MINISTRY
COOPERATIVE GOVERNANCE AND TRADITIONAL AFFAIRS
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REMARKS BY DEPUTY MINISTER DR. NAMANE DICKSON MASEMOLA AT THE MISA PROFESSIONALISATION PROGRAMME INDUCTION SESSION FOR BUILT ENVIRONMENT OFFICIALS IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

BIRCHWOOD HOTEL & OR TAMBO CONFERENCE CENTRE, BOKSBURG, GAUTENG

23 OCTOBER 2026

Programme Director,

CEO of the Municipal Infrastructure Support Agent (MISA), Ms Pati Kgomo,

Representatives of the Department of Traditional Affairs, the South African Local Government Association, the Council for the Built Environment, statutory professional councils and voluntary associations,

Municipal managers and officials, engineers, construction project managers, town and regional planners, environmental scientists, property valuers, and all participants joining us today,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning.

It is a pleasure to join you at this important induction session, which marks a significant step in strengthening the professional capacity of local government and improving the way municipalities plan, deliver, operate and maintain infrastructure.

This programme recognises that effective service delivery depends not only on the availability of funding and technical resources, but also on the people who must translate public investment into functioning infrastructure and better living conditions for communities.

When a municipality plans and constructs a road, installs a water pipeline, upgrades an electricity network or develops a community facility, the quality of the outcome depends on the competence, integrity and accountability of the professionals responsible for that work.

Their decisions influence whether infrastructure is completed on time, whether public money is used appropriately, whether assets are maintained and whether communities receive the services they need.

The professionalisation of built environment officials is therefore not simply an administrative exercise or a process of obtaining professional registration, but rather an investment in the long-term ability of municipalities to fulfil their constitutional responsibilities and to provide reliable, sustainable services to the people they serve.

THE IMPACT WE WANT THIS PROGRAMME TO ACHIEVE

Government has made considerable investments in supporting municipalities through infrastructure grants, technical expertise and capacity-building initiatives. Through MISA, the CoGTA Portfolio deploys technical professionals and provides support to municipalities, particularly those with low and medium technical capacity, to strengthen infrastructure planning, project implementation and asset management.

This support is essential, but our experience has also shown that deploying technical experts to a municipality cannot, on its own, guarantee lasting improvement. Where a municipality depends indefinitely on external expertise without strengthening its own officials, the gains made during an intervention can diminish once that support is withdrawn.

Similarly, infrastructure projects cannot achieve their intended impact if they are undermined by weak planning, poor procurement, inadequate financial management, insufficient oversight or a failure to maintain completed assets.

This is the challenge that the professionalisation programme seeks to address. We want municipalities to build and retain the expertise required to manage their infrastructure responsibilities, rather than relying exclusively on support from outside their institutions.

We want technical knowledge to become part of the municipality’s permanent institutional capacity, enabling officials to make informed decisions, manage projects effectively, comply with professional standards and take responsibility for the quality of their work.

The programme prioritises key built environment disciplines, including electrical and civil engineering, construction project management, town and regional planning, environmental science and property valuation. These are critical fields in which professional competence

directly influences the planning, development, management and long-term sustainability of municipal infrastructure and services.

The current intake comprises 50 candidates drawn from seven of our nine provinces, of whom 19, representing 38%, are women. While we welcome this level of participation, we want to encourage more women to apply and take advantage of the opportunities offered through the programme.

We are also optimistic that the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape, which are not yet represented in the current intake, will have candidates participating in future intakes.

The provincial representation of the current intake is as follows: Mpumalanga has 16 candidates, Gauteng has 10, KwaZulu-Natal has nine, the Free State has eight, Limpopo and North-West have three each, while the Western Cape has one candidate. This distribution provides a foundation on which we can continue to expand access to professional development opportunities across all provinces.

Through this programme, we are supporting candidates to obtain professional registration with the relevant statutory councils, with the aim of strengthening technical competence, professional accountability and ethical conduct in local government.

Professional registration is more than a formal qualification; it demonstrates that practitioners have met recognised standards within their respective fields, and are committed to maintaining their competence and upholding the ethical requirements of their professions.

Achieving professional registration requires candidates to complete a structured candidacy process, which, depending on the requirements of the relevant statutory council, includes mentorship, training, coaching and the preparation of technical reports.

It is through this process that we seek to build a stronger culture of professionalism and ethical responsibility among built environment officials, particularly those entrusted with planning, managing and delivering municipal infrastructure projects.

We want officials who are not only technically capable but also confident and adequately equipped to engage meaningfully with consulting engineers, contractors and other professionals, ask the right questions, assess the quality of work and safeguard public resources throughout the implementation of infrastructure projects.

To facilitate this process, MISA has appointed the South African Institution of Civil Engineering-Professional Development and Projects (SAICE-PDP) as the mentorship service provider for a period of 36 months. Each candidate is allocated a mentor who provides guidance and support throughout the candidacy process.

