RAMOTSHERE MOILOA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY FOR RAMOTSHERE MOILOA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

Resolution Number 47/05/25

Date of Approval: 28 May 2015

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Constitution of the Country adopted on 8 May 1996 envisages 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.

The Ministry for Provincial Affairs and Constitutional Development embarked on a policy process that would give effect to this new vision of local government. 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 programme 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."

The Municipal Systems 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. 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 mobilisation and organisational change, which underpin the notion of developmental local government. By linking these processes into a single, integrated cycle at local level, the Act undo the complex, fragmented, top – down, overregulated approaches of the past. In seeking to maximise 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 process of driving development, improving performance and facilitating change.

From the aforementioned new local government legislation it is clear that there should be a shift from governing to governance. It requires the Ramotshere Moiloa Municipality to consider its approach to communication and citizen involvement in local government matters and to develop strategies accordingly. In addition, the spirit of community involvement is captured in Council's vision, that is:

"The Ramotshere Moiloa Municipality has a culture of **public participation** through efficient, accountable, non-racial and non-sexist municipality that focuses on social and sustainable economic development, improving the quality of life of the communities in a safe and secured environment". Flowing 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 Ramotshere Moiloa Local Municipality IDP

Communication is an integral part of management and the promotion of dialogue and interaction contributes to an organisation's success. In this context, dialogue means two-way interaction and sharing of information between equal parties. Through communication, relationships with citizens and "roleplayers" are nurtured; thereby improving the understanding of community needs and enabling the Municipality to respond.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide a link between the legislative framework and the operational institutionalisation thereof in the municipality. The goal of employment equity action in the Municipality is to create an equitable organisation and to build an environment that supports and enables those who have been historically disadvantaged by unfair discrimination to fulfil their maximum potential and to enhance organisational performance. In keeping with its policy of fair and equitable employment practices, Municipality reaffirms its commitment to comply fully with the spirit and requirements of the Employment Equity Act to the strategic advantage of our business.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE COMMUNICATION POLICY

"To encourage and promote culture of community participation and improve Council's public image."

4. Underlying Principles of this Policy

Emanating from the aim, there **are five principles** central to the Communication Policy.

1. The first principle is ensuring **"governance".** In terms of the national definition of "governance", the Ramotshere Moiloa is required to govern with, rather than for people. Thus Council is to be viewed as a facilitating body and not a 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.

2. The second principle of **"participation"** requires both Council and citizens to be actively involved in and contribute to the affairs of Council. 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 endeavour to enable participation wherever possible and avail itself and its personnel to engage in discussions with citizens.

3. **"Citizen"**, being the third principle, 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 organisations operating outside Council e.g. ward committees, Community Development Workers, etc.). This policy should enable Council to interact with all role-players in an efficient and effective manner.

4. 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 recognised 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 organisation and its personnel.

5. The last principle being **"public image"** 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 shows 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.

ENVIRONMENT - The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act (Act No. 106 of 1996); - Municipal Finance Management Act (Act No. 56 of 2003); - The Local Government: Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 117 of 1998); - The Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act No. 32 of 2000);

5 Encouraging a culture of community participation through governance

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 efforts , by so doing, consideration must be given to two concepts enabling governance, namely **availability of information** and **accessibility of the organisation**.

5.1 Information

Research 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. 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. 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. This 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, continuous consultation with communities is important. This requires information to be up-to-date.

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, newsletters, flyers, advertisements, brochures, banners, blimps, meetings, workshops, awareness campaigns, izimbizo/ let's talk sessions, pamphlets, council agenda etc**. 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 spoken language.

5.2) Accessibility

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 the Municipality and *vice versa.*

Citizens should be able to access Municipal Departments, its Personnel and Councillors.

Council should create an environment whereby the process of governance (which is translated into programmes and services offered

by the organisation) is accessible and available to all citizens of Ramotshere Moiloa. To accomplish this, Council should eliminate barriers preventing access to information. Barriers exist in many forms and include entrenched well established procedures, policies and even attitudes of personnel.

