

## **Communication Policy for Bushbuckridge Local Municipality**

### **1. Background**

1.1 Historically, decisions and policies were formulated by local government without consulting communities and community interest groups and imposed on the community, with the result that implementation was not as effective as anticipated.

1.2 The Constitution of the Country adopted on 8 May 1996 envisaged a complete transformation of the local government system. In terms of the Constitution, local government is a sphere of government in its own right and no longer a function of national and provincial government. Local government has also been given a distinctive status and role in building democracy and promoting socio-economic development. It requires from local government to involve communities and community interest groups in local government matters.

1.3 The government embarked on a policy process that would give effect to this new vision of local government. To this end, an intensive 18 – month period of consultation and research culminated in the White Paper on Local Government. This White Paper spells out the framework and programmes in terms of which the existing local government system will be radically transformed. It establishes the basis for a system of “developmental local government” which is centrally concerned with working with local citizens and communities to find sustainable ways to meet their needs and improve the quality of their lives. The definition of developmental local government as contained in Section B on page 17 of the White Paper on local government reads as follows:

*“Developmental Local Government is local government committed to working with citizens and groups within the community to find sustainable ways to meet their social, economic and material needs and improve the quality of their lives”.*

1.4 The Municipal System Act gives effect to the vision of “developmental local government” as envisaged in the White Paper on Local Government. This Act elaborates the core principles, mechanisms and processes that are necessary to enable municipalities to move progressively towards the social and economic upliftment of communities, and ensure universal access to quality services that are affordable to all.

1.5 The Act extends the definition of municipality to include residents and communities within the municipal area, working in partnership with the municipality's political and administrative structures. This relationship is fundamental to sound and effective governance, and the long-term sustainability of local government. The Act establishes a simple and enabling framework for the core processes of planning, performance management, resource mobilization and organizational change, which underpin the notion of developmental local government. By linking these processes into a single, integrated cycle at local level, the Act undoes the complex, fragmented, top – down, overregulated approaches of the past. In seeking to maximize resident's knowledge of municipal plans and targets, and giving both Council and residents tools with which to evaluate and compare municipal performance. The Act creates a bottom – up processes of driving development, improving performance and facilitating change.

1.6 From the aforementioned new local government legislation it is clear that there should be a shift from governing to governance. It requires therefore Bushbuckridge Local Municipality (BLM) to consider its approach to communication and citizen involvement in local government is captured in Council's vision that is "*Bushbuckridge Local Municipality strives for a developmental and prosperous life for all*".

1.7 Descending from the vision, the need for a communication policy was identified which should enable Council to interact with the broader community as outlined in the Bushbuckridge Local Municipality (BLM) Integrated Development Plan (IDP).

1.8 The White Paper on the transformation of the public service (1995) has established a policy framework to guide the introduction and implementation of new policies and legislation aimed at transforming the South African public service, to that end, this policy takes cognizance of it as a high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained.

1.9 Promotion of access to information Act (Act 2 of 2000) gives effect to the constitutional right of access to any information held by the state. In the past, the government system was regarded as secretive and unresponsive to the needs of the people, leading to abuse of power and even violations within basic human rights. To that effect, the Batho-Pele principles are based on these fundamental cornerstones of legislation and brings the actual implementation thereof, closer to the people it aims to serve.

1.10 Knowing our rights is in fact the very same base from which Batho-Pele is operationalised and cultivating a caring and serving culture, from which we deliver services, will ensure that all citizens receive the services they are entitled to. It will make Batho-Pele “people first” a very real experience to all who embrace its nature.

## **2. Communication Policy for Bushbuckridge Local Municipality**

### **2.1 Discussion**

2.2 Communications is an integral part of management and the promotion of dialogue and interaction contributes to an organization’s success. In this context, dialogue means a two – way interaction and sharing of information between equal parties. Through communication, relationships with citizens and role players are nurtured: thereby improving the understanding of community needs and enabling the Municipality to respond.

### **3. Aim of the Communication Policy**

3.1 The intention of the Communication Policy is “To encourage a culture of community participation in governance and improve Council’s public image”.

