

THE RELATIONSHIP AND INTERACTION BETWEEN POLITICAL OFFICE BEARERS AND CHIEF OFFICIALS IN POLICY MAKING AND SERVICE DELIVERY.

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ABSTRACT.

In the public sector, various functions are performed and various processes carried out. For the purpose of this paper the functions are grouped into legislative, executive and judicial functions. From this grouping the governing and administrative functions, which are part of the legislative and executive functions, become important because public policy is the linking pin between the latter functions. The governing and the executive functions require a co-operative, interactive partnership between the elected politicians in the legislative and governing institutions and the chief officials in the various governmental institutions. In this paper the nature and steps of the policy process, which is one of six processes, namely the

- policy process;
- financial process;
- organisational process;
- personnel process;
- procedure process; and
- control process

will be explained to give an understanding of the various steps in the policy process.

Policy making does not take place in isolation, but is made by humans for humans. The human factor in policy making can therefore not be ignored. The participants in policy making can be classified into three main groups, i.e. the

- citizens of a specific area;
- elected politicians; and
- appointed officials. For the purpose of this paper, the co-operative interaction between municipal councillors and chief officials in policy making and service delivery is essential and important.

INTRODUCTION.

Policy is a process consisting of a series of consecutive, related steps which demonstrate a recognisable pattern. It is generally accepted that the policy process consists of three main functions or steps, namely

- policy making;
- policy implementation; and
- policy analysis and evaluation.

Each of the three functions will be dealt with today. The purpose of this paper is to discuss policy making as a step in the policy process and to explain the role of the public chief official in the making of public policy and service delivery.

Firstly, the nature and place of the policy process in Public Administration will be explained. Secondly, policy initiation as the first step in policy making will be spelt out. Thirdly, policy formulation will be discussed and policy approval will be explained. Lastly the co-operative interaction between chief officials and political office-bearers in policy-making and service delivery will be explained.

1. NATURE AND PLACE OF POLICY PROCESS IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION.

Various approaches can be used in the study of Public Administration. The work that public officials do can also be divided into various categories, functions and processes. There are as many functions and processes classifications as there are numerous approaches possible. For the purpose of this paper it is desirable to group all the public administration functions and processes into six different categories. A process can be described as a course of action which consists of various consecutive related steps (a series of events, which form a recognisable pattern and which appear so often that the same pattern repeats itself).

The work that officials do, namely the executive functions, can thus be divided into six

specific processes, namely the

- policy process;
- financial process;
- organisational process;
- personnel process;
- procedure process; and
- control process.

The process should be seen in a comprehensive sense to include all the thought processes and actions necessary to achieve the objectives set out in the (executive) policy. A further analysis will show that each of the above processes will have three characteristics, namely an

- enabling;
- utilising (management); and
- operational characteristic.

The policy process can thus be divided into the following three consecutive steps or functions:

- Policy making (the enabling component).
- Policy implementation (the operational work); and
- Policy analysis and evaluation (the utilising/management component).

Policy making, which entails the

- initiation of policy;
- formulation of policy; and
- approval of policy

can be explained as follows.

2. POLICY INITIATION EXPLAINED.

With initiation is meant the activating of the policy making process (Hanekom, 1987: 45; Starling, 1977: 22), the commencement of the activities to make a policy. Policy making is undertaken in reaction to a specific deficiency or problem in the environment. It should be noted that policy is not only made to solve problems in a specific environment. The ideal situation is to determine policy that will prevent

potential shortcomings or problems in the municipal environment and which will correspond with the will and wishes of the majority of the citizens. Policy making is aimed at developing the environment and development means change. Before development can take place, the politicians and chief officials must identify specific development areas. Problems may exist in such areas and these problems should also be considered by the politicians and chief officials. However, before they can act, it is necessary that they should be aware of the needs, problems or potential problems and expectations of the citizens, regarding the development area(s).

Policy initiation refers thus to a three fold activity. Firstly policy initiation should refer to the policy maker(s) becoming aware of a new field of action and the need to undertake a search for development possibilities to promote a “good life” (Cloete, 1982:9). Secondly policy initiation refers to awareness of an existing problem in the community and the need to undertake a search for a possible solution to solve the problem (Edwards and Sharkansky, 1978: 263). Thirdly policy initiation could refer to awareness of a potential problem and the need to undertake a search for a quantifiable solution to prevent the problem (Hanekom, 1987:51).