In accordance with the concept of governance, Council intends improving the **decision-making process** by making it more accessible an open invitation from the Speaker to the Public to attend Council Meetings, Ward Meetings all Community Participative engagements and interactions. 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 enhanced.

Communication cannot be effective if there are insufficient linkages with role-players. Council will have to:

- Promote and facilitate access to all interest groups.
- This requires Council to clarify linkages with citizens and organized interest groups.

6   Improving council's communication

Communication occurs on two levels, internal (e.g).personnel and Councillors) and external (e.g. media, citizens, role-players, etc.). Therefore the concept of governance should be incorporated into both levels. The formulation of strategies for internal and external communication should be guided by the notion that citizen participation in governance requires the provision of information and accessibility to the administration and role-players.

6.1 Internal Communication

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, amongst others, informed personnel. This means that personnel are knowledgeable on the functions of the organisation and the areas where transformation is occurring. Informed personnel have a positive mindset and are better equipped to provide an improved service.

6.1.1 Clarify the Role of Councillors and Personnel

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's decisions and policies.. Personnel should provide Councillors with the necessary support (be it administrative or technical) in preparation for meetings.

Personnel play an important role in assisting with communication and improving the accessibility of the Municipality to citizens. Attention should be given to those personnel directly involved with citizens, namely front-line personnel.

6.1.2 Encourage Meetings to Promote Dialogue

All existing channels of communication should be used to disseminate information. Through meetings, dialogue can be promoted and the interaction of management with Councillors, Personnel with management and personnel with Councillors should be 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" discussions should be encouraged.

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 discussions on ward based projects and with personnel assisting portfolio councillors with portfolio tasks..

6.1.3 Council to Disseminate Information via

Council should prepare and produce a quarterly newsletter. Research shows this to be effective in communicating with communities. Information such as Council resolutions, project developments in the wards, events, campaigns promotions and general Municipal News can be disseminated through these means.

6.1.4 Establish Departmental Chatterboxes

Departmental chatterboxes will enable personnel to submit queries and concerns. These concerns will be addressed by management who will inform personnel of actions taken, either via the internal newsletter, e mail, meetings, union meetings or any appropriate channel. In this way interaction of personnel with management can be encouraged. Departments should regularly inform Councillors by submitting items to their respective Committees.

6.1.5 Dissemination of Information via the Ramotshere Moiloa Website and the Internet

The dissemination of information should be timeous. The Councils website and the internet can be used to effectively disseminate information to a large majority of personnel and the Community. With this, Council can be assured that personnel and communities receive information that is not distorted by rumours and misinterpretations caused by the internal "grapevine".

6.1.6 Improve Systems of Referrals

Accessibility to the organisation can be promoted through an efficient system of referrals. Common points of referrals are the switchboard, public counters, and ward councillor, office of the Mayor, Office of the Speaker, Communications Unit, secretaries and personnel. At these points, citizens should be given accurate information on the division responsible (and preferably a contact name) for that subject. To provide this service, personnel should be trained and informed of the various functions of the organisation. In addition, personnel should be available to assist citizens in their preferred language be it Setswana, English or Afrikaans & Portuguese. Consideration should also be given to improve signage within departments. Signage should direct citizens to public counters and should also be able to assist citizens once they are referred to a division within the department.

6.2 External Communication

Council needs to identify additional ways in which information can be shared with citizens. Currently information on Council matters is disseminated through various channels e.g. media Reports, Newsletter, Imbizo, community Meetings, awareness campaigns,

news, Radio Talk Shows, Council agendas, banners, pamphlets, posters, billboards and publicity campaigns.

However for Council to encourage participation in governance, concerted efforts need to ensure that relevant information (e.g. the achievements of Council, projects, policies, etc.) 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 organisation. Strategies enabling accessibility and the effective provision of information are indicated below.

