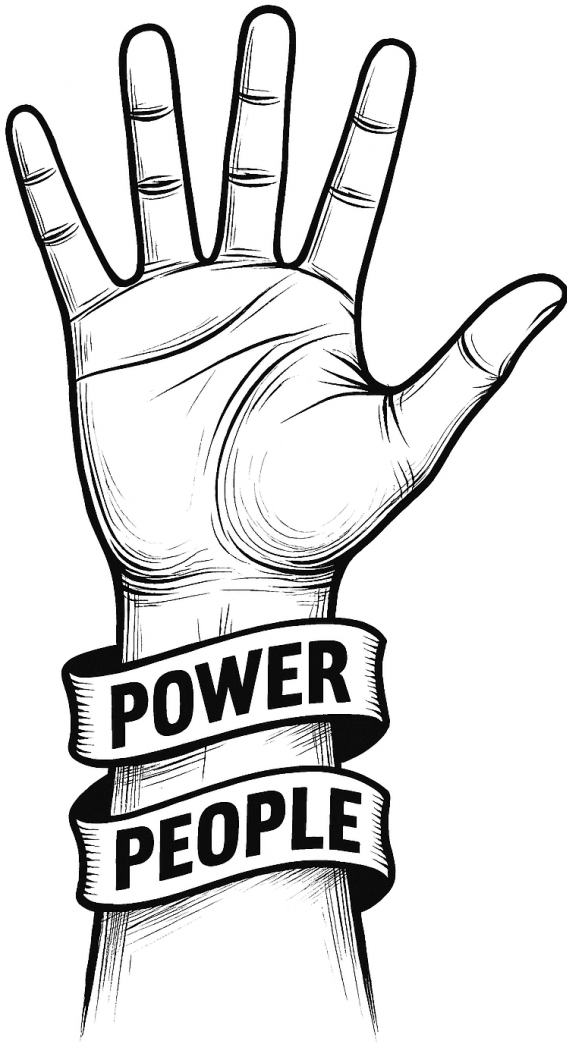




*Advocating for transparency and
accountability*

Guide

Understanding the Local
Government Structure

Module 1

Written by
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About Us

Planact is a Johannesburg-based non-profit organisation established in 1985. The organisation is committed to addressing the exclusion of vulnerable communities from local government processes. Planact advocates for increased municipal accountability to communities and promotes the meaningful inclusion of marginalised groups in local government policy, planning, and implementation practices.

This guide was written by Sinalo Sojanga, and sincere gratitude is expressed to colleagues who contributed their time and expertise in bringing this guide together. Special gratitude goes to Mike Makwela, Siphwe Segodi, Wetu Memela, Kiara Britton, Tamzin Hudson, and Chelsea Ndlovu-Nachamba for their invaluable inputs and assistance throughout the process. Their collective effort and assistance have been instrumental in shaping this guide.

Special acknowledgement is extended to a series of guides developed by Planact from 2001, including The Planact Enhancement Programme for Ward Committees, Councillors and Officials and Empowering Ward Committees and Local Leaders in Democratic Governance, as well as the Handbook for Municipal Councillors developed by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) in collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).

Purpose

This is the first module of two modules titled:

- Module one: Understanding the Local Government Structure
- Module two: Understanding Community Participation

The purpose of this guide is to provide an understanding of the roles and functions of local government clearly and practically. It is designed to support community members and civil society organisations in understanding how local government is structured and how it operates.

Specifically, the guide aims to:

1. Explain the structure and functions of local government institutions to promote transparency and accountability.
2. Enhance the accessibility of information so that communities can better engage with their municipalities and exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities.
3. Serve as a practical resource for training, capacity building, and understanding the role of councillors, municipal staff, and community leaders.
4. Strengthen participatory governance by equipping citizens and organisations with knowledge that enables meaningful involvement in planning, decision-making, and monitoring of service delivery.
5. Promote effective governance and service delivery by outlining best practices, legislative frameworks, and operational processes of local government.

Background

Local government is the sphere of government closest to communities and is responsible for delivering essential services, developing local policies, and ensuring that residents' needs are met. In South Africa, municipalities form the foundation of local governance, and their work directly affects people's daily lives through the provision of housing, water, electricity, waste management, and community development initiatives.

The structure of local government is made up of three main components:

1. The Municipal Council (political arm) – which is made up of elected representatives, including councillors, the speaker, the mayor, the executive committee, and portfolio committees. This arm is responsible for making policies, exercising oversight, adopting budgets, and representing the voice of the community.
2. The Municipal Administration (administrative arm) – led by the municipal/city manager and supported by heads of departments and officials. This arm is responsible for implementing the council's decisions, managing resources, and delivering services on the ground.
3. Community- which refers to the citizens who hold local government officials accountable.

It is essential for communities to understand these structures and the specific roles of different actors. It empowers residents to know who is responsible for what, how decisions are made, and where accountability lies. For example, councillors are elected to represent community voices in council, while the municipal manager is accountable for ensuring that plans and budgets are implemented effectively.

This knowledge is important for strengthening accountability. When communities are aware of the responsibilities of each actor, they can:

- Call for better service delivery from the right officials.
- Monitor whether resources are being used fairly and efficiently.
- Participate more meaningfully in decision-making processes, such as Integrated Development Plan (IDP) consultations.
- Hold both political leaders and administrators accountable for promises and performance.

By equipping communities with a clear understanding of how local government functions, this toolkit aims to support stronger engagement between citizens and municipalities. An informed community is better positioned to claim its rights, influence policy decisions, and ensure that local government remains transparent, responsive, and truly representative of the people it serves.

Chapter 1: Institutional and Legal Framework

1.1 The Constitution and the rule of law

Communities need to understand how laws are made and how government is structured to execute those laws.

South Africa is a constitutional democracy, which means that the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa is the highest law (Republic of South Africa, 1996). It guarantees human rights for all in South Africa, and sets out the government's legal duties. The Constitution overrides any law that does not agree with it.

No government office or individual is above the law. All of the government, including local government, must act according to the Constitution and laws passed by the government. This is known as the rule of law (section 1 and section 2 of the Constitution) and means that government, politicians and officials at all and any levels can be ordered to obey the law.