Initiation thus relates to

- making known a problem;
- emphasising the necessity for a new policy or the amendment of an existing policy to satisfy an existing problem or to prevent a potential problem; and
- submission of suitable policy recommendations/proposals.

The search for a solution for a specific problem is, however, only the starting point in the design of a quantifiable policy on which rational, defensible work programmes can be based. To obtain such a result, it is necessary to undertake extensive investigation into the means and ways a problem can be solved/prevented (Meiring, 1987:135). Such investigation requires three related steps to be followed, i.e.

- awareness of the problem(s);
- description of the problem(s); and

- collection of information on solving/preventing the problem(s).

2.1 Awareness of a problem.

By referring to “something” as a problem, the presumption is made that a value-judgment on a specific condition at a specific place and moment of time, is seen as unsatisfactory for a person or group(s) of persons. A problem is not necessarily experienced by all people in a group (community) and does not always remain a problem to everyone (Laver, 1986:19). Problems are time and place bound and will always have a specific origin and result. Various symptoms may result from a problem (Meiring, 1987:146).

It could also happen that a political government can be aware of a specific problem, but has decided not to act. In addition, a political government may also be unaware of a specific problem and therefore not be able to act. It can thus be deduced that the politicians and chief officials can only act on a definite stimulus and that the citizens as individuals and as groups should take the initiative to bring such problem(s) to the attention of the politicians and/or officials. The politicians and chief officials usually endeavour to find solutions to problems which could harm the general welfare. Policy making reveals in this regard a dynamic characteristic, in that it constitutes a choice between development (change) or retaining the status quo (Anderson, 1979:19).

The awareness of a specific problem leads to the search for a quantifiable solution. Ideas and perceptions must be changed into specific resolutions and it must be decided which action is to be taken, e.g., to solve or prevent a problem. These decisions will also have an enforceable characteristic. Such action will end in the setting and publication of a policy. Various factors however will influence policy making, for example

- physical environmental factors such as the place, size and conditions of the soil of a geographical area, or the availability of resources;
- social environmental factors such as population composition, duration of life, educational standards or even the values of the inhabitants of the state;
- economic environmental factors such as standard of living, availability of money, market conditions and unemployment;

- constitutional (political) environmental factors such as the role of the higher authorities such as parliament, relationships and co-operation between authorities such as local authorities and the role of party politics (Meiring, 1987:148).

Problems in a community are noted in one or more of the following ways:

- Discussions between politicians and chief officials ;
- complaints and requests from individuals;
- complaints and requests from interest groups;
- opinion polls; and
- own observation of politicians and chief officials.

Specific factors may result in politicians and chief officials being unaware of the existence of a specific problem, for example

- (a) officials may be negligent, ignorant, dishonest and injudicious, which could result in the submission of incomplete reports or incorrect recommendations;
- (b) politicians could be uninformed, injudicious or could have insufficient time or knowledge to liaise sufficiently with the citizens of an area;
- (c) citizens could, as individuals, be ill-informed or apathetic and neglect to inform a government of a specific problem. Even groups (e.g. the press) may neglect to report on a specific problem (Meiring, 2001:54).

It can be deduced that solutions to specific problems in a community and the determining of a suitable policy are complicated by various factors which result from a rapidly changing environment. This could also hamper the taking of preventive measures.

2.2. Description of problem.

Before a solution to a problem can be formulated, it is necessary to describe the nature and scope of such problem. Determining the cause of a problem could lead to establishing a basis for recommendation and possible prediction for the elimination of such problem (Dunn, 1981:99). In addition attention should also be given to the obstacles in the way of finding a suitable solution. In a contemporary municipal

environment it is expected that the municipal council should act pro-actively by taking the lead and to govern development in a specific direction to ensure the effective and efficient rendering of services. Information is needed regarding the results that are desired, the obstacles that are being experienced and the limitations of a solution (Massie and Douglas, 1981: 173). The diagnosis and description of a problem is a cyclic process which requires continuous analysis and evaluation if the policy makers wish to take realistic decisions to meet the demands of a changing environment (Meiring, 2001:54).