### **4. Underlying Principles**

4.1 Drawing from the aim, there are five principles at the heart of this Communication Policy. The first one is that of ensuring “governance”. In terms of the national definition of “governance”, Bushbuckridge Local Municipality is required to govern with, rather than for people. To that end, Council is to be viewed as a facilitating body and not governing body. For this to be achieved dialogue between Council and citizens through ward committees and collective decision – making must be promoted and enabled. This requires the strengthening of the link between Council, ward committees and the community.

4.2 The second principle equally important to governance is “participation” that requires both Council and citizens to be actively involved in and contribute to the affairs of Council and the region. Through dialogue, citizens and Council will be able to share expertise, experience and information and contribute to the creation of an interactive local authority. In this interaction, Council and citizens are considered equal. Council should endeavor to enable participation wherever possible and avail itself and its personnel to engage in discussion with citizens. The third principle is “citizen” which allows for a broad definition of role players and stakeholders. The term includes the internal i.e. Councillors, personnel and municipal trade unions, and external public i.e. individuals or organization operating outside Council e.g. ward committees, delegations, VIP’s, e.t.c. This policy should enable Council to interact with all role-players in an effective and efficient manner.

4.3 The fourth principle refers to the manner in which communication occurs. It is envisaged that communication, involvement and interaction become a “culture” within Council. In this context “culture” means that the necessity and importance of communication is recognized and is an integral part of Council’s operations. With the acceptance of the need for involvement, the value and importance of communication is appreciated and understood by all role-players. This culture cannot be enforced: it develops and evolves within the organization and its personnel.

4.4 The fifth and last principle is that of “public image” which is an important factor for successful communication. Image refers to the public perception of Council and may either attract or deter citizen involvement and participation. Research studies display that a favourable public image promotes participation. However, it must be noted that in this policy, it is anticipated that Council’s image will be improved through communication.

4.5 Batho Pele Principles are a fundamental cornerstone that brings government closer to the people it aims to serve. Amongst others the Batho Pele Principles calls for the creation of stakeholder and citizen forums, road shows, workshops and summits, Izimbizo etc.as this will ensure that citizens are told about what level and quality of public services they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect.

## **5. Encouraging a culture of community participation through governance**

5.1 The concept of governance requires Council to be more transparent and democratic. Effective communication is an essential component of governance, it is therefore critical that Council improves its communication policy for Bushbuckridge Local Municipality efforts. In so doing, consideration must be given to two concepts enabling governance, namely availability of information and accessibility of the organization.

## **6. Information**

6.1 Research studies shows communication to be an interactive process whereby information is exchanged between the source and receiver. Information refers to the actual content of the message and in Council’s case, is varied. Communication conveys messages and enables the sharing and creation of new ideas, in turn allowing various parties to react and in so doing, fulfill their functions and responsibilities. As communication cannot occur without the existence of information, it is critical that it is readily available and in a format allowing interaction. The quality of information is important for effective communication. To achieve effective community involvement in Council affairs, it is essential that communities are provided with necessary information.

Without this, Council cannot expect communities to become involved and provide a meaningful contribution.

6.2 The active provision of information to communities and personnel will encourage Council to be accountable for its actions. Increased accountability and willingness to share information encourages participation: allowing for improved understanding and informed decision-making. Thus in turn results in decisions beneficial to all parties. Information is a critical resource and the optimal utilization of other resources is dependent on the quality of the information. To ensure effective communication, information shared with communities should be of a high standard. This requires information to be up-to-date and presented in a format that is understandable and appropriate to the receiver.

6.3 To enable Council to communicate effectively, attention must be given to the actual information and the way in which it is disseminated. Information is currently shared by various means e.g. Notices/ Advertisements, Newsletter. Council should share information through methods indicating sensitivity to the needs and requirements of the receptive audience, in a timeous manner and appropriate format. Wherever possible, it should be simplified and presented in the appropriate medium and language.

## **7. Accessibility**

7.1 Communication occurs when parties wish to share information. Its effectiveness is dependent on the level of accessibility that exists between parties. It is a critical component as it facilitates interaction and dialogue. The exchange of knowledge and ideas allows for the integration of concepts and thoughts: resulting in informed decision-making. In defining this concept, Council should have easy access to the citizens of Bushbuckridge and vice versa. Citizens should be able to access municipal departments, its personnel and Councillors. Council would like to create an environment whereby the process of governance (Which is translated into programmes and services offered by the organization) is accessible and available to all citizens of Bushbuckridge. To accomplish this, Council should eliminate barriers currently preventing access to the decision-making process, the administration and role players. Barriers exist in many forms and include entrenched procedures, policies and even attitudes of personnel.

