals and medical staff were placed under severe pressure with the George Hospital's bed capacity being well over 100% for an extended period of time.

George Municipality

- a. During the first wave up to 09 October 2020, the Municipality had 73 Covid-19 positive cases with 3 fatalities reported.
- b. During the second wave from 10 October to date, there have been 131 Covid-19 cases with 4 fatalities reported.

- c. A total of 204 Municipal employees have therefore tested positive for Covid-19 with a total of 7 fatalities. A total of 15% of the employee complement tested positive for Covid-19; one in seven employees.
- d. Over the past 7 days we have not yet had a positive case reported.

We express our deepest condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of these staff members. The MM is planning a gathering where we can suitably honour the colleagues that we have lost in the past year.

The impact on our staff has been significant and concerning. Many staff members work in the frontline, provide services on a 24/7 basis. Some staff members been sick for periods often up to 6 weeks. Many of us have needed to self-quarantine as a result of being in contact with positive cases.

We wish everyone who has had the virus a complete recovery and return to excellent health. This pandemic has also impacted on mental wellness as all of us have been working and living in unfamiliar circumstance given the disruption to social environments that we humans are used to.

Covid-19 has impacted on service delivery in many ways:

Some staff members and the Council have continued to work from home in a virtual environment – this has become a new norm;

Some of the teams involved in service delivery have been depleted as a result of the infection and risks to staff members at home due to co-morbidities

Access to buildings and facilities has been restricted due to sanitation and decontamination requirements;

There is a significant impact on the finances of the municipality due to the various lockdown levels imposed since March 2020. Businesses and individuals have been affected through closures imposed on businesses and income and jobs that have lost.

I will refer in more detail to these aspects when I table the S72 financial results for the six months to December 2020.

In a media statement released yesterday, 26 January 2021, the Premier Alan Winde has urged President Ramaphosa to urgently convene a special President's Coordinating Council meeting so that some restrictions in the Western Cape can be relaxed. Our economy in the Garden Route has been severely impacted as a result of the beach closures in mid-December, curfew times and closure of liquor outlets. This has resulted in declines in turnover for many businesses that operate directly in the tourism, restaurant and related sectors as well as indirectly. I therefore endorse Premier Winde's plea that we constantly balance saving both lives and jobs.

As many business in the Region rely on buoyant sales over the peak 6 week December-January period to sustain them through the winter months, I fear that many of our citizens and small businesses will experience additional hardship in the coming months.

Prior to the second wave the WCG had launched the Jobs-Safety-Dignity/Wellness project to undertake the Economic Recovery phase. We will need to return our focus to this lend assistance in the form of temporary work projects, ensuring Jobs.

We need to encourage Investments that can lead to job creation.

Covid-19 has placed many person in vulnerable situations, so we need to provide Safety environments.

Many members of society are now more Vulnerable; we need to seek ways of facilitating assistance to deal with hunger and poverty; restoring dignity; looking at wellness and ways to improve this.

Consequences

Our Motor Vehicle Registration and Driver's Licence Offices have been under severe pressure during this Covid-19 period due to the compulsory operating restrictions that have been experienced, causing massive backlogs. Much criticism has been levelled by members of the public, who often stand for hours in long queues, at the Municipality even though similar challenges are experienced at all local authorities.

Ideally vehicle licences should be renewed well their expiry dates to obviate the bottlenecks that are created around deadline dates.

We earnestly wish to encourage members of the public to make use of the available online facilities to renew licences. This is a good example of the behavioural changes that can be learnt from Covid-19.

A plan of action is being implemented to set up a separate office to accommodate the motor vehicle industry and to deal with transactions more efficiently.

Staff have been working overtime to address the backlog created as a result of the lockdown closures and resultant restrictions. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the staff of this department who have worked tirelessly and excessive hours to address the challenges.

Refuse Collection

We have experienced disruptions in the refuse collection over several months as a result of some Covid-related issues, the withdrawal for financial reasons of Interwaste from their tender service to collect blue and green bags, launching a supply chain process for a service provider, labour related disruptions, etc.

