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Municipality's role in tourism clarified

The Constitution of South Africa identifies local tourism as a municipal competency, but also as a concurrent responsibility between national and provincial government. Knysna Municipality Acting Executive Mayor Dr Louis Scheepers explained that different aspects of local tourism could be identified.

"First there is the actual tourism industry, made up of private businesses that cater to the needs of tourists," he said. "Then there is the destination marketing function, which is of critical importance. What few people consider, however, is the fact that conditions in town must facilitate the marketing of Knysna as a destination, as well as the functionality of the tourism industry."

"This is the municipality's main function in terms of local tourism," he continued. "To create policies that facilitate tourism business in our town, and to maintain and build on our infrastructure to ensure that all services are delivered as expected, and that all visitors will have an enjoyable experience when interacting with that infrastructure."

While the Constitution relegates local tourism to local government, the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 does allow for a municipality to explore the possibility of providing the service through an external mechanism. Investigating the future possibilities of either providing this service internally or externally, a report on the Systems Act Section 76 & 78 assessment of the tourism mandate and functions of Knysna Municipality was tabled at the Planning and Development Committee Meeting of 19 November 2020.

Certain aspects that must be taken into account when considering the outsourcing of this function or managing it internally include the direct and indirect cost benefits of providing the service through an internal mechanism; the municipality's capacity and potential future capacity to do so; and the likely impact on development, job creation and employment patterns.

Knysna Municipality entered into a Service Level Agreement with Wesgro, the official tourism, trade and investment promotion agency for Cape Town and the Western Cape, on 23 October 2018.

"Wesgro is responsible for promoting Knysna as a tourism destination on behalf of the municipality," said Dr Scheepers. "They work closely with our Economic Development Department to ensure a better alignment between tourism development and promotion."

Wesgro is being paid R13 240 000 over three years: R4 million in the first year, R4,4 million in the second and R4,8 million in year three.

The municipality's Economic Development Department has taken upon itself the creation of a local economic development strategy as well as a tourism destination strategy. These form part of the municipality's Integrated Development Plan. "These strategies will identify and prioritise the specific interventions and initiatives that are required to ensure governance and assure quality in the industry at a local level, develop and grow both demand and supply for local tourism products and drive skills and people development within the local population," he said.

“It is also important to note that Knysna Municipality is not responsible for job creation,” he continued. “That might sound like a controversial statement, but the municipality is responsible for ensuring that the overall economic and social conditions are conducive to the creation of employment opportunities.”

A further report on an appropriate delivery mechanism for the functions of destination marketing; event attraction, facilitation and marketing; and a local tourism office/visitor information centre will be tabled for consideration in the near future.

“The tourism industry has long been the driving force of our local economy,” Dr Scheepers concluded. “It brings value to multiple industry sectors and is the cornerstone of socio-economic development within the greater Knysna municipal area. Our commitment to the further development of tourism will present unmatched opportunities for investment in and the economic development of our area. That is how we’ll create an innovative, inclusive and inspired Knysna.”

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