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Johann Mettler: The non-partisan City Manager

In intriguing headlines this month, Nelson Mandela Bay's Deputy Mayor, Mongameli Bobani opposed the appointment of City Manager, Johann Mettler. Mettler, however, has the backing of DA Mayor, Athol Trollip. What makes Mettler so interesting is that his tenure started under the ANC when the Department of Cooperative Governance deployed him to assist former Mayor, Danny Jordaan, with turning the Metro around. This Personality of the Month considers Mettler's experience and prospects, as well as the intriguing non-partisan transition he has made.

A new apolitical era for municipal officials?

Mettler was deployed to Nelson Mandela Bay as acting City Manager in November 2015 (mype.co.za) and has seen the City through its bitter infighting, election campaigning and now, unsteady coalition arrangements. More recently he has made headlines for his frank assessment of the City's ill-conceived indigent policy (www.businesslive.co.za) and has become a source of conflict himself.

Central DA-alliance partner, the UDM, last month failed to attend a meeting after disagreeing with Mettler's appointment. This had been confirmed in October after Vuyo Mlokoti was disqualified for the post for withholding information about his work history (www.timeslive.co.za).

While it may be somewhat surprising that Trollip supported Mettler this was probably because of Mettler's reputation for turnaround work and the fact that he was a relative newcomer to Nelson Mandela Bay (and thus not strongly associated with his former ANC principals), while bringing valuable diagnostic insight into the financially fragile metro.

Mettler, a qualified lawyer with a Masters Degree from the Lund University in Sweden. is well regarded for his work in Msunduzi in 2010, where he oversaw the aspirant metro which was under administration (www.news24.com). From 2012, he worked as municipal manager in Drakenstein

municipality (www.news24.com). Mettler also worked at Salga with a focus on inter-governmental relations and has wide-ranging experience in the local government sector (www.rnews.co.za).

It would appear that Trollip has been impressed by these credentials and is able to work with Mettler - the only metro City Manager to survive a DA-coalition takeover. If Mettler can survive the UDM challenge to his role he may well come to embody the rise of a new non-partisan professional that can transition between political orders. This sort of manager is sorely needed in the new era of fast changing and often coalition-led local government.

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