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Paul Mashatile: Gauteng MEC with a big job

Much of the news over the past few weeks has dealt, in some way or another, with Gauteng's backlog in housing - a function of the province's fast-growing population. The issue has been at the centre of a number of service delivery protests, most recently in Atteridgeville (www.dailymaverick.co.za), as well as blighted inner-city buildings that present a death trap for residents (ewn.co.za). While Gauteng's metros have significant housing budgets and programmes, these ideally need to be bolstered and coordinated at a provincial level under MEC Mashatile's leadership. Furthermore, Mashatile has the hot-potato of Mogale City to watch (municipaliq.co.za, municipaliq.co.za, municipaliq.co.za); juggling the necessity of municipal performance against the governance knife-edge of a hung council. This Personality of the Month considers Mashatile's background and how it might play into these roles.

Long-established newsmaker

Outside of his role as Gauteng MEC for human settlements and cooperative governance, Paul Mashatile is a well-known figure in the media - as chairperson of the ANC in Gauteng; a province known to be outspoken on a number of issues within the ruling party (see for instance, city-press.news24.com) and a supporter of Cyril Ramaphosa in the succession race (ewn.co.za).

Mashatile has also held a number of high profile posts including (national) Minister of Arts and Culture (2010-2014), Premier of Gauteng (2008-2009), Gauteng MEC for Finance and Economic Affairs (2004-2008), Gauteng MEC for Housing (1999-2004) and Leader of the House (Gauteng Legislature, 1994-1996) (whoswho.co.za).

Mashatile is very much a son of Gauteng - born in 1961, in Geraldsville, Pretoria, and growing up in Alexandra where he became a student activist as a member of Cosas, and co-founder and first president of the Alexandra

Youth Congress (in 1983). He was detained without trial from 1985-1989, during which he held the title of General Secretary of the UDF (1985-1991) (whoswho.co.za, en.wikipedia.org).

These high-profile credentials and political status must make it difficult for Mashatile to deal with his weighty day job of looking at ways to ensure inter-governmental cooperation between the province's ANC-led administration and the DA-coalition run metros of Tshwane and Johannesburg, as well as perpetual headache Mogale City.

In addition, Mashatile has come under fire for comments suggesting a political motivation in some service delivery protests in Gauteng (citizen.co.za, www.politicsweb.co.za). He may also come under more criticism for asserting the need to develop land without "owners" to meet housing and basic service needs (www.timeslive.co.za) - but it's a position that may also win him support from voters attracted to the EFF and is an understandable stance, given the estimated backlog of 500,000 housing units attributed to the MEC (citizen.co.za). Mashatile has urged residents to be patient and work with government to build houses and develop skills (citizen.co.za).

But the most serious pressure facing the MEC is trying to shore up the ANC's plummeting levels of support in the province (www.businesslive.co.za) with support having already dropped below the all-important 50% mark last year - using the measure of ANC support in Gauteng in the 2016 local elections. Although clearly the ANC in Gauteng is being punished by issues connected to national politics and outside of Gauteng's control (www.news24.com) but some voter sentiment also probably relates to frustration tied to the complex, intense and demanding issues of service delivery in the province.

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