

### **Council will not tolerate threats of violence**

Knysna Executive Mayor, Elrick van Aswegen stressed that Knysna Municipality would not tolerate threats against its councillors nor against the economic welfare of the Greater Knysna.

This statement followed threats against several Knysna Municipal Councillors and their families from lawless residents and illegal protests. “There seems to be an inherent lack of understanding of the roles designated to our three spheres of government, namely; National, Provincial and Local Government,” said the Mayor.

“Because of this lack of understanding our councillors are often faced with the threat of violence and intimidation from community members. They are at times expected to mediate on behalf of entities of the state or account for issues falling outside their scope of responsibility. This often places their lives and those of their immediate family, and their properties at risk. People are showing misguided anger towards councillors, when it is other entities that ought to take responsibility,” said van Aswegen.

He called upon these misguided residents of Greater Knysna to inform themselves on the role of councillors to prevent misdirected blame and violence. “I ask you to familiarise yourselves with Council decisions. All our council meeting minutes are available, so I urge those of you who take to the streets in protest, first find out what the council decision on the issue has been. I assure you that Council does not take decisions lightly, we always take the community’s best interest into account, while trying to balance in our fiscal responsibility during these extremely tough times.”

“Despite Covid-19 preventing community meetings during which our Integrated Development Planning (IDP) could be discussed, our residents still had access to the IDP and were given the opportunity to submit their representations before it was accepted by council, and many did. It has not escaped my attention that many of the protests and threats originate for opportunistic would-be politicians who are already setting their stage for next year’s elections, and we will not tolerate such behaviour.

“Besides the IDP, every Greater Knysna Ward has a ward committee whose purpose it is to bring community grievances to the attention of their ward councillor. These committees are well versed in the role of their councillor and the various spheres of government, i.e. housing is not a municipal issue, but rather the responsibility of Provincial and National Government.

Just as the provision of electricity in rural areas such as in Rheenendal and Karatara is the responsibility of Eskom. As local government we respect the need to protect state assets and to maintain law and order. All spheres of government currently face extreme budget pressures and the cost to repair the damage caused during invasions and protests will further impact our already stretched service delivery.

“Threatening violence against our councillors and their families will result in valuable funds being diverted to ensure their safety, once again impacting on vital service delivery.”

He added that he most vehemently condemns the violent and destructive protests and land invasions over recent days. “Closing the N2 serves no purpose, other than impacting on our ability to provide key services to the most vulnerable residents. I am of the opinion that many of the recent land invasions and protests appear to be coordinated efforts by a select few as mentioned earlier, people who hope to profit politically from these attacks and invasions.

Council is committed to apply the full force of the law to those who take the law into their own hands. Be aware that we will arrest those who break the law by joining illegal protests, threatening violence and damaging property, leaving their families without a breadwinner,” the Mayor stressed.

Van Aswegen reminds all residents of the Covid-19 regulations prohibiting large gatherings and the dangers of such behaviour. “Greater Knysna, that has recorded over 1 000 Covid-19 positive cases, and has been identified as a Covid-19 hotspot. It is now, important more than ever that all our residents adhere to the Covid-19 regulations to ensure that we flatten the curve. So please, for your own safety and of those vulnerable residents, I urge you not to partake in these protests.

“Don’t be used by underhanded politicking, especially during these dangerous Covid-19 times. If you feel pressurised into committing a crime, I urge you to contact the Police and report the incidence. I further urge all residents to keep an eye on the Knysna Municipal communication portals which keep the public updated on service delivery developments.”

**ENDS**

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