The Bill of Rights in the Constitution requires the government to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil our rights.

These include the rights to:



Access to any information held by the state



Adequate Housing



Health care



Healthy environment



Just and Fair government processes



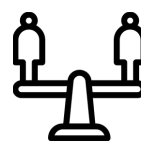
Social Assistance



Education



Food and water



Equality



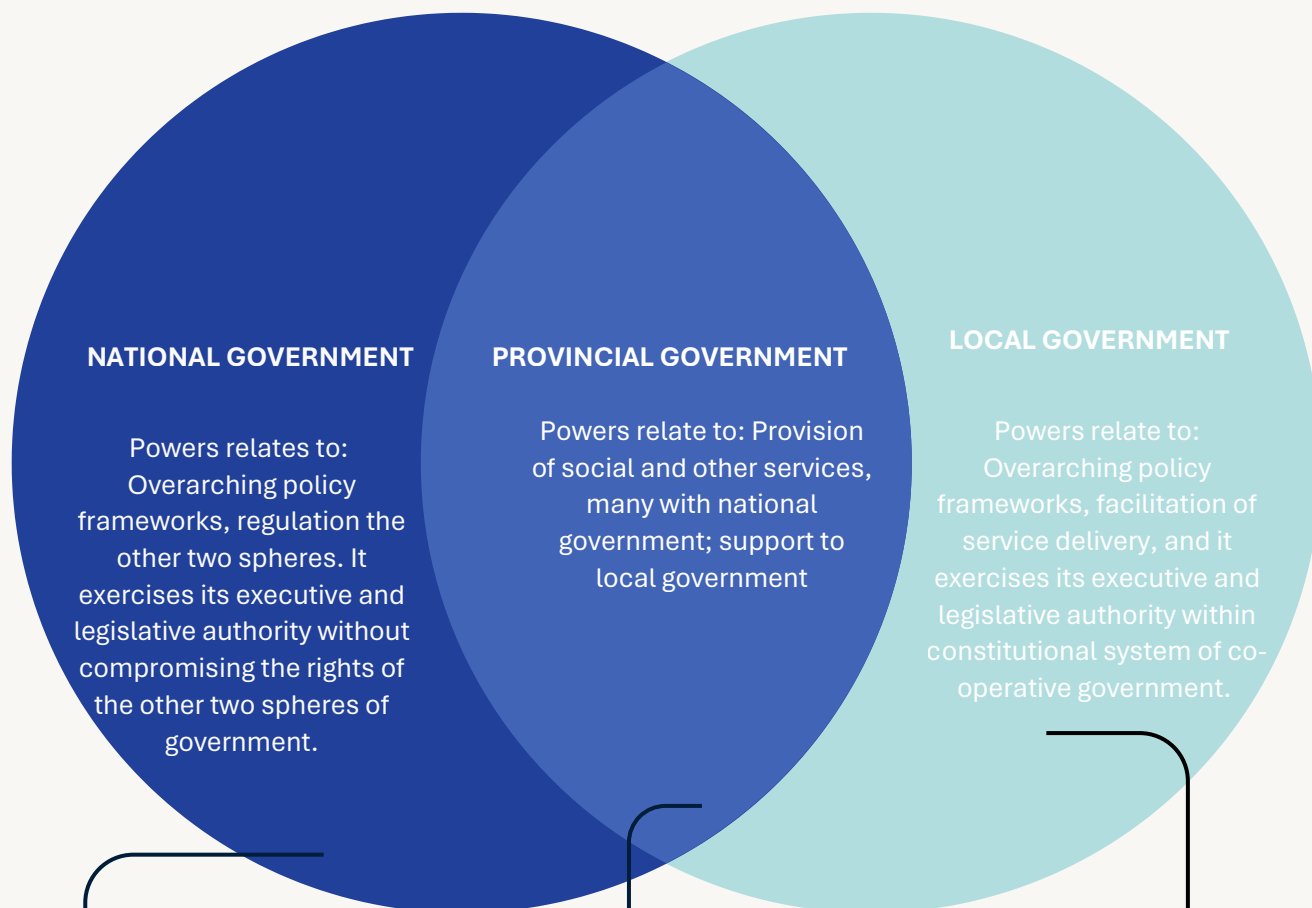
When challenging a local government action or refusal to act, there are two questions you need to ask:

- What law gives the government the authority to act?
- Has the government obeyed the law?

1.2 Cooperative Government

The Constitution divides the government into three spheres, namely: local, provincial and national. All three spheres have legislative and executive powers, allowing them to pass laws and implement programmes. As illustrated below, each sphere's powers are different: both in geographical size, as well as in the type of government functions (services) it is responsible for.

OVERVIEW: THE DISTINCT POWERS OF LOCAL, PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS



The national government has exclusive authority to pass and implement legislation on any matter not listed (e.g. National elections) in Schedule 4 (Functional areas of overlapping/concurrent National and Provincial legislative competence) of the Constitution of South Africa, including exclusive control over taxation.

Provincial and municipal powers only apply within their boundaries, and powers are limited to functions as listed in Schedule 5 (Functional Areas of exclusive Provincial Legislative Competence, eg. local amenities) of the Constitution.

Since the spheres of government have different responsibilities and powers, no sphere of government can fulfil citizen's rights on its own. While the Constitution recognised that each sphere is **independent**, meaning that in general no sphere may interfere in other spheres' decision-making, spheres are also **interdependent**, and must work together. The Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) is responsible for making sure that the spheres cooperate effectively.

Unfortunately, cooperative governance often does not work very well, and this impacts negatively on service delivery.

1.3. What is local government supposed to do?

Before 1996, local government was fragmented and racially segregated, with municipalities providing unequal services to different communities. In an effort to fix the resulting imbalances, the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa envisioned municipalities that are both democratic and developmental in nature.

