

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Knysna Municipality meets with community to discuss grievances.**

Knysna was brought to a standstill due to protest actions on more than one occasion this year. This has not only had a negative economic impact on the town but has caused chaos with traffic on the N2 unable to enter or exit the town from the east for hours on end. Municipal Manager Dr Sitembele Vatala met with community representation to discuss their grievances at a meeting facilitated by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) on 31 July this year.

“The SAHRC requested this meeting on behalf of Knysna United,” said Dr Vatala. “I have been working with this organisation to find solutions to our community’s issues and we have made great strides together. We discussed – and resolved - three main issues at this meeting. The results were later conveyed to the community during a public meeting, also facilitated by the SAHRC.”

One of the issues discussed, was with the municipality’s approach to installing new water management devices (WMD’s). Knysna United felt that this was an unconstitutional and illegal action. It felt that the municipality had neglected to consider backyard dwellers and that the monthly allotted free water might not be sufficient. To this end it suggested that each indigent household be provided with a water tank. The organisation also had a problem with the contractor’s conduct.

“The installation of WMD’s was rolled out in wards 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 and 11 as these are the wards where most households had not even had a traditional water meter installed,” responded Dr Vatala. “The second phase of installations in wards 9 and 10 began on 1 August, but residents from these, and other, wards had already started applying for WMD’s before this. The Board of Trustees that administers the Thesen Islands Homeowners’ Association had also already resolved to have WMD’s installed throughout Thesen Islands much earlier than that. I can reconfirm that, although very beneficial to households in the long run, installation of a WMD remains completely voluntary.”

Indigent consumers already receive 6kl of water per month for free while other users receive 3kl per month. Dr Vatala has proposed to Council that an additional 50l of water per day be allotted to indigent consumers, as well as an additional 20l per day to other households. Any water consumed over and above these allotted amounts must be purchased. “We will also have a discussion with the contractor regarding allegations made against them,” he added.

The housing situation in Hornlee was also discussed, as there is a perception that very little is being done here in terms of housing delivery. “Hornlee is included in a three-year delivery plan developed by our Directorate of Integrated Human Settlements,” Dr Vatala said. “This plan aims to see at least 150 homes built in Hornlee during the next two financial years at a combined cost of approximately R20 million.”

Schedule 4 of the Constitution of South Africa states that providing housing is not a local government function, but that of National and Provincial Government. Local municipalities have, however, become the implementing agency for the roll-out of housing projects. “And this is a role we must assume under continuous uncertainty regarding funding and immense stress on our already strained resources,” Dr Vatala confirmed.

The final issue raised by Knysna United was that of land claims and redistribution. It was confirmed that this is a function of National Government at the meeting. “Knysna Municipality will, however, play an important role in assisting with this process when and as necessary,” he said.

“We take any issues facing our communities very seriously,” Vatala concluded. “We are here to explain matters and to assist where and how we can. The important thing to remember is that there are proper channels for raising concerns and having your voice heard. Knysna United knows that my door is open to them and by working together, we have been able to come to understandings on most issues. Communication and cooperation between our communities and the municipality – as in this case – is one of the main avenues to creating an inspired, innovative and inclusive Knysna.”

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