**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**COGTA COMMITTEE WANTS ANSWERS FROM MOGALAKWENA MUNICIPALITY**

**Parliament, Thursday, 5 November 2020** – The Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (Cogta), on Tuesday established the state of Mogalakwena Local Municipality by interacting with the Mogalakwena Local Municipality; the Office of the Auditor-General of South Africa; the South African Local Government Association; Provincial Treasury; the Provincial Department of Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs; and the Department of Cooperative Governance.

This meeting was a follow-up on matters emanating from the portfolio committee’s previous interactions with Tzaneen and Mogalakwena municipalities.

In Tzaneen, the committee first dealt with the matter of the suspension of the municipal manager (MM) in connection with the Mulati access road and the Codesa to Hani Street road construction projects. It was resolved that the suspension of the municipal manager was unlawful and illogical, a stance which a court subsequently confirmed. The committee also agreed that the termination of the two contracts was within the MM’s fiduciary responsibility as the accounting officer, as prescribed in the Municipal Financial Management Act. The committee then envisaged a final discussion with the municipality to close the matter.

The committee also considered a petition regarding the enforcement of by-laws in the municipality. The committee felt that the matters contained in that petition could have been resolved at the municipal level. The petition did not exhaust all the prerequisite avenues before being tabled to the Speaker of the National Assembly. The challenge was the communication gap between the municipality and the petitioners, and this needed to be resolved at that level.

In Mogalakwena municipality, the committee first dealt with the matter of consecutive adverse or disclaimed audit opinions in a joint meeting with the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. As a follow-up on the matters raised in that meeting, the committee conducted an oversight visit to the municipality last year. The municipality was then called to Parliament, but there was an interruption in deliberations due to load shedding. The municipality was again called on 28 February 2020 to resume the meeting.

By that time, the municipality had undergone constitutional intervention in terms of Section 139 (1) (b). The committee had also recommended serious intervention to normalise and bring Mogalakwena municipality back to stability. The intervention is now near to completing its 12-month duration.

The committee heard that the intervention was a breakthrough for the municipality. The speaker of the municipality, Councillor HS Mathebula said he was confident in the process of the intervention by provincial government, while Councillor Rassie Maepa informed the committee that the intervention was not working as reports were brought to the council after nine months. The Deputy Director-General of Cogta indicated that the administrator and all components of the administration are working.

The committee heard that Mogalakwena municipality owes Eskom almost R500 million and asked what plans are in place to repay this debt and stabilise the municipality.

The committee also wanted answers on the seven companies contracted to supply personal protective equipment for Covid-19. Were these new service providers or already on the database of municipal service providers, the committee asked. The committee requested a breakdown of how much each tender was worth and for information on councillors doing business with the municipality.

The committee questioned the municipality’s mayor, Councillor Andrina Matsimela, on the R200 000 spent on hiring a Mercedes Benz while water delivery to communities in the municipality is poor. The mayor did not respond to this question due to issues with network connectivity. However, the committee has requested a written response from the municipality.

The committee also calls for better oversight by the Provincial Portfolio Committee on Cooperative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs, as that left the meeting without addressing concerns raised by the portfolio committee. Therefore, the portfolio committee calls on all three spheres of government to work together to assist municipalities to deliver on their mandate.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE COMMITTEE, MS FAITH MUTHAMBI.**