Section 152 of the Constitution states that local government must:

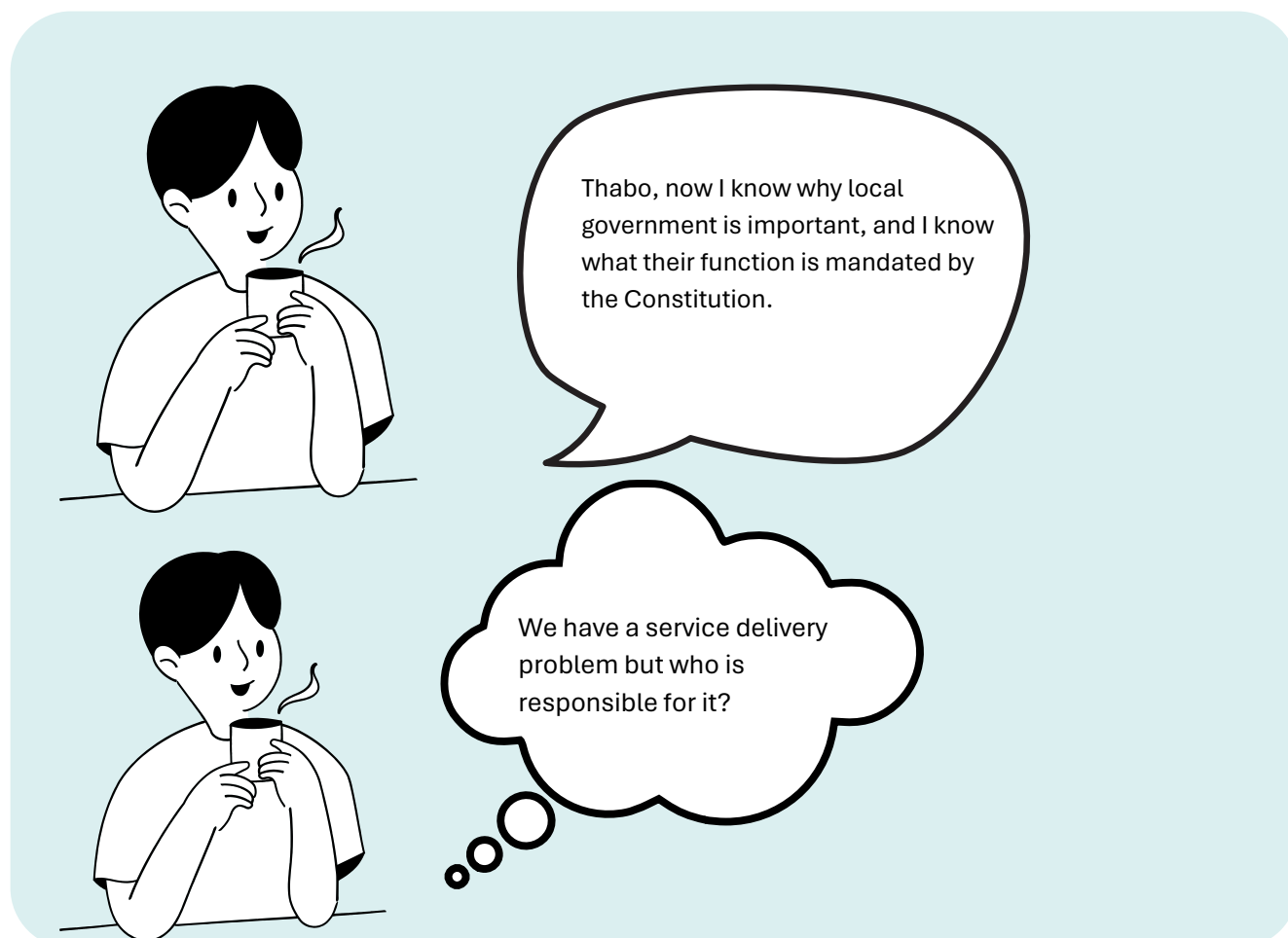
- provide **democratic, accountable and participatory government** for local communities;
- Prioritise the **basic needs of the community** and **provide the services** assigned to it by the Constitution (Schedules 4 and 5); and
- Promote **social and economic development**, as well as a **safe and healthy environment**.
- Encourage the **involvement of communities and community organisations** in the matters of local government.

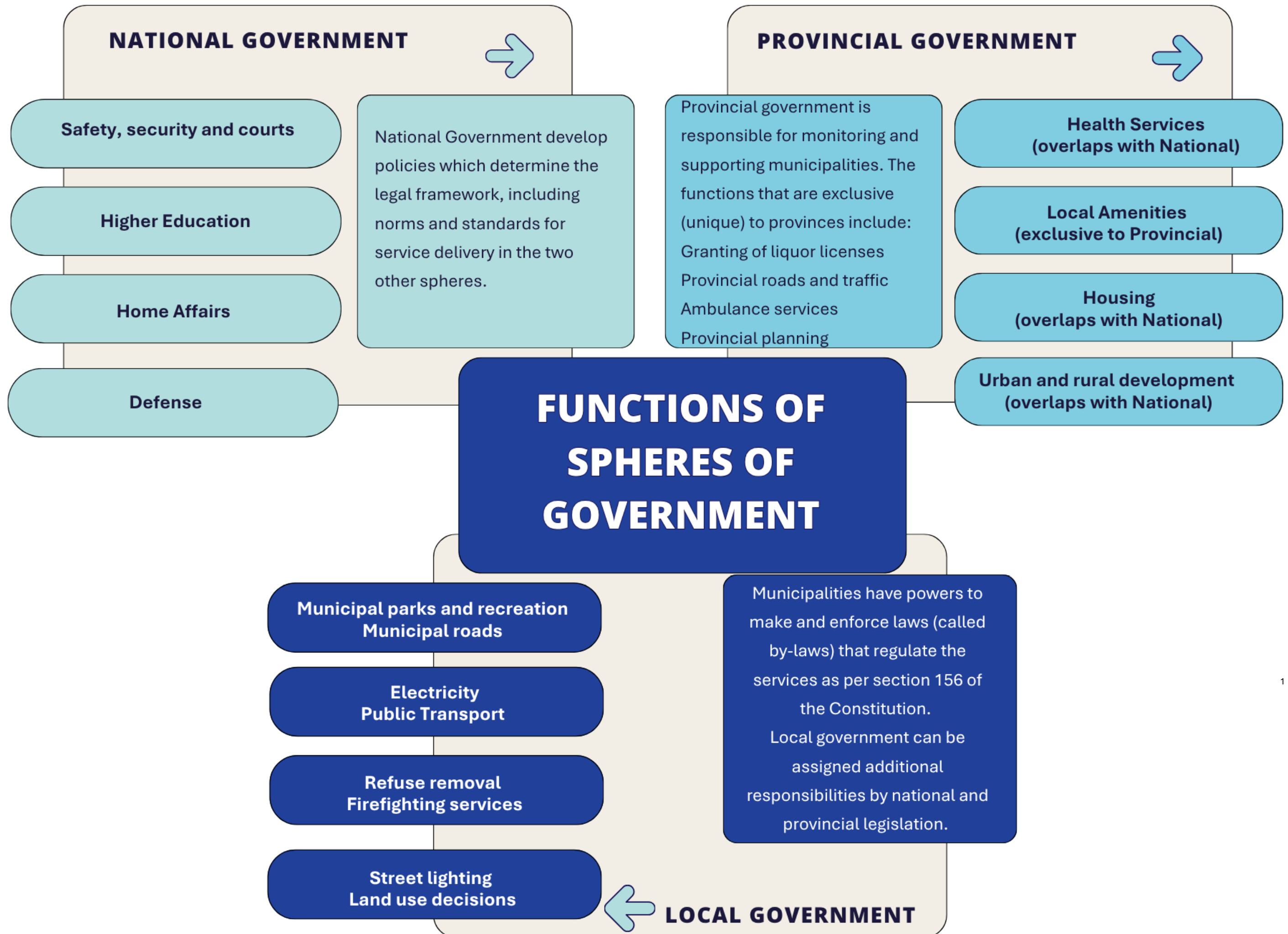
Local government is the sphere of government closest to the community, responsible for governing and managing a specific geographic area such as a city, town, or district.