While the programme is structured over three years, candidates who demonstrate the necessary readiness may complete the process earlier and submit their reports for professional review in accordance with the requirements of their respective statutory councils.

This investment in our built environment professionals is ultimately an investment in the capacity of municipalities to plan better, manage infrastructure more effectively and deliver reliable, sustainable services to communities.

By strengthening the professional capabilities of the officials responsible for these functions, we are taking practical steps towards building municipalities that are better equipped to fulfil their developmental mandate and meet the expectations of the people they serve.

The intended impact must, however, extend beyond the individual official. We must see improvements in how municipalities prepare infrastructure plans, develop project pipelines, manage contractors, monitor expenditure, prevent irregularities, comply with technical standards and maintain infrastructure after construction.

We must also see greater continuity in municipal technical functions, better institutional knowledge and stronger accountability for project outcomes.

Ultimately, the value of this programme will be measured by what changes in municipalities and in the lives of communities. It must contribute to fewer avoidable project delays, better-quality infrastructure, more effective and efficient use of public resources and more reliable municipal services.

For us, at its core, professionalisation must translate into practical improvements that residents can experience in their daily lives.

PROFESSIONALISATION AS A FOUNDATION FOR A CAPABLE STATE

The National Development Plan: Vision 2030 identifies the need for a capable and developmental state, supported by a professional public sector that can implement policy and deliver services effectively. This remains particularly relevant to local government, where the

ability of the state is tested daily through the availability of water, sanitation, electricity, roads, waste removal, spatial planning and other essential services.

In October 2022, government adopted the National Framework Towards Professionalisation of the Public Sector, which seeks to build a capable, efficient, ethical and development-oriented state. Its emphasis on professional conduct, competence and service to the public speaks directly to the responsibilities of municipal officials and the professionals who manage public infrastructure.

Professionalisation must be understood as more than acquiring qualifications or meeting the requirements of a professional body. It requires a commitment to public service, ethical decision-making, continuous learning and accountability for the consequences of one's work. Technical professionals in local government must understand that their expertise is exercised in the public interest and that the resources they manage belong to the people.

This means that an engineer must be prepared to uphold safety and quality standards even when there is pressure to compromise. A project manager must ensure that projects are properly planned, monitored and completed in accordance with approved specifications.

A town planner must support development that responds to the needs of communities while promoting sustainable and integrated settlements. An environmental scientist must ensure that environmental considerations are incorporated into infrastructure decisions, while property valuers must apply appropriate professional standards in the valuation of public assets.

These responsibilities require both individual professionalism and an institutional environment that enables officials to perform their duties. Municipalities must recruit and retain appropriately qualified personnel, provide opportunities for professional development, establish sound management systems and hold officials accountable for their responsibilities.

Equally, political leadership and municipal administrations must respect the distinction between political oversight and professional administration.

We cannot expect individuals to sustain professional standards if they work in institutions where poor planning is tolerated, accountability is weak or technical advice is disregarded. Professionalisation must therefore be accompanied by improvements in governance, administration, financial management and organisational culture.

PROFESSIONALISATION AND THE REVISED WHITE PAPER ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

The timing of this induction session is especially significant because just yesterday at this same venue, the President of the Republic, His Excellency Cyril Ramaphosa, launched the

Final Revised White Paper on Local Government (WPLG), following Cabinet's approval of the policy framework.

The White Paper review responds to the need to strengthen local government and ensure that municipalities are better equipped to meet the developmental needs of their communities. It provides an opportunity to reconsider how the local government system is organised, how responsibilities are allocated, how performance is supported and how national and provincial government can work more effectively with municipalities.

The professionalisation programme and the Revised WPLG are closely connected because both recognise that municipalities must have the institutional capability to fulfil their mandates.

Policy reform can establish a clearer framework for how local government should function, but the implementation of that policy depends on the availability of skilled people, effective institutions and systems that support performance and accountability.

This is why the professionalisation of built environment officials must be seen as part of the broader reform of local government. The Revised White Paper provides the policy direction for strengthening the local government system, while initiatives such as this programme contribute to the human and institutional capacity required to put that direction into practice.

The White Paper also recognises the need to address fragmentation in the support provided to municipalities. Over time, different spheres of government and institutions have introduced capacity-building initiatives, sometimes with overlapping objectives, different reporting arrangements and insufficient coordination.

Although these initiatives may be well intentioned, fragmented support can place additional demands on municipalities without necessarily addressing their most pressing institutional weaknesses.

We must therefore move towards a more coordinated and differentiated approach to municipal support, one that responds to the actual circumstances and capacity of individual municipalities. Support should be informed by municipal priorities, including those identified through Integrated Development Plans, and should strengthen the ability of municipalities to deliver on their mandates.