Describing a problem leads to an observable presentation (description) which could be seen as an image of the real situation. How effectively the written description or presentation corresponds with a real problem will depend on the ability of the participants in the process as well as the quality of information that is available. The process of obtaining and processing information is for this reason linked to the human factor and is influenced by the values and perceptions of the participants. In addition the situation is further complicated by the perceivable/observable reality (the environment which has a specific problem) which changes, but also in values (Meiring, 2001:55).

It can thus be deduced, firstly, that three phenomena should be taken into account when describing a problem, i.e. the observable reality, the written description (presentation) of it, and the perceptions of the participants. Secondly, that divergent views could exist on the above phenomenon, between the participants on the one hand and the politicians and the officials on the other hand. The complexity of policy making is also demonstrated by this. Policy making can thus not always be reactive but must also be pro-active. The policy makers should, however, ensure that a proposed policy is associated and reconcilable with the needs and expectations of the inhabitants of the state.

2.3 Collection of information.

The elimination or prevention of a problem necessitates that such problem be defined in quantifiable terms. It should be borne in mind that formal communication on any

level of government occurs mostly by means of the written word. The elimination or prevention of problems and, for that matter the performance of any purposeful human action, entails decision making. It can thus be said that the describing of a problem includes communication and decision making and that information is needed for this. Such information must be obtained in and processed into suitable recommendations or proposals in order to eliminate or prevent a problem (Meiring, 1987:158).

To ensure that the information obtained is sufficient for determining an effective policy, a scientific approach should be followed and all the available information which relates to the topic should be considered. It could, however, happen that sufficient information is not available, maybe because the research has as yet not been undertaken (Hanekom and Thornhill, 1983:75).

It should also be noted that the collecting of information can be

- time-consuming;
- expensive (it is always linked to cost); and
- unrelated to community values.

As already indicated policy making as a continuous process, involves decision making on factual information and value-judgements. The factual information relates to the observable, measurable information that can be collected, e.g. the number of persons or vehicles using an existing road, the number of plots that must be serviced or the potential number of patients who will visit a new hospital or clinic. Values on the other hand relate to the inherent human feeling for what is, e.g., valuable, wanted or pursued. From this it becomes clear that the formulation of policy demands a compromise between factual information regarding the real problem or need and the information obtained on the values of the people. The politicians and chief officials should be sensitive when collecting information and should endeavour to expand the existing collected information in the light of new circumstances and as more information becomes available. The collection of information is thus a continuous process.

3. FORMULATION OF POLICY.

Policy formulation, which succeeds policy initiation, can be divided into two main categories. Firstly it must be decided what action is needed to solve or prevent a problem. Secondly a suitable proposal or recommendation must be formulated. By formulation is meant the clear, precise and accurate writing of processed information so as to attain a specific aim (Anderson, 1979:63). Policy formulation is thus the written description of a specific problem/need and the solution thereto. By drafting such policy proposals or recommendations the policy makers are able to exercise a final choice between the available alternatives to solve or prevent the problem/need. The information that has been obtained must thus be classified, described and processed into the required proposals or recommendations.

The various activities which constitute policy formulation are often described as agenda setting (Parsons, 1997:128-129). From this it can be deduced that the collecting and processing of information, e.g. for the setting of an agenda, is a prerequisite for the elimination/prevention of a problem (Dunn, 1994:16). The formulation of policy can for study purposes, be classified into various consecutive steps.

3.1 Liaison with interested parties.

By means of liaison with interested persons, it becomes possible to determine the public perceptions (which are sometimes conflicting) on a specific matter and to find suitable solutions. A reconciliation may be made between any existing divergent perceptions (Meiring, 2001:57). The divergent perceptions are usually based on the different values people hold. The factual information and non-quantifiable values can also be tested in such liaison. A policy can thus be made that will indeed promote the general welfare of the majority of the citizens (Hajer and Wagenaar, 2003:12).