It operates within powers and functions assigned by the national or provincial/state government and is tasked with addressing the day-to-day needs of residents.

Key features of local government:

- **Decentralised authority:** It functions independently within the framework of the Constitution and legislation.
- **Service delivery:** Provides basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, housing, waste management, roads, and community facilities.
- **Representation:** Local councillors represent the community, ensuring that residents' needs and priorities are considered in decision-making.
- **Accountability:** It is accountable to the local population through elections, public participation, and oversight mechanisms.





1.4. Local Government and the law

While the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa sets out the main principles and rules that govern South Africa, there are many other laws that are relevant for communities in relation to local government.

Statutes or Acts: Also referred to as legislation, these are laws voted by an elected body (including municipal council, provincial legislature or national parliament).

There are several important pieces of national legislation based on the Constitution, but which set out more specific rules governing local government. These include:

- Municipal Systems Act (MSA) 32 of 2000
- The Municipal Finance Management Act (MFMA) 56 of 2003
- The Municipal Structures Act (MSA) 117 of 1998
- The Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) 2 of 2000
- The Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (PAJA) 3 of 2000
- The Spatial Planning and Land Use Management Act (SPLUMA) 16 of 2013

Municipal by-laws: these are laws made by local government. They must be passed by a majority vote of a municipal council. Under the Constitution, the public must be allowed to review and comment on bylaws before they are voted on by a municipal council. Each municipality publishes its laws in what is called a Municipal Code they cover, building laws, zoning laws, health and safety standards, and business operating requirements, etc).

Resolutions: These are decisions made by a municipal council on behalf of the community, usually through a majority vote. Some important community-related decisions, such as approving the construction of a new community hall, upgrading local roads, or introducing new service fees, may require a higher level of agreement, such as a two-thirds majority of councillors, before they can be passed.

Municipal policy: A document that outlines the principles and process a municipality will follow about a particular issue and the outcomes it hopes to achieve through these. Examples include indigent policy, credit, collections policy, and tariff policies. A municipal policy adopted in a by-law or resolution of the municipal council is legally binding.

Standing rules and orders: these deal with how a municipal council conducts a meeting, when meetings may be closed to the public, the role of the speaker and how petitions are handled.

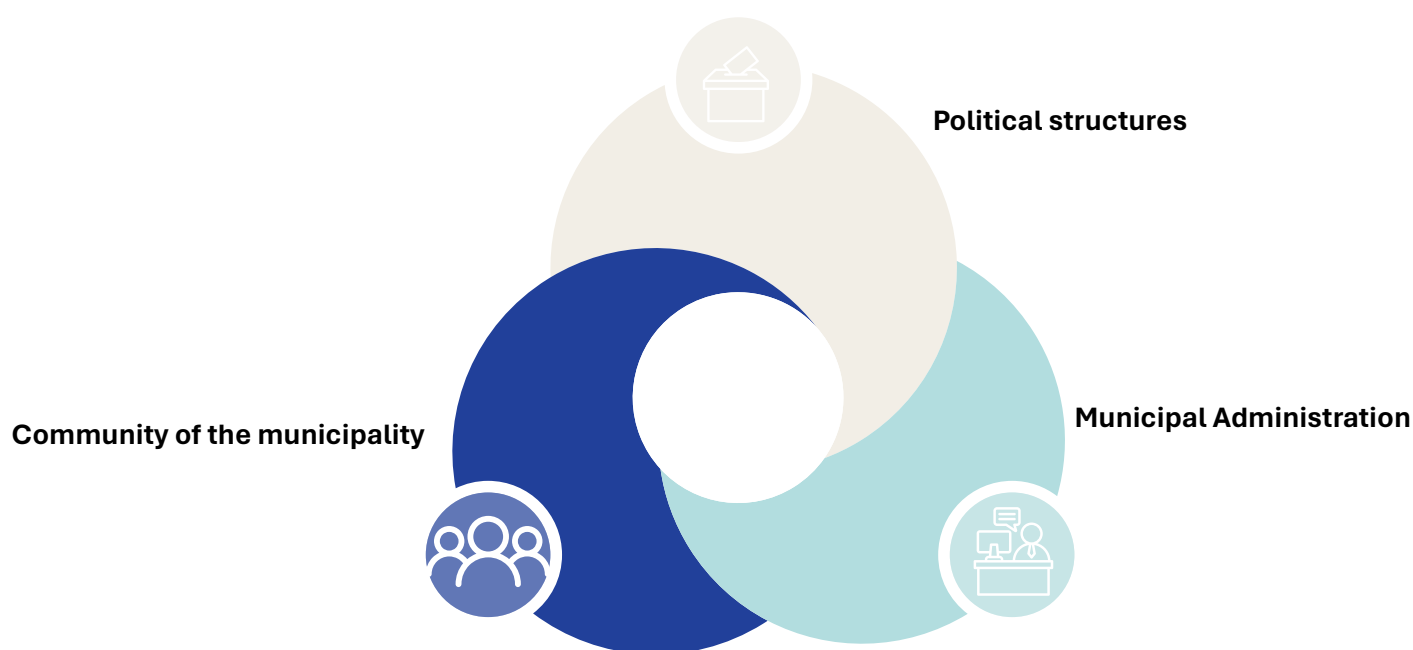
Regulations: Some Acts of Parliament give executive permission to issue regulations- rules that are legally enforceable even if not passed by Parliament. National regulations that are important to local government include those issued in terms of the MFMA by the National Treasury regarding Municipal Supply Chain Management (MSCM).