6.2.1 Improve Council's Image

Before strategies to improve or amend the image of the organisation can be developed and formulated, the current image should be determined. Through a "perception survey" both the external and internal image of the organisation can be assessed. These studies will not only identify the existing image but also determine the attitudes and perceptions of citizens and personnel. Those areas requiring attention will be identified and strategies developed accordingly.

6.2.2 Media Relations Personnel (Training of Front-line Personnel)

In order to improve the quality of information given to citizens, the role of front-line personnel is essential. They play an important role in the promotion of Council's image and it is at this first point of contact that the image and service should be improved. Front-line personnel should be trained in public relations and service orientation skills and empowered with knowledge of Council and services rendered. This

knowledge should also include the names of contact people within the organisation.

6.2.3 Dissemination of Information via the Ramotshere Moiloa Website

The Municipal Website be regularly updated, and should contain information such as Council agendas and minutes, Council policies, press releases, budget, information on the responsibilities and structure of municipal departments together with contact names, tender notices, personnel vacancies, tourist attractions, business opportunities, all requirements of the section 75 of the MFMA etc. The Ramotshere Moiloa Municipal Website can be used to effectively disseminate information locally, nationally and internationally.

The possibility should be investigated to install computers and internet facilities at decentralized Information centre (Thusong Centers, Tribal Offices and libraries where citizens can access the Councils Website for information or to register concerns / complaints /compliments.

6.2.4 Provision of Information on Departments

Knowledge of the organisation will encourage citizens to interact. Information on the responsibilities and structure of the organisation, together with contact names should be co-ordinated in a document (such as "The A-Z Services Guide Booklet"). It should be distributed at all points of public access such as clinics, libraries, tribal offices , schools , Thusong Centers, Government Offices, Tribal Offices post offices, etc. and be available within Council. Ideally this document should be printed in Setswana, English or Afrikaans.

6.2.5 Creation of Decentralised Information Centres

For information to reach all citizens in the Municipality it must be readily available and accessible; hence the creation of decentralised information centres. In addition to providing advice and dealing with complaints, these centres will distribute all public material and brochures published by Council. At these centres, the effectiveness of "complaint books" should be investigated. These will allow citizens to register complaints regarding municipal problems and concerns. These entries that are signed and dated b citizens, will be referred to the appropriate department. This will encourage dialogue with citizens and alert Council to urgent concerns.

6.2.6 Dissemination of Information via Newsletter to Account holders, accompanying Municipal Accounts

The newsletter should accompany monthly municipal accounts where possible. The following news snippets can be synopsized on the accounts:

A brief explanation on the credit control policies and procedures to account holders;

Inform account holders about:

- Service charges.
- rates increases
- Council resolution were applicable

6.2.7 Launching and official opening of new projects

Through the launching and official opening of new projects communities are made aware of new developments. Currently the launching and official opening of new projects are done on an ad hoc basis and in most instances funds are not available for the launching

these projects. This should be done in a planned and organised way. Projects which must be launched/officially handed over must be identified well in advance, a programme must be drawn up, funds must be provided on the budget and the launch of new projects must be done according to the programme.

6.2.8 Ward meetings

An effective way of communicating with communities is through ward meetings through Ward Councillors. Through interaction at these meetings, Ward Councillors can 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 departments for attention and actioning.

6.2.9 Community participation in the formulation of policies

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 functions. It is widely believed that participation facilitates implementation. Specific issues such as the annual budgets, annual reports and major projects should allow for citizen involvement. Participation inspires people to adopt policies or decisions as their own; encouraging support and commitment.

For citizens to be involved and contribute to policy formulation, Council should include key "role-players" in the process. However, the level of involvement may vary according to the complexity and nature of the

subject. In some instances, involvement may be limited to liaison or could involve representation on task teams or steering committees. Involvement should not be limited to policy formulation but extend to the normal operations of Council. In the preparation of committee items, consideration should be given to the potential implication a decision may have on interest groups. Role-players should be given the opportunity, where appropriate, to provide input and be involved in consultation processes prior to recommendations being submitted to relevant committees.