3.2 Processing information.

The processing of information on any level or sphere of government is evidenced in

the compilation and submission of various agendas, reports and memoranda to committee and council meetings. Edwards and Sharkansky (1978:100) write, for example, that "...(w)hether or not a consensus develops over the nature of a given problem or the extent of its symptoms, persons who desire governmental action on an issue must have it placed on the agenda". In the contemporary public administration it is required that all public activities be performed with rationality. This entails that policy making also be founded on reason and that all decisions resulting from policy be defensible. The proposed action resulting from the policy should as far as possible, correspond with the will and wishes of the majority of the citizens.

3.3 Setting of objectives.

After the problem has been described, it must be decided what must be done to solve or prevent such problems. A specific future state of affairs is in fact pursued. Such desired intention can also be seen as a normative picture of the real problem. The decision on what must be done also becomes part of a process of setting objectives. The ideal in a democratic community (where public services are rendered), is that both the setting and ranking of objectives should be done spontaneously by the political representatives (Du Plessis, 1980:113). When an objective has been set and made known in the public sector, it is normally said that the policy has been made (Cloete, 1980:56). Public services cannot be rendered without the setting and making known of clear objectives, in order that all persons involved will know exactly the target at which the activities are aimed.

3.4 Determining priorities.

The determining of priorities or the setting of preferences is a given factor and part of any decision that is taken. The satisfied expectations of a human being will always lead to more or higher expectations. No government is continuously in a position to satisfy all the needs and expectations of the state inhabitants, e.g. due to a lack of sufficient money. Each person, from the individual to even a government, must thus set priorities. The most well-known scarce resource is that of finance. The policy makers usually take decisions that are based on information and recommendations

received from participants in the policy process, especially the chief officials, individuals and interest groups. In general, each executive institution will pursue a specific set of objectives which are closely linked to its main objective (goal) and statutory assignment.

Each executive institution, in the pursuance of its objectives, will compete with other institutions for the funding of such objectives. It could thus happen that some of the objectives could be in conflict or be counter-productive (Meiring, 2001:58). Needs are usually not equal and often difficult to compare or weigh up against each other, e.g. to take a decision to build a road or a hostel for the elderly. It becomes therefore paramount that objectives be defined clearly. The network of objectives that is to be found in any executive institution should also be ranked in a priority list, whereby it becomes clear which objectives are more important than others. The setting and ranking of objectives and priorities is based upon two questions, i.e. what should be done and what can be done to solve or eliminate a problem?

3.5 Considering alternatives .

In the public sector it is expected that all actions be rationally undertaken (Cloete, 1980: 57). It is thus necessary to guarantee that the set objective will indeed promote the general welfare. The complex nature of contemporary society means, however, that it is no simple task to guarantee that government action will always promote the general welfare. Demands from the inhabitants, politicians and officials will, for example, influence decision making. To guarantee that government action meets the expectations of the inhabitants and that services will be rendered as effectively and as efficiently as possible, it is necessary that all available alternatives be considered during the formulation of policy. There is usually more than one solution to a problem. To determine which alternative is the "best", all the advantages and disadvantages of each solution (i.e. alternative) should be considered.

To consider an alternative requires the making of an inventory of alternatives, the determining of all available consequences and a comparative evaluation of each consequence (Meiring, 2001:59). Only then can an order of priority be determined.

Although various reasons may influence the considering of alternatives, the more important determinants are costs, needs, existing infrastructure and historical background of the policy. Even the determining of specific criteria which could influence an alternative is influenced mostly by the cost, needs and the expert advice of the officials.

3.6 Survey of available financial resources.

The rendering of a public service to satisfy a specific community need is, of necessity, dependent on the availability of sufficient resources. Governments on all levels or spheres are frequently confronted with increasing competitive demands for more and effective services and a general lack of sufficient resources to meet such demands. The major limiting factor which influences the nature and scope of public service is, however, the limited ability of the citizens to provide the finance for such services. It is, therefore, necessary that a continuous survey be made of the financial resources that are available, and that the information obtained be compared with the expectations and demands of the citizens. The financing of a public service must in the end justify the effectiveness thereof and its contribution to the promotion of the general welfare.