1.5 Municipality

What is a municipality?

According to the Municipal Systems Act of 2000, a municipality is an organ (part) of the state within the local sphere of government, exercising legislative and executive authority within an area determined in terms of the Local Government: Municipal Demarcation Act, 1998.

A municipality consists of the **political structures and administration of the municipality, and the community** of the municipality. It functions in its area in accordance with the political, statutory and other relationships between its political structures, political office bearers and administration and its community and has a separate legal personality which excludes liability on the part of its community for the actions of the municipality.



A diagram showing the key components of a municipality

A municipality exercises its legislative and executive authority by:

- developing and adopting policies, plans, strategies and setting targets for delivery;
- promoting and undertaking development;
- establishing and maintaining an administration;
- administering and regulating its internal affairs and the local government affairs of the local community;
- implementing applicable national and provincial legislation and its by-laws;
- providing municipal services to the local community, or appointing appropriate service providers in accordance with the criteria and set process;
- preparing, approving and implementing its budgets;
- imposing and recovering rates, taxes, levies, duties, service fees and surcharges on fees, including setting and implementing tariff, rates and tax or plans;
- establishing and implementing performance management systems;
- promoting a safe and healthy environment;
- passing by-laws and taking decisions affecting the local community;

1.6 Different Categories of Municipalities

Category A Metropolitan Municipality



E.g. City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality



- This type of municipality is found in highly populated metropolitan areas with active movement of people, goods and services.
- They are often referred to as 'metros' for short.
- In Category A, there is only one IDP for the whole area, and one municipal council, which can be divided into sub-councils.
- The municipal council has the exclusive authority to administer and make rules in its area of jurisdiction.

Category C District Municipality



E.g. Nkangala District Municipality (Mpumalanga)



- The areas that do not match the description of a Category A municipality are known as Category C, or district municipality, which includes more than one municipality.
- Within each category C municipality, there are a number of smaller, category B local municipalities.
- This type of municipality has the authority to administer and make rules in an area made up of more than one local municipality.
- Areas that are too small to constitute a municipality are called district management areas (DMAs), and the district municipality performs all the municipal functions in such an area.

Category B Local Municipality

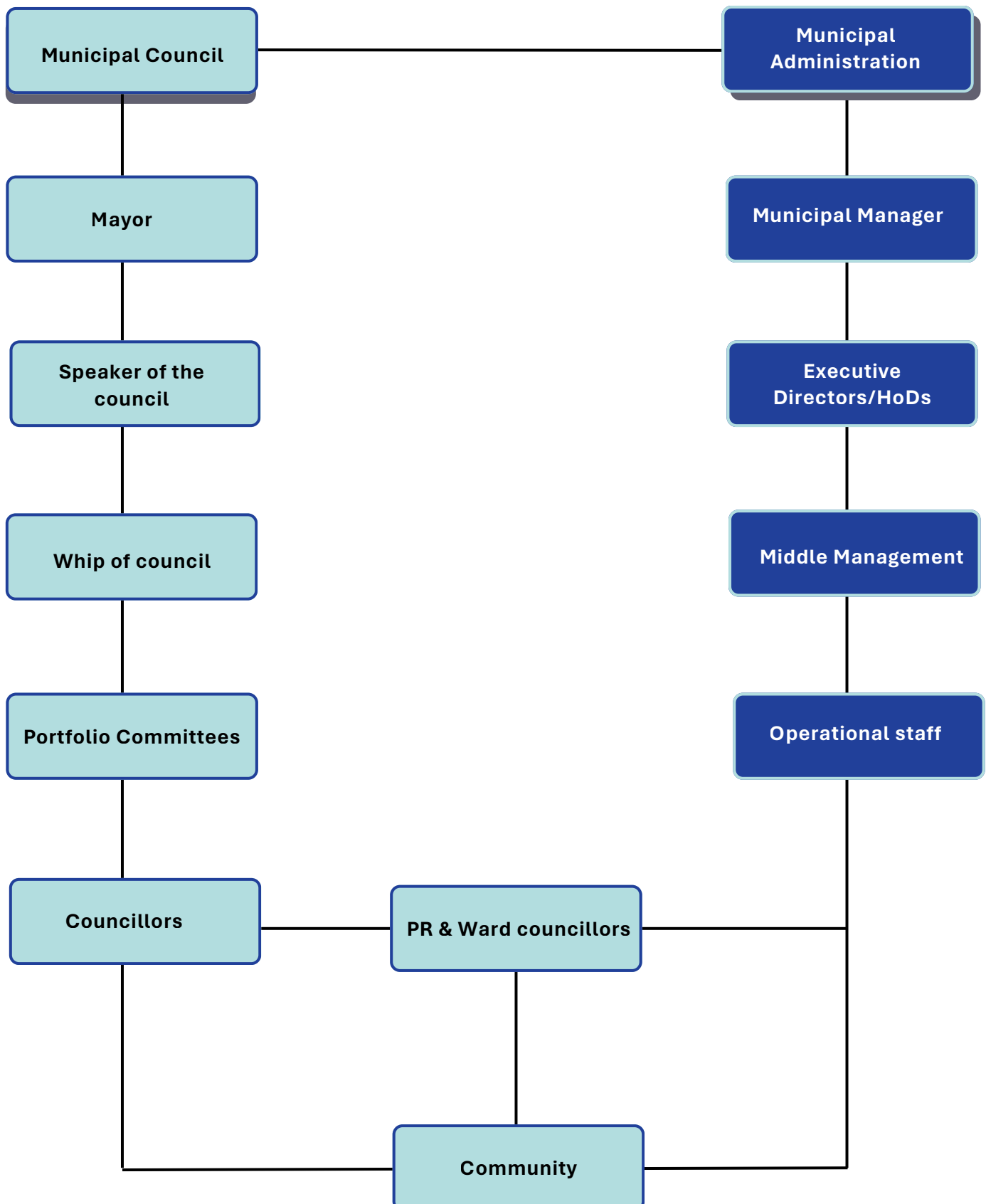


E.g. Emalahleni Local Municipality (Mpumalanga)