6.2.10 ensuring that Decisions, Policies and Implications are understood

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, CDW's, Ward Committee Members and personnel should fulfill this role of communicating crucial decisions to the affected communities in public meetings.

6.2.11 Clarify the Role of Ward Committees

Ward committees can enable interaction between Council and the citizens of the Municipality. However, for interaction to occur, it is essential that the role of ward committees be clarified. The potential exists for ward committees to play a meaningful role in policy formulation. As ward committees have a wide representation, and are in a fortunate position of being able to monitor **changing citizen needs**. This information could be relayed to Council and used in the formulation of policies and strategies. Ward Committees could also be represented on steering committees and play an active role in the

formulation of policies and strategies. Ward committees can assist sharing information with citizens. Due to the network and membership of the ward committees, it is an effective way of communicating the intensions of Council to a wider audience. To assist ward committees in fulfilling this role, Council should provide initial support to these structures to facilitate involvement.

6.2.12 Database of organized interest groups

A database of all organised interest groups in the Municipality 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 database should be developed and be made available to all personnel and Councillors, thereby enabling them to communicate with the relevant interest groups

6.2.13 Strengthening Linkages with Ward Committees

To ensure dissemination of information, Council will strengthen its linkages with ward committees. Through these linkages, Council can target ward committees with relevant information and develop partnerships. Ward committees can assist in communicating Council's intentions amongst its members.

6.2.14 Establishment of networks and working relations with sector department

The presence of networks often enables timeous communication and interaction through the Mayoral Intergovernmental Forum. 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. Information of contact people should be captured in a database and made available for use throughout Council.

6.2.15 Strengthening linkages with media

In an effort to improve the dissemination of information, Council should improve and strengthen its interaction with the media. *Refer to section 7.2.2 on the responsibilities to communicate to the media.*

6.2.16 Use of appropriate equipment and material in communication

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, notice boards, banners, flyers, booklets, brochures etc should be made available for communication purposes. The use of bill boards, located at strategic points (i.e. shopping centres, taxi/bus ranks, clinics, etc.) to share council news, should be investigated.

7 PROCESS TO IMPROVE COUNCIL'S COMMUNICATION

To ensure effective citizen participation in governance, Council must prepare itself and its citizens. Council should establish a favorable image and develop the necessary skills. Frontline workers should be capacitated.

An approach allowing Council to prepare itself and its citizens for participation in governance is detailed below. This process has both an internal and external focus, with the initial focus being addressing internal communication. As the implementation of individual strategies within each focus area may vary, it is not possible to allocate time-frames. Hence situations may occur where certain aspects of the process are implemented concurrently.

Internal Focus: Preparing Council for its New Role in Communication

The intent of this internal focus is to prepare Council for its new role in governance and through communication, improve the quality of service rendered. Particular attention will be paid to preparing and enabling Council and its personnel to adapt to this new role. This phase allows Council to address and make the necessary procedural and structural changes to enable participation and interaction. Specific objectives for the internal focus are detailed below. The strategies enabling the fulfillment of these objectives are listed accordingly.

Objective 1: Improve communication within Council by making the lines of communication more direct
Strategies: • Encourage meetings to promote dialogue.   • Council to disseminate information via Municipal Newsletter, Notices, flyers, meetings, brochures, banners, notice boards, organized labour organizations .

- Establish departmental chatterboxes.
- Dissemination of information via the municipal website and the intranet

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Objective 2: Afford all personnel the opportunity to contribute towards transforming and restructuring the organization.

Strategy:

- Clarify the role of Councillors and personnel.

Objective 3: Improve accessibility within the organization

Strategy:

· Improve systems of referrals

   Complaint management system.