The professionalisation programme can make a meaningful contribution to this approach by bringing together the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCoG), MISA, municipalities, professional councils, the Council for the Built Environment (CBE), South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and the relevant skills development institutions around a shared objective. Rather than working in isolation, these partners must coordinate their

resources, expertise and interventions to address identified skills gaps and strengthen municipal performance.

The significance of yesterday's launch therefore must not be seen as a policy document alone that will resolve the challenges facing local government. Its significance lies in the opportunity to establish a clearer reform direction and to align the work of government and its partners behind the practical changes required.

As we implement the Revised White Paper, we must ensure that professionalisation is not treated as a separate initiative operating alongside local government reform. It must be integrated into the way municipalities plan, budget, recruit, develop their workforce, manage infrastructure and account for performance.

BUILDING A COORDINATED SYSTEM OF MUNICIPAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Programme Director, the Integrated Local Government Capacity Building Strategy provides an important basis for improving coordination among the institutions involved in strengthening municipal capacity. It calls for a more collaborative approach in which public and private institutions align their interventions with the strategic objectives of municipalities.

The success of this professionalisation programme will depend on such collaboration. MISA cannot carry this responsibility alone. Municipalities must identify their skills gaps and create opportunities for officials to participate in professional development.

Statutory councils must provide guidance on registration requirements and professional standards. The CBE and voluntary associations must contribute their expertise, while the relevant Sector Education and Training Authorities must support skills development pathways.

SALGA has an important role in supporting municipalities to understand and address their capacity requirements, while the DCoG must provide policy direction and facilitate coordination across the local government system.

Municipal leadership must also ensure that professional development is supported by appropriate workforce planning, institutional arrangements and performance management.

The Municipal Infrastructure Grant is another important part of this picture. Infrastructure funding must be supported by the capacity to plan and implement projects effectively. Municipalities need functioning Project Management units, appropriately skilled officials and systems that enable them to manage the full infrastructure cycle, from project identification and feasibility to procurement, construction, commissioning and maintenance.

We must be clear that the allocation of funding does not automatically result in infrastructure delivery. Municipalities require the technical and administrative capability to convert available resources into completed projects that meet community needs.

Where that capability is weak, the consequences can include delays, cost escalations, incomplete projects and infrastructure that fails to deliver its intended benefits.

Through MISA's support and this professionalisation programme, we have an opportunity to strengthen that capacity in a more sustainable manner. The objective is not to replace municipal responsibility with external expertise, but to ensure that municipalities develop the internal capabilities to manage their responsibilities with increasing independence and confidence.

This approach must also recognise that municipalities do not all have the same needs. A small rural municipality may face different skills shortages and operational constraints from a large metropolitan municipality. Our interventions must therefore be differentiated, evidence-based and responsive to the context in which each municipality operates.

Ladies and gentlemen, as we begin this programme, I encourage every participant and institution represented here to approach it as a shared responsibility. The challenges facing local government are complex and addressing them requires more than isolated interventions or short-term deployments of expertise. It requires sustained investment in people, strong institutions, coordinated support and a commitment to professional standards.

To the officials participating in this programme, I encourage you to take full advantage of the opportunities presented to you. Professional registration should be regarded not merely as a career milestone, but as a commitment to serve the public with competence, integrity and accountability.

The communities we serve must be able to trust that the professionals responsible for their infrastructure will make decisions that protect public resources, uphold safety standards and promote sustainable development.

To municipalities, I urge you to prioritise the development and retention of technical skills within your institutions. Identify your capacity gaps, support your officials in pursuing professional registration and continuous development, and create an environment in which professional expertise informs planning, budgeting, project implementation and decision-making.

To our professional councils, voluntary associations, educational institutions and sector partners, I call for stronger collaboration in supporting the professional development of municipal officials. We must ensure that the pathways to professional registration are

understood, that appropriate mentorship and practical experience are available, and that the programme responds to the actual needs of municipalities.

To MISA and the Department, the responsibility is to ensure that this initiative is implemented with clear objectives, coordinated support and measurable outcomes. We must track progress, identify obstacles and make the necessary adjustments to ensure that the programme produces lasting institutional benefits.

We must move beyond viewing municipal capacity as a temporary requirement to be addressed whenever a crisis emerges. Building capacity must become a continuous institutional responsibility, supported by workforce planning, professional development, knowledge transfer and effective partnerships.

Let us work together to ensure that the knowledge gained through this programme is reflected in better-managed projects, more effective use of public resources, stronger municipal institutions and improved service delivery.

Our communities do not experience government through policy documents or programme announcements alone. They experience government through the quality of the services they receive, the infrastructure they use and the responsiveness of the institutions entrusted with serving them.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that the work we undertake here contributes to tangible and lasting improvements in their lives.

I wish all participants a productive induction session and look forward to seeing this programme translate into meaningful progress in strengthening municipal capacity and professionalising local government.

I thank you.