- A Category B municipality is a local municipality that shares municipal and executive authority in an area that has a Category C municipality.
- A Category B municipality must have a viable centre of economic activity. If it does not have such a centre and is unable to fulfil the functions of a municipality, it is designated as a DMA, and the district municipality then has to perform all the municipal functions in the area.

1.7 Hierarchy of Local Government Structure



Organogram of the role players in local government

Chapter 2: Definitions , Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 Definitions

Participation	Participation in local government means the active involvement of community members in the decision-making processes, planning, and oversight of their municipality or local authority. It goes beyond just voting in elections — it includes all the ways residents engage with local structures to ensure their voices, needs, and priorities are heard. The basis of community participation is provided for in the Constitution and the Municipal Systems Act. Key elements of participation in local government: 1. Democratic engagement – Citizens vote for councillors who represent them in council. 2. Consultation – Residents are consulted on policies, budgets, and development plans (e.g., Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) in South Africa). 3. Collaboration – Communities work with local government in projects and service delivery initiatives. 4. Oversight and accountability – Communities monitor performance, demand transparency, and hold leaders accountable. 5. Empowerment – Participation gives citizens a sense of ownership in governance and development.
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2.2. Roles and Responsibilities



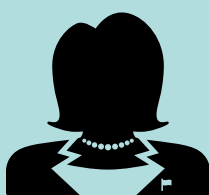
Municipal council or the 'governing body'

Municipal Council

A **municipal council** is the governing body of a municipality, that is exclusively made up of councillors elected by the residents to represent their interests and make decisions on local matters. It acts as the legislative authority of the municipality and is responsible for setting policies, passing bylaws, approving budgets, and overseeing the administration of municipal affairs. The functions and powers of the municipal council is provided for in the Municipal Structures Act under chapter 3.

Roles of a Municipal Council:

- Develop and adopt policies
- Passes municipal bylaws to regulate local matters
- Approves the municipal budget and ensures that resources are allocated efficiently.
- Monitors revenue collection and expenditure
- Ensures service delivery to residents
- Monitors the performance of the municipal manager, mayor and other officials.
- Ensures that the executive (Mayor or executive committee) and members of the Mayoral committee(MMCs) implements council decisions.
- Ensures transparency and accountability to residents.
- Represents the interest of the local community.
- Ensures good governance, ethical leadership, and compliance with laws and regulations.



mayor or the 'political head'

Mayor

The **mayor** is the political head of a municipality, elected from among the councillors by the municipal council. The functions and powers of a mayor are provided for in the Municipal Structures Act under section 49.

Roles of a Mayor:

- Provides political leadership and direction for the municipality.
- Oversees the implementation of council decisions.
- Guides the preparation and adoption of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP).
- Plays a central role in the development and approval of the municipal budget.
- Chairs the Executive Committee or Mayoral Committee, depending on the municipal system.
- Ensures accountability, transparency, and good governance.
- Promotes public participation in municipal decision-making.
- Represents the interest of the community in council deliberations.
- Works closely with the municipal manager to ensure effective service delivery.
- Provides political oversight of municipal programs and projects.

2.2. Roles and Responsibilities



Speaker of the council or the 'referee'

Speaker of the council

The **speaker of the council** is the chairperson of the municipal council. The speaker ensures that the council functions democratically, orderly and according to the law. He/she is elected by the councillors in the first sitting of a newly elected municipal council.

Roles of the speaker:

- Makes rulings on procedure (e.g like a referee).
- Ensures all councillors are given a chance to speak and debates are conducted according to rules.
- Enforces the code of conduct for councillors.
- Ensures that the council operates transparently and in line with constitutional principles of democracy.
- Encourages public participation in council processes (IDPs, budget hearings, etc.)
- Provides political oversight in the functioning of the council.
- Ensures accountability between the executive (mayor and mayoral committee) and the council.



Whip of the council or the 'the pulse of the council'

Whip of council

The **Whip of the council** is a councillor appointed by the municipal council.

Roles of the Whip of the council:

- Ensures that councillors are coordinated, and that council business runs smoothly.
- Helps apply the principle of proportional representation when councillors are allocated to committees.
- Works with party leaders to ensure councillors follow party mandates policies.
- Encourages councillors to attend meetings and participate actively.
- Addresses issues of absenteeism, misconduct or lack of discipline.
- Serves as a link between different political parties in the council.
- Facilitate communication, negotiation and cooperation between parties.
- Assists the speaker in ensuring that council meetings are efficient and orderly.
- Ensures councillors act in the best interest of their parties and the community.
- Plays a role in strengthening accountability and democratic practices in council operations.

2.2. Roles and Responsibilities



Portfolio committees or 'Monitors'

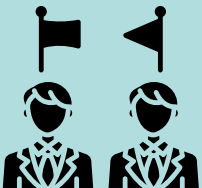
Portfolio Committees

A **portfolio committee** is a group of councillors appointed by the municipal council to focus on a specific sector of municipal work (e.g. housing, finance, transport, water, health, or human settlement). It is similar to a specialised working team inside the council that deals with detailed oversight, policy input and monitoring.