It can be deduced that policy decisions cannot be taken arbitrarily because such decisions will always have a financial implication. Any change in the nature and scope of the public services rendered will stem from a change in policy, which will in most cases, have a financial implication.

4. POLICY APPROVAL.

Policy is to be found in various forms, for example, political policy, executive policy, departmental policy and operational policy, because policy making takes place on various levels and various participants play a co-operative role. The determining, for example, of an executive policy such as an act or a municipal by-law will differ from the determining of an operational policy as set out in a work programme. It should also be remembered that different objectives are set on each level of policy making. This could also result in a specific policy, e.g. a housing policy, will have political, executive, departmental and operational aspects to be taken into account. It can

thus be deduced that before a policy can be implemented, a specific development phase should be followed in that the political, executive, departmental and operational aspects must first be determined. This also means that each of these aspects must be formulated and approved before a policy can be implemented.

Meiring (2001:60) writes that it is not only specific objectives that must be set on each policy making level but the taking of various decisions also occurs. Depending on the level of policy making, a specific and changing premium will be placed on the relation between facts and values on each level. For example, a higher premium will be placed on values when political policy is being determined, and a higher premium will be placed on factual information when departmental policy is determined.

The formulation of policy is followed by the consideration and approval of such policy. The interaction between politicians and chief officials, which becomes apparent in the formulation of policy is also required during the consideration and approval of the formulated (draft) document. A specific procedure is usually followed, for example for the approval of an executive policy.

5. CO-OPERATIVE INTERACTION BETWEEN POLITICIANS AND CHIEF OFFICIALS IN POLICY MAKING AND SERVICE DELIVERY.

In the public sector it is the task of the elected political representatives, for example, the municipal councillors in the municipal council and the executive and other committees, to effect active arrangements to promote the welfare of the municipal citizens. A municipal councillor operates on three different levels. Firstly, at the level of an individual in the municipal council, often performing an assigned task. Secondly, at the level of a group, for example as a member of the executive committee, where policy decisions are made and the governing functions are being performed. Lastly, in the municipal council where legislation, for example by-laws are enacted. The elected councillors exist because the citizens want specific results that must be provided. Political office bearers are to a large extent elected and come into office through the ballot box. In some instances, however,

political office bearers may be appointed on the strength of their expert knowledge in a particular field. As elected officials, politicians have to always be sensitive to the needs of the electorate which voted them into office. Their major function is to formulate policy based on the values and needs of the electorate. The political office-bearers determine what is to be done and how action is to be taken to manage the communal or public affairs for the promotion of the general welfare. The political office bearers are the elected representatives and must obtain consensus in respect of the nature, scope and quality of goods and services which must be delivered to the communities. The governing function cannot be delegated because the political office bearers are accountable to the public for the effective and efficient governing and administration of their departments or municipalities. They are, furthermore, expected to,

- exercise overhead control over the implementation of policy;
- obtain public support for the policy and for the method of implementing it;
- fully account to the inhabitants for the success or failure of policy implementation; and
- obtain a clear understanding of the values of the people by being in constant contact with leaders and interest groups within the community.

All human associations are differentiated by the objectives and functions they perform. The relationship between councillors and chief officials are thus also determined by the division of work (functions between the two groups). An understanding of municipal policy making is impossible without recognition of the multiple purpose of such policy and the role of decision making in policy making.

Decisions are made by municipal councillors and officials and the aggregate of such decisions constitutes the final decision and thus, policy. The decisions taken can be divided into two categories, namely decisions on

- factual information provided by the municipal chief officials; and
- value judgments made by the municipal councillors.

Factual information and value considerations are thus important in policy making and in the determining and satisfying of community needs. The municipal council is par excellence the body to facilitate human action and interaction. The council must develop, maintain and improve a municipal environment which is conducive to

constructive social interaction and cultural development, to harmonise relationships between people, to generate a healthy economic climate and thus enrich human life.

Policy making can thus be seen as a linking pin between the legislature and governing functions of the municipal councillors and the administrative functions of the chief officials. In short it can be stated that the municipal councillors will determine what is to be done and how such action is to be taken, whilst the chief officials ensure that the “what” and “how” is made real by the subordinate municipal personnel. The municipal chief official can thus be seen as

- an executant of executive policy made by council;
- an advisor in the making of executive policy;
- a maker of departmental policy which compliments the executive policy;
- both an innovator and a conservator; and an interface of communication with the public on the one hand and the elected councillors on the other.

