**National Assembly**

**Tuesday, 17 May 2022**

**Budget Vote 4: Government Communication and Information System** (**GCIS**)

**Hon. MM Hlengwa, MP (delivered on behalf of Hon. Z Majozi, MP)**

Hon. Speaker,

It is fitting that we meet on 17 May, World Telecommunication and Information Society Day. A Day founded to “help raise awareness of the possibilities the Internet and other information and communication technologies (ICT) can bring to societies and economies.”

Communication is central to everything we do. It is how we share information, and in today’s world, there are multiple platforms and mediums used to get messages across to audiences.

The importance of the Department of Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) can therefore not be overstated. In brief, and I quote, “the Department is responsible for providing strategic leadership and coordinating a government communication system that ensures that the public is informed, and has access to government information, programmes and policies that benefit them”.

As the IFP, we would like to remind all those present today, and joining us online, that GCIS’s “coordination role cuts across all three spheres; national, provincial and local government.” One would hope that this would automatically ensure cooperation between various departments. However, it seems, this is not the case. According to the Portfolio Committee,  “Although [GCIS] has a constitutional mandate, it however still relies on the power of persuasion to compel some departments to fulfil their communication obligations.”

Considering the type of information GCIS is tasked with disseminating – at times, life-saving – we call on all non-compliant Departments to get their houses in order.

It is further of concern to the IFP that in a country with over 60 million people, the digital footprint of this Department is relatively small.

Despite the Department’s claim to have “seamlessly adapted to the modern ways in which the public consume or receive information, by embarking on an intensive penetration and sustained presence in the digital media space”, the numbers tell a different story. On Facebook, this Department has just over 8 000 followers; on Twitter, slightly more, with almost 122 000 followers; while on YouTube, the Department has 64 000 subscribers.

However, who is speaking to the youth? Why does the Department not have an Instagram account?

According to international research agency, Statista, “As of March 2022, there were 6.8 million Instagram users in South Africa …  with 18 to 23 year olds [making] up 30.8 percent of Instagram’s audience” and  “users aged 25 to 34 years … with 30.3 percent.”

Interestingly, no mention is made in the Budget Report of specific allocations to increase the Department’s footprint on social media. Instead, it seems that GCIS is directing a large chunk of its budget on what is arguably a dying medium: print.

According to the Report, “Over the medium term, the Department plans to produce 30.6 million copies of Vuk’uzenzele at an estimated cost of R75 million to R50.4 million per year for printing”. Has the Department conducted any monitoring and evolution on the efficiency of Vuk’uzenzele as a vehicle to convey essential news to the broader public? This is a line item that possibly might need to be reviewed, and the monies invested more wisely.

We welcome the plans for  “1 140 community and stakeholder engagements per year”, which include “community radio talk-shows, activations at taxi ranks and mall, information blitzes on commuter trains and social media campaigns”. As the IFP, we feel this type of engagement is much more appropriate for reaching South Africans where they travel, work and engage, and should be expanded.

We further welcome the Department’s plans to “invest in technological reforms … in light of cyber-security issues”, as well as to enable to Department to function effectively in a fast-moving digital environment.

As the IFP, we must also register concern in relation to the Media Development and Diversity Agency (MDDA), and that “overall expenditure on community and small commercial print and digital projects and community broadcast projects is expected to decrease from R5.8 million in 2021/22 to R4.3 million in 2022/23”.

This Agency’s all-important goal is “to enable historically disadvantaged communities and individuals to gain access to the media”. There should be more funding directed to this Agency, not less.

Upon consideration of the Portfolio Committee’s Report, the IFP echoes its observations, and supports the accompanying recommendations.

The IFP supports the Budget.