Roles of the portfolio committee:

- Monitor and oversee the work of the corresponding municipal department (e.g. the Housing portfolio committee oversees the Human Settlement Department).
- Ensure municipal policies, plans and budgets are being implemented correctly.
- Identify irregular or wasteful expenditure.
- Call officials to account for performance, spending and service delivery.
- Study proposed policies, bylaws, budgets and development plans and make recommendations to the full council on whether to adopt, amend or reject them.
- Serve as a bridge between elected councillors and the municipal administration.
- Ensure councillors understand technical reports from officials.
- Give feedback from communities to officials, and from officials to communities.
- Encourage and facilitate community input on issues relevant to their portfolio (eg. residents participating in discussions on water, sanitation or housing plans).
- Strengthen participatory governance by bringing local voices into decision-making.

2.2. Roles and Responsibilities

 <i>Ward councillors or 'representative'</i> Ward Councillors	Ward councillors are directly elected by the community in each ward during municipal elections. Roles of ward councillors: • Community representation- They are a direct link between the community and the council. They bring the community's needs, concerns, and priorities into the council. • Public Participation- Mobilise and encourage the community to participate in municipal programs (e.g. IDP meetings, budget consultations). • Problem-solving - Address service delivery complaints, mediate disputes, and assist residents with municipal processes. • Oversight Role- Ensure that the municipality delivers services in their ward fairly and effectively. • Reporting back- Give feedback to communities on council decisions, projects and progress.
 <i>PR councillors or 'party representative'</i> Proportional Representation (PR) Councillors	PR councillors are elected through the party list system. After ward councillors are elected, the remaining seats 50% in the municipal council are allocated to political parties based on the proportion of votes they received. The parties then send councillors from their lists to fill these PR seats. Roles of the PR councillors: • Party Representation- Represent their political party's policies, positions, and constituencies in council. • Oversight and Policy work- Participate in council debates, portfolio committees and decision-making processes. • Support to wards- Work alongside ward councillors in community projects and service delivery monitoring. • Broader constituency focus- Unlike ward councillors who represent specific wards, PR councillors often focus on broader or city-wide issues, ensuring balance between local and party priorities. • Accountability- Hold the executive and municipal administration accountable through council and committee structures.

2.2. Roles and Responsibilities



*Municipal Administration or
'secretariats'*

Municipal Administration

Municipal administration refers to the professional and technical arm of a municipality responsible for carrying out the decisions, policies, and bylaws adopted by the municipal council. These professionals are employed and not elected like the municipal councils.

Roles of municipal administration:

- Ensures that policies, bylaws and strategic plans approved by the council are executed.
- Translates political decisions into practical programs and projects.
- Provides essential municipal services (water, sanitation, electricity, waste management, housing, community services and roads).
- Prepare and implements the annual municipal budget
- Collects revenue
- Ensures effective use of resources and prevents waste or corruption
- Promotes skill development and maintains labour relations.
- Provides professional and technical advice to the council.
- Manages procurement and supply chain processes.
- Drafts policies, plans and bylaws



*Municipal manager or 'accounting
officer'*

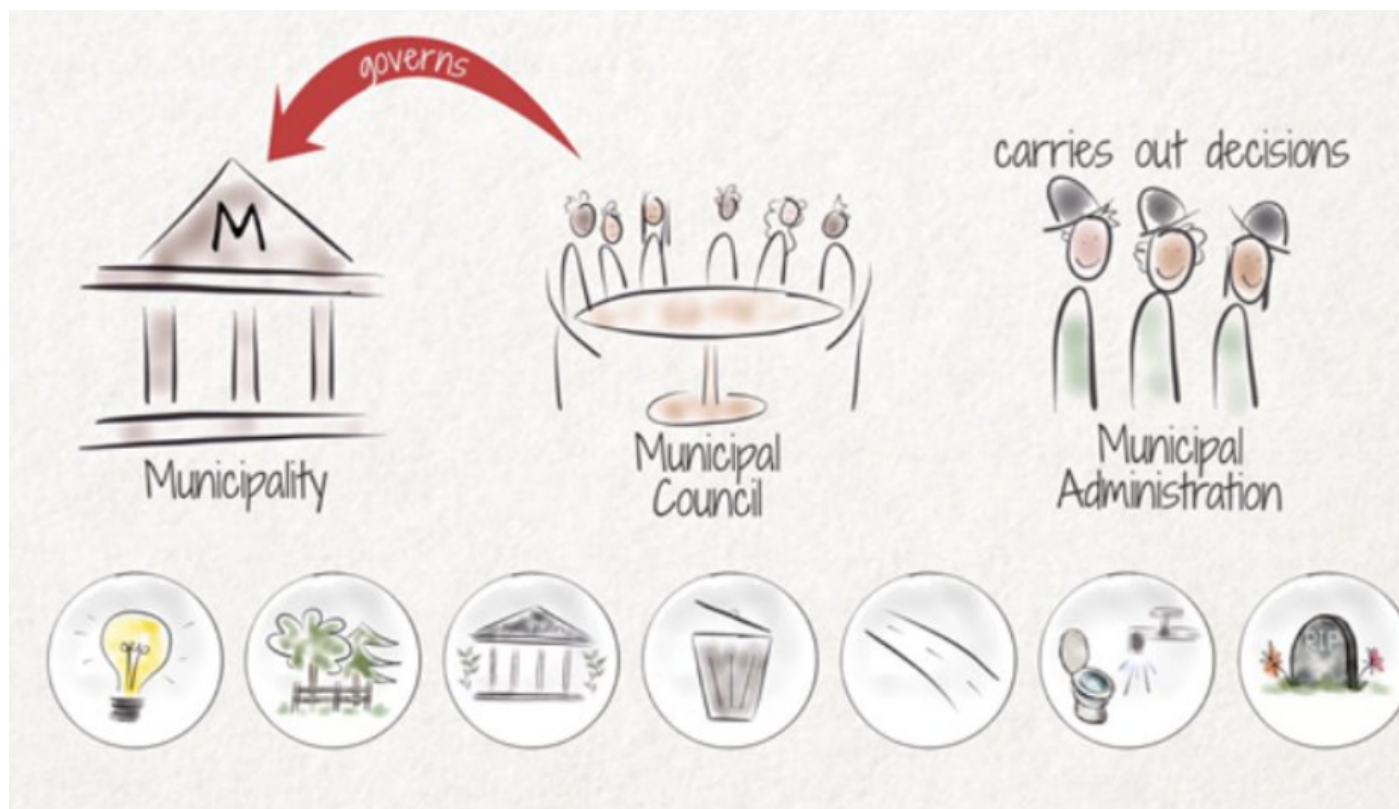
Municipal Manager

The **municipal manager** is the head of the municipal administration and the accounting officer of a municipality.