The chief official can be viewed as the single functionary around whom government and administration revolves and who can greatly influence the efficiency of government and administration.

The two important components of government are politics and administration. These two components have to be integrated and conducted by the chief official. Consequently the chief official will have to possess a thorough knowledge of these two components, being the basis of any municipal structure or any government for that matter. Since, on the one hand, the political office bearers are chiefly engaged in politics and are not necessarily acquainted with public administration as such, and on the other hand, specialist public officials lack knowledge of politics, it is essential to appoint a functionary who will possess knowledge of both aspects and, in addition, will have the ability to harmonise and integrate them.

The chief official needs to be conversant with the political dynamics to enable him to act efficiently as advisor and source of information to the political office bearer to enable him /her to carry out political duties proficiently. In the case of a municipality, for example, the Municipal Manager should understand and interpret the politics of the

municipality and transmit the information gained to the municipal officials. The Municipal Manager must also ensure that the policy proposals of the departmental heads are formulated in such a way that they could be used meaningfully by the Municipality in the political process. Officials are specialists in their field and although not empowered to make final decisions they can nevertheless through their specialist knowledge render valuable service by making recommendations to political office bearers. Such recommendations, however, should not be merely technically functional but take into account the broad political milieu in which they have to operate. Officials, therefore, need to take note of the effects of the broad political, economic, social and cultural environments within which they operate as these factors will have a decisive influence on their recommendations.

In addition to all this, the chief official ought to be a professional, a member of a service with its own standards of ethics and skills, making its own demands on the loyalty and support of the subordinates.

The political functions and the administrative functions are inseparably linked and it is not possible to separate them in practice. Today's public administration recognises that public policy-making involves both political and administrative components. Politics and administration play a continuously complementary role in both the making and implementation of policy. Traditionally, it was expected of public officials to only implement policy, to only act in an advisory capacity in policy-making and to adapt existing policy accordingly to changes made by political office bearers. This has, however, now changed. Carson and Harris (1963:12) write that, "...today it is recognised that public administrators play a vital role in the preparation and formulation of policies and programmes and advise political office bearers accordingly".

Today, the chief officials are not only partners in the making of policy but are often, e.g., in the making of departmental and operational policy, the senior partner and are sometimes just as much policy makers as the politicians are. In the contemporary government and administration, public officials have a supplementary role in the making and implementation of policy. It should, however, be noted that the politicians,

especially the political office bearers, remain responsible for the governing and legislative functions. The politicians (as a group) are as such responsible for conflict resolution, value allocation and the enforcement of legislative measures. It can also be said that the influence that political office bearers exercise over the administrative functions can be seen as the politicisation of administration, whilst the influence that the chief officials exercise over the political functions can be seen as bureaucratisation of politics. The official operates, just as the politician does, in a political environment and the decisions taken by an official will also have a specific influence on the general welfare experienced by the inhabitants.

In a rapidly changing political environment it is not always possible for officials to take all decisions in collaboration with politicians and members of a community. It could happen that an official must take decisions based on his/her own value-judgments and perceptions. It should also be taken into account that decisions that relate to the rendering of public services will always be linked to the values of the inhabitants. The public officials will for this reason always be involved in the judgment and recognition of such community values. However, the inhabitants are composed of various individuals and groups which results in divergent and many community values which need to be taken into account. Community values are not homogenous. The question thus arises: whose values must be taken into account? It is often found that divergent perceptions about community values exist. These perceptions might differ from views that community values should not be taken into account in policy making, or that the personal values of politicians should be the decisive factor, or that the values of the majority of inhabitants should be the decisive factor. This is a challenge that all of us gathered here should grapple with.

6. CONCLUSION.

A policy can be seen as a course of action designed to attain specific objectives. Policy will thus always involve both decisions and action. Action on behalf of the set objectives can result from policy only if the decisions themselves indicate clearly where the policy makers want to go and what they want to achieve. As a result the approved policy is the result of three consecutive steps which must be carried out

before a policy can be made or put into practical, operational steps. In this paper it has been explained that such policy needs to be initiated, formulated and eventually approved before it can be implemented. These steps are inherent requirements of all policies. However a policy is nothing more than a hypothesis. It must be tested, explained and proven to be true or false.