External Focus: Opening Channels of Communication

As the focus is on external communication, this allows Council to implement strategies having a direct impact on the external environment. It is during this phase that attempts enabling citizen participation in governance be communicated externally. As participation in governance demands responsible and informed citizens, Council will inform citizens of their rights and responsibilities. During this time, clarity on the expectations of both citizens and Council in terms of communication and participation in governance will

be obtained. The opportunity can be used to develop networks and linkages with organized interest groups and explain the political process and Council's responsibilities. The following objectives can be embarked on:

OBJECTIVE 1: COUNCIL TO PROJECT A FAVOURABLE PUBLIC IMAGE.
LAUNCHING AND OFFICIAL HANDING OVER OF NEW PROJECTS FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND INVOLVEMENT BY COMMUNITIES.

Strategies:

- · Improve Council's image.
- · Training of front-line personnel.
- · Dissemination of information via the website
- · Provision of information on the departments.
- · Creation of decentralized information centres.
- · Dissemination of information via newsletters , municipal Accounts, website , meetings, flyers , vouchers etc.

Objective 2: Council to communicate effectively and efficiently with citizens, organised civil society, other spheres of government and the
international community (with an interest in our municipality)

Strategies:

· ward meetings.

· Clarify the role of ward committees and CDW's..

· Establish a database of organised interest groups.

· Strengthening linkages with ward committees.

· Establishment of networks and working relations.

- Strengthening linkages with media.
- Use of appropriate material and equipment in communication

Objective 3: TO ENABLE PARTICIPATION IN GOVERNANCE
Strategies:
· Community participation in the formulation of policies.
· Ensuring that decisions, policies and implications are understood

Through the process of preparing the organisation and opening the communication channels, both citizens and Council (its Councillors and personnel), will be better equipped to effectively manage and participate in governance. Council will become increasingly transparent and democratic and with time, participation and effective communication will become part of civic culture.

8 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMUNICATION POLICY

The way in which Council communicates will not change unless a structure within Council is made responsible for the implementation of this policy. The responsibility of this structure would be to initiate and co-ordinate implementation and continually review the effectiveness of Council's communication. As communication is an essential component of the overall management function, it must receive the attention it deserves. With the new environment within which Council now operates, communication and democracy is becoming increasingly important and should be a dedicated function within the organisation. Effective communication requires co-ordination and the responsibility thereof should be centralised in a unit with dedicated functions. Currently Council does not have a unit dedicated to the co-ordination of its communication. It does however have a Public Relations Division,

located in City Administration, responsible for Council's public relations. As research has shown that public relations are merely one aspect of communication, it is essential that the role of this division and its capacity and ability to implement the policy be reviewed.

9 DISPUTES

Any disputes in terms of this policy will be dealt with in terms of the Municipal Grievance Procedure Policy.
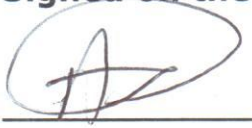
10 CONCLUSION

We cannot not communicate therefore The need for Council to review its communication efforts is a matter of urgency. This review will not only be of benefit to the functioning of the organisation but will also make a significant contribution to the improvement of Council's image. This in turn will enable Council to make a concerted effort in enabling citizen participation in governance. As citizen participation in governance is dependent on effective communication, Council must first improve its internal communication and then address external communication. To this end, a process with an internal and external focus is suggested. As governance and democracy is an important aspect of the local authority, communication must be valued. It is therefore critical that in conjunction with the importance of communication, that a dedicated structure be responsible for its co-ordination. Although the organisation currently has a Public Relations Division (PE Unit), its terms of reference do not allow it to adequately address communication. It is therefore necessary that the role of the Public Relations Division (PE Unit) be reviewed in terms of the policy with the aim of creating a new communication unit/ structure; and

being responsible for the implementation of the Communication Policy for Council

Signed on the 28th May 2015

Speaker

Ramotshere Moiloa Local Municipality