7.2 In accordance with the concept of governance, Council intends improving the decision-making process by making it more accessible. Improved accessibility will encourage interaction: contributing to improved understanding and informed decision-making. To promote and encourage the concept of governance, access to municipal departments and personnel should be facilitated. Communication cannot be effective if there are insufficient linkages with role-players. Council will have to promote and facilitates access to all interest groups. This requires Council to clarify linkages with citizens and organized interest groups.

## **8. Improving Council's Communication**

8.1 To enable Council to take on its role as a facilitating body, it is essential that Council applies / incorporates the concept of governance – which is governing with, rather than for people.

8.2 Governing with, rather than for people explain the new vision of Batho Pele as expressed through the belief set “we belong, we care, we serve”.

## **9. Internal Communication Strategy**

9.1 Internal communication addresses those systems and procedures used to communicate information with personnel and Councillors. Research shows that if internal communication is ineffective, it does not enable the projection of a positive image: which is critical for successful communication. An effective organization depends on, among others, informed personnel. This means that personnel are knowledgeable on the functions of the organization and the areas where transformation is occurring. Informed personnel have a positive mindset and are better equipped to provide an improved service. Because of varying functions and responsibilities, communication needs of personnel will vary throughout the organization and cognizance should be taken.

9.2 Lack of proper communication to public servants as employees about matters affecting them and their morale and therefore service delivery. Furthermore, this model recognizes that the communications element is not just about communication to and consultation of public servants as employees. It also recognizes that the speed of dissemination of information and communication is very critical in ensuring effective service delivery with regard to turn around time.

9.3 The Project Operations Team (POT) which is a management Forum is used to discuss internal and external issues related to service delivery. The latter intercourse of issue leads to decisions which has to be implemented by relevant officials across the organization. The meetings should be cascaded to the larger organization through Directorate, Unit and Regional offices meetings wherein official from bottom to up are informed.

9.4 confidentiality must be applied by all employees of the municipality to avoid information leakages that may have a bad impact to the municipality e.g. Council documents, employee's health status and employment contract cannot be disseminated without proper municipal consent.

9.5 Municipal staff must be capacitated with the activities of the municipality, so that everyone understands and protect the image of the municipality.

9.6 The municipal Manager must make an effort to meet municipal employees regularly, so as to give them the assurance that they have a pivotal role to play in the municipality.

9.7 Departmental meetings must be encouraged, the Project Operation Team (POT) meeting wherein Senior Managers and Regional Managers must cascade down to directorates, units and regions. This will ensure a proper dissemination of information, thus putting everyone up to speed with the activities of the municipality.

9.8 The culture of written communication through memos and notices must be consolidated to enable everyone to have access to such information, this will enable employees to air their views on the subject matter and consequently open doors for opportunities thus allowing the principles of Batho Pele to advance – know your service rights.

9.9 Internal Communication must also be strengthened through the engagement of Unions, as the labour forum will present a platform for dialogue. This will mean that the union does not perceive itself as an enemy to the municipality, but a partner.

9.10 Identification of every employee through name tags and performance conduct of employees is vital for the image of the municipality, therefore employees must at all times put on their name tags.

9.11 Intergovernmental relations must be seen as a window of opportunity by employees as it affords the opportunity to have a communication network with other tiers of government.

## **10. Clarify the role of Councillors and Personnel**

10.1 Councillors and personnel play an important role in facilitating communication and promoting access to local government. Through monthly ward committee meetings, Councillors can assist in communicating Council decision and policies. They should be empowered to liaise with citizens regarding Council projects and initiatives citizens should know about.

Personnel should provide Councillors with the necessary support (be it administrative or technical) in preparation for and at the meeting.

Personnel play an important role in assisting with communication and improving the accessibility of Council to citizens. Attention should be given to those personnel directly involved with citizens, namely front-line personnel, community liaison officers and public relation officers – communication officers. These respective officials must be conscious of their fundamental roles in the organization.