It can be concluded that policy making is part of the policy process and that the policy process is one of six administrative processes consisting of various functions. The policy process takes place in a unique environment which is not only time and place bound, but which is also continuously changing. As time goes on, human beings will continuously change the environment to make it a better place to live in . Human beings will always adapt to changes, they will invent, innovate and change. How do they do it and why do they do it? In the municipal sphere of government a co-operative, interactive role between councillors and chief officials is required.

I thank you.

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ADDENDUM .

POSSIBLE AREAS OF CONFLICT.

- One area of conflict between political office bearers and officials is the so-called “competition for turf”, where one imposes himself/herself as superior to the other in the department. The political office bearer would exercise political clout and the officials would claim experience and knowledge which may be perceived by the political office bearer as undermining political authority. The “competition” is detrimental to service delivery because there is always the possibility of “sabotage” on the part of the officials in terms of implementing policies. The adage that “when elephants fight it is the grass that suffers” holds true because out of the show of strength it is the communities that suffer. In some instances it has been observed that conflict between a political office bearer and a head of department or Municipal Manager, emanates from political party positions. In the municipality or department, the Minister or MEC, or Mayor may be senior in terms of the political position he/she holds but in the party structures outside, the head of department or Municipal Manager may hold a senior position of, for example, chairmanship over the Minister or MEC or Mayor. If the Minister/MEC/Mayor “throws his/her weight around” in the department or municipality, and gives instructions to the head of department or Municipal Manager, the latter may show reluctance/resistance to carry out such instructions from his/her “junior” in the party structures which actually elected the Minister/MEC/ or Mayor to the position he/she holds in the department/municipality. The attitude from the head of department/Municipal Manager may be that as chairman of the party, he/she is responsible or played a role in the employment of the political office bearer and that the latter’s stay in office is dependent on the whims of the party, which the head of department or Municipal Manager chairs with the attitude of “I am your employer and, therefore, cannot take instructions from you”. Service delivery is once again compromised.

The *Local Government Laws Amendment Bill* proposes that the employment contracts of municipal managers should be structured in such a way that municipal managers should not be employed for more than a year after the composition of a newly-elected council. The reason is that over the past few years, municipalities which were taken over by new politicians after local government elections, have experienced running battles between the newly-elected politicians and the incumbent municipal managers.

- An obvious area of conflict is different political party affiliation, where the political officer bearer and the Chief Official are affiliated to two different political parties, more so if such political parties are significant and of consequence to the electorate. Naturally, if such parties are almost always engaged in conflict in the legislature/parliament and even during election time, that will impact on the relationships between a political office bearer and his/her Chief Official, with each trying to push through political party agendas in the department or municipality.
- Politicisation of public officials by political office bearers impacts negatively on political neutrality of public officials as well as their accountability. Haque (2000:607) writes that political neutrality of public officials, which is one of the prerequisites in democracies, has been challenged by the increasing power of political office bearers to exert influence in the public service. Decisions with regard to appointment, dismissal and retirement of top officials are increasingly being based on political considerations and preferences of politicians. This is exacerbated by the introduction of contract-based appointments. Political influence of political office bearers on senior public officials, especially where their appointments are short-term, will make these public servants more loyal to their political heads, while ignoring accountability to the public. The politicians themselves become less accountable to the public.

Professional accountability in the public sector ensures that public officials perform their duties and functions in line with ethical norms and standards, the violation of which will result in disciplinary action against the guilty

officials. Although professional accountability grants the individuals a high degree of autonomy, and exposes them to being influenced by the norms and values of their profession rather than political responsiveness, in practice it is not a simple exercise. In some cases officials find themselves in a dilemma of being true to their internalised norms and values or giving in to political pressure in the course of performing their activities. The latter course of action gives room to corrupt activities and does not augur well for public accountability.

A question arises as to how this impasse can be circumvented and institutions repositioned for good governance and increased service delivery.