22 workers from Refuse removal have been charged for illegal work stoppage and bringing the Municipality into disrepute during December 2020. A Disciplinary hearing has taken place this week.

There has been an Illegal work stoppage due to the non-payment of hours claimed for collection of blue and green bags. The Matter was resolved and workers resumed work later in the day without claiming any overtime. An Item is serving before council about overtime payments for refuse removal employees.

During the past few weeks, some staff have been redeployed to assist in the collection of blue and green bags and vehicles hired in for the task. The tender for a new blue and green bag service provider has been awarded subject to the appeal period of 14 days. Improvements in the service are already being experienced.

Illegal Dumping

GRDM has partnered with GM to clean illegal dumps in 2 hotspots, Thembaletu and Pacaltsdorp, through a MOU, which commenced in October 2020 until end March 2021. An amount of R2.3 million rand was allocated from GRDM, for cleaning of illegal dumps, placement of 9 skips, appointment of 30 EPWP workers to do awareness and education and 14 EPWP workers to man and clean around skips, and R500 000 from GM. Another R500 000 was given to Cleansing Services for the cleaning of illegal dumps. GRDM allocated R577 000 to the cleaning of illegal dumps in Thembaletu and Pacaltsdorp, which was all used till end December 2020. GM used the R500 000 to clean the other municipal areas. Currently only GM are cleaning illegal dumps in all residential areas with funding received from the budget office. More funding needs to be made available at the adjustment budget to continue with the cleaning of illegal dumps.

Land invasions

The illegal occupation of land within the jurisdiction of George Municipality is occurring more frequently with what would appear to be with the assistance of certain interest groups. The Municipality is currently following the legal avenues at its disposal to address this challenge.

Voëlklip:

The Municipality regrets that another tragic incident has taken place at Voëlklip. The land in question is privately owned with jurisdiction for the gravel road falling under provincial administration. A site visit was undertaken by the Mayor, members of the Mayoral Committee, certain officials and various roleplayers, including the landowner on Tuesday. A task team has been established in order to look at possible options to address the problem. Even though the Municipality has no legislative role or jurisdiction over the matter, we wish to prevent any further incidents as far as possible and will take the leading role in co-ordinating the activities of the task team.

We extend our deepest sympathies to the family of the bereaved.

Rosedale drowning:

As far as can be determined, the dam is situated on what used to be a farm that has subsequently become a residential area. It is registered as an official water source with the national Department of Water and Sanitation, which means it cannot filled up

with sand or the dam wall broken down without application to the relevant national departments.

Factors that would, among other things, be considered regarding the future of the dam include water security, if it sustains farming or livelihoods in the area and if it serves as a mechanism to slow down stormwater run-off or other environmental factors.

In the meantime, the municipality has erected a notice board at the dam indicating that swimming is prohibited.

The municipality again extends its condolences to the loved ones of the boy who drowned.

Finances:

The mid-year report indicates that we are unfortunately very behind on the implementation of capital projects and MIG projects. There is a severe shortage of staff in critical positions and this matter needs to be addressed urgently. In order to address this situation, urgent temporary appointments are being proposed in order to create additional capacity in the Civil & Engineering Services Directorate to assist with the projects as well as Corporate Services to assist with appointments. The revision of the recruitment and selection policy has also proved to cause long delays and changes to that policy are on the agenda today. This will improve capital expenditure and the roll-out of the MIG projects.

Electro-Tech

The Electro-technical directorate has developed a pilot project that will help mitigate the Eskom energy supply risk (load shedding) in the long term while still protecting electricity revenue in the short term.

The project consists of a wheeling arrangement with an energy trader, in other words, we will “rent out” our grid to transport energy.

The project will also create a more sustainable business model for the municipality’s electro-technical division and benefit the area by attracting investment into George through renewable energy generation.

In closing, I wish to extend a word of thanks to all our officials for their dedicated work under extremely difficult circumstances. Since the start of the pandemic, working hours and days for many of our staff have become a theoretic concept. Thank you so much.

We need to remember to remain and to observe Covid-19 protocols at all times.

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