## **11. Encourage meetings to promote dialogue**

11.1 All existing channels of communication should be used to disseminate information i.e. Bushbuckridge Radio, Mpumalanga News, Lowvelder, Mpumalanga Sowetan edition, Thobela FM, Munghana Lonene FM and Ligwalagwala FM, including posters, pamphlets, flyers and Municipal Newsletter - Website. Through meetings, dialogue can be promoted and the interaction of management with Councillors, personnel with management and personnel with Councillors, encouraged. Such sessions should be used to inform personnel, management or Councillors on changes that are occurring and provide immediate feedback on matters of concern or relevance. "Face to Face" discussion should be encouraged.

11.2 Councillors should be regularly informed of the progress on projects, changes and activities initiated by personnel. Improved interaction amongst Councillors and personnel will strengthen working relationships and enhance Council's effectiveness. Interaction can be improved with the involvement of ward Councillors in meetings or discussion on ward based projects and with personnel assisting portfolio Councillors with portfolio tasks.

## **12. Council to Disseminate Information via Municipal Newsletter and Website**

12.1 Council resolutions deemed fit for personnel consumption be published on both the municipal newsletter and website. Research shows this to be effective in communicating with personnel. Information such as Council resolutions, projects, personnel appointments, promotions and general departmental news can be disseminated through these means. In addition it can be used as a forum to address personnel queries and concerns.

## **13. Establish Departmental Chatterboxes / Suggestion boxes**

13.1 Departmental chatterbox will enable both the personnel and the public to submit queries and concerns. These concerns will be addressed by management who will inform of the action taken, either via the municipal notice boards, newsletter or even the website.

In this way interaction between management and personnel and the public will be encouraged. Departments should regularly inform Councillors by submitting items to the Mayoral Committee.

## **14. External Communication**

14.1 Council needs to identify additional ways in which communication can be shared with citizens. Although Council matters are disseminated through various channels e.g. media reports, community news, radio talk shows, Council agendas, pamphlets, posters and publicity campaigns.



However for Council to encourage participation in governance, concerted efforts need to ensure that relevant information e.g. achievements of Council, projects, policies e.t.c is shared in an efficient and effective manner. In addition to considering the way in which Council communicates with the external environment, consideration should also be given to the importance of image. This is often a factor influencing a person's decision to become involved and contribute to the organization. The strategies enabling accessibility and the effective provision of information are as follows:

14.2 External Communication will take cognizance of the fact that culture change is placed at the centre of the successful implementation and sustainability of Batho-Pele. Culture recognizes the fundamental centrality of the "right" culture in the public services a prerequisite for any sustainable and through going service delivery improvement. Though processes, systems, functions, resources, regulations, technology, etc are all important elements of effecting change (s), it is ultimately people (employees) who must initiate and sustain change.

14.3 In an effort to communicate properly externally, the front office re-engineering models will be applied, thus by "front office" making use of multi-purpose community centers, and government offices e.g. labour centers, p7 Traffic fine centers, Home Affairs centers, Clinics, Police Stations etc. the back office model encompass a variety of institutional functions, systems and process from finance, procurement, human resources, logistics and ICT. Therefore any efforts to improve service delivery should fundamentally be underpinned by back office processes, systems, processes and function improvements or re-engineering.

## **15. Improve Council's Image**

15.1 The communication unit of the municipality must conduct regular perception surveys to assess the effectiveness of communication.

## **16. Training of Front-line Personnel**

16.1 Although the municipality has a reception area, the problem is that such an area has not be filled by well trained and conversed personnel. Apparently the municipality does not have a receptionist and this has resulted in visitors been ushered by security guards to respective offices. There is an urgent need to appoint a receptionist who will communicate properly and understand the organization's vision and mission properly.

## **17. Dissemination of Information via Newsletter and Website**

17.1 The municipal website must contain information such as Council agendas and minutes, Council policies, Press Statement, Information on the responsibilities and structure of municipal departments together with contact

names, tender notices, personnel vacancies, tourist attraction, business opportunities, etc. The municipal website can be used to effectively disseminate information locally, nationally and internationally. An effort must be made to install computers and internet facilities at decentralized information centers e.g. Municipal Libraries, where citizens can access the Municipal Website for information or register complaints.

## **18. Provision of Information on Departments**

18.1 A document must be prepared elaborating the functions and duties of each Municipal Directorate and Unit e.g. the document must spell out each directorate/unit's business plan. This will enable the public to understand the organization better.

