

Single public service

Challenges ahead

For many years, municipal councils have enjoyed the freedom to determine the recruitment, appointments, promotions, transfers and dismissals of their employees.

This is in line with section 160(1)(c) of the Constitution, which provides that a municipality may employ personnel that are necessary for the effective performance of its function. With the differences in resources and capacities between municipalities, this means conditions of service vary from one municipality to another.

Parliamentary address by the Minister of Public Service and Administration

The Minister of Public Service and Administration, Ms. Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, initiated a discussion in Parliament on 19 October 2004 regarding the integration of the current public service and local government. This will mean a radical change from the current situation. The public service as it exists now establishes uniform conditions of service throughout the national and provincial government departments. The Minister believes that by integrating the public service and local government under the same legislative framework, it will strengthen co-ordination between the spheres of government, eliminate fragmentation and make seamless service delivery a reality.

The Minister said that local government stands at the forefront of delivery, but in order to make local government successful in performing its functions there is a need to extend its capacity to fulfil its delivery and developmental responsibilities. Functions have increasingly been shifted or assigned to local government, but, at times, without the necessary resources and capacity.

Local government is a critical player in the government supply chain. Based on this understanding, she said, the government is exploring ways to ensure that, as the needs of delivery change in nature and location, there are leaders to manage and lead service delivery processes. One way to ensure this is the deployment of senior managers from one area of the public service to another – for instance, from national or provincial government to local government. This means that senior managers will be appointed to the service, not to a specific post, and can thus be deployed wherever their skills and experience can be put to the best possible use.

Challenges

The Minister conceded that harmonising public service and local government conditions of service pose new challenges to the government

key points

- The creation of a single public service has been raised for discussion.
- The challenges of this proposal include potential inroads into a municipality's constitutional autonomy.

because of the differences between these two spheres. Some of the challenges are:

- The differences in conditions of service between the public service (provincial and national government) and local government. Public service conditions of service are uniform, regardless of location or department, while local government conditions of service are, in theory, based on affordability and vary from municipality to municipality.
- The public service has a single employer (the State) whereas in local government each municipality is an employer.
- The public service has a single, defined-benefit retirement fund, whereas local government is in the planning stages of establishing a single, defined-contribution fund.

Comments

While this initiative may be welcomed by those municipalities experiencing difficulties, others may consider it an unacceptable intrusion on their autonomy. The huge salary packages paid to some municipal managers have, no doubt, contributed to this debate. The outcome of this debate should be in the interest of local government and service delivery.

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