## **19. Dissemination of Information via Newsletter to Account holders, Accompanying Municipal Accounts.**

19.1 Budget allowing, Municipal Newsletter must be attached to financial statements sent to account holders. This method can be used to effectively disseminate the following information to all citizens in Bushbuckridge:

- ❖ Explain credit control policies and procedures to account holders.
- ❖ Inform account holders about service charges/ rates increase
- ❖ New services and new projects and policies.

## **20. Launching and Official Opening of New Projects**

20.1 While projects are officially launched and opened, the municipality has at times had an oversight .e.g. only projects related to Housing Constructions and Inyaka Bulk Line have been officially launched and opened, but some bridges around Bushbuckridge have been built without the community knowing and such completion of such contracts were not recorded. This has resulted in some press concluding that the Council is failing the community in Bushbuckridge i.e. Arthurseat Bridge that costed the Council 3.1 million.

## **21. Monthly Ward Meetings**

21.1 An effective way of communicating with communities is through monthly ward meetings through ward committees.

Through interactions at these meeting, ward Councillors cannot only discuss and clarify Council matters but also encourage communities to voice their concerns and needs. Information received from these meetings should be relayed to the relevant department for attention. Personnel should assist ward Councillors with preparation and be available to attend meetings.

## **22. Community Participation in the Formulation of Policies**

22.1 Whilst citizens are unable to participate in the decision-making of Council, opportunities exist for involvement in policy formulation and major projects. Through interaction at this level, Council gains an improved understanding of needs and concerns. These can be incorporated into policies, allowing Council to be more effective in the implementation of its function. It is widely believed that participation facilitates implementation, Participation inspires people to adopt policies or decisions as their own: encouraging support and commitment.

## **23. Ensuring that Decisions, Policies and Implications are understood**

23.1 Barriers are often created by a lack of understanding of Council decisions. It is critical that decisions, policies and the implications thereof be explained to citizens. Councillors and personnel (such as Community Liaison Officers) should fulfill this role of communicating crucial decisions to the affected community via wards, ward committees and public meetings.

## **24. Clarify the Role of Ward Committees**

24.1 Ward committees can enable interaction between Council and the citizens in Bushbuckridge. Members of the committee must be enlightened enough to understand their role. To assist ward committees in fulfilling their role, Council could provide initial support to establish structures or processes required to facilitate involvement.

## **25. Database of Organized Interest Groups**

25.1 A database of all organized interest groups in Bushbuckridge will enable Council to establish linkages and interact and communicate as and when required. This database will provide a listing of all organized groups with information on the area or field of interest, membership numbers and contact names. This information will also establish whether these organizations would be interested in becoming involved in Council affairs.

This database should be made available to all personnel and Councillors, thereby enabling them to communicate with the relevant interest groups. Interaction with the organized interest groups will facilitate informed decision-making.

## **26. Establishment of Network and Working Relations**

26.1 The presence of networks often enables timeous communication and interaction through the Mayoral Support Services Task Team on International, Intergovernmental, National and Domestic Relations. Councillors and personnel should endeavour to establish networks with people at Provincial, National and

International levels. The active use of these networks will be of benefit to Council. This information on contact people should be captured in a database and made available for use throughout Council.

## **27. Strengthening Linkages with Media**

27.1 In an effort to improve the dissemination of information, Council should improve and strengthen its interaction with the media.

## **28. Use of Appropriate Equipment and Material in Communication**

28.1 When information is shared with the external environment, it should be done in a manner indicating sensitivity to the needs of the receptive audience. Information should be presented in a format that is understandable and not complicated. In addition, the appropriate equipment e.g. Loud-hailers, billboards e.t.c should be made available for communication purposes. The use of billboards located at strategic points i.e. Shopping centres, taxi/bus ranks, clinics, e.t.c to share Council news, should be investigated.

## **29. Process to Improve Council's Communication**

29.1 To ensure effective citizen participation in governance, the BLM must prepare itself and its citizens. For starters, the image of the organization must be consolidated. Both the internal and external communication working methods must be improved, by affording all personnel the opportunity to contribute towards transforming and restructuring the organization, improving communication within Council by making the lines of Communication more direct and lastly improving accessibility within the organization.