Roles of a municipal manager:

- Serves as the head of municipal administration
- Acts as the accounting officer of the municipality
- Implements council resolutions, policies and bylaws.
- Provides professional and technical advice to the Mayor and council
- Prepares and manages the Integrated Development Plan (IDP) and municipal budget
- Manages the day-to-day operations of the municipality.
- Ensures efficient delivery of municipal services (water, sanitation, electricity, roads)
- Supervises and manages all municipal staff
- Ensures compliance with laws, regulations and financial management standards.
- Oversees supply chain management and procurement.
- Monitors and reports on municipal performance to the council.
- Promotes effective, transparent, and accountable administration.

2.2. Roles and Responsibilities



Understanding municipal council and municipal administration



Executive Directors or 'senior managers'

Executive Directors/ Head of Department

Executive directors or Heads of Departments (HoDs) are senior managers appointed within the municipal administration. They report directly to the municipal manager. Each one is responsible for managing a specific municipal department (e.g. finance, human settlement, infrastructure, water and sanitation, health etc.) The title may differ depending on the municipality call them Executive Directors, others Heads of Departments (HoDs).

Roles of HoDs:

- Provide strategic and operational leadership in their area (e.g. Executive Director of Infrastructure oversees roads, electricity and water services).
- Ensure that the council's policies and resolution are turned into real programmes and projects.
- Oversee the day-to-day provision of services to communities within their functional area.
- Prepare departmental budgets.
- Monitor and control expenditure in line with municipal financial regulations.
- Manage and supervise managers, professionals and other staff in their departments.

2.2. Roles and Responsibilities

Executive Directors/ Head of Department	• Ensure staff performance and capacity building. • Report to the Municipal Manager on departmental progress. • Provide updates and technical input to council committees when needed. • Ensure compliance with municipal legislation, regulations, and performance standards.
 <i>Middle management or 'strategy'</i> Middle Management (Deputy Directors, Managers, Assistant Directors)	Middle management sits below Executive Directors/ Heads of Departments (HoDs) and above junior staff. Roles of the middle management: • They provide a link between strategic leadership (Municipal Manager and HoDs) and Operational staff who deliver services on the ground. • Assist with departmental planning, budgeting, and reporting. • Translate strategies into work plans for their sections. • Supervise day-to-day operations. • Directly manage supervisors, technicians, and operational teams. • Ensure tasks are completed and performance standards are met. • Provide specialised knowledge in their field (e.g. deputy director of water services might be an engineer overseeing pump stations.) • Ensure their section complies with policies, laws, and regulations. • Submit regular performance reports to the HoD. • Handles community complaints or service delivery challenges that escalate from frontline staff.

2.2. Roles and Responsibilities



Operational Staff or 'direct service level'

Operational Staff

Operational staff are frontline employees of the municipality. They are the ones residents see most because they directly deliver services on the ground.

Roles of operational staff:

- Carry out hands-on tasks such as waste collection, road repairs, fixing water leaks, maintaining parks, operating clinics etc.
- Often the first point of contact between the municipality and residents.
- Follow instructions from supervisors and deputy directors to implement projects or services.
- Escalate service delivery challenges from the ground to their supervisors for action (e.g. broken infrastructure, shortages, safety risks).
- Ensure municipal assets (trucks, roads, water network facilities) are maintained and functional.

Types of Operational Staff:

- Technical workers- electricians, plumbers, artisans, technicians.
- Service workers- waste collectors, street sweepers, park maintenance staff.
- Administrative/Clerical staff- customer care clerks, registry clerks, data capturers.
- Community Services Staff- Librarians, clinic nurses, sports and recreation facilitators.
- Law Enforcement/ Safety Staff- municipal police, traffic officers, security.



community or 'foundation of local government'

Community

Community is at the foundation of local government.

Roles of the community:

- Elect ward councillors and vote for political parties (which appoints PR councillors).
- Monitor councillors and the municipality's performance.
- Demand accountability through public meetings, petitions, ward committees, protests or legal action.
- Engage in IDP municipal budgets consultations.
- Join ward committees to channel local concerns.
- Attend council meetings that are open to the public.
- Report problems to ward councillors or through municipal service lines.

2.3. Executive and Legislative Functions of councils



The executive or delivery function of the local government refers to putting laws into action, such as providing services to communities, electricity, water, sanitation, social and cultural services, management of a public administration system, and encouraging local economic development.

Legislative function includes making laws that compel people to pay for services, making decisions affecting the rights of people in the area, responding to petitions or requests from the community, assisting in the employment of municipal staff, and deciding on resource allocation

2.4 Officials and Service Delivery

What is an official?

Officials are the people who carry out the work in municipalities and deliver services. Officials range from secretaries, accountants, planners, garbage collectors, and clerks, among others. Unlike councillors, officials are appointed because of the skills and knowledge they have. Their role is to provide the community with services, whether they hold the same political views and agree with the policies or not.

Different forms of services provided by officials

Officials are responsible for the delivery of services such as basic services, protection and safety services, cultural, social and welfare services.

1. Basic services

Local government is responsible for planning, developing and maintaining a system that can deliver services to communities. The services include:

- electricity
- water supply
- sewage and treatment of wastewater
- refuse removal
- passenger transport services
- building and maintaining roads.

2. Protection and safety services

These services include:

- Fire and rescue services
- ambulance services
- traffic control
- environment and pollution control
- services
- building plans control
- public community health
- safety inspection of buildings
- regulation of public transport services
- control of fresh produce markets and abattoirs

3. Cultural

Local government is responsible for providing various cultural services such as:

- Public libraries
- museums

- parks
- cemeteries
- monuments
- art galleries
- promoting local tourism

4. Social and welfare services

Some social and welfare services that the local government is responsible for include:

- AIDS or anti-smoking campaigns
- Health services
- adult education programmes
- nursery schools and creches
- community development
- care for the aged
- housing
- public swimming pools

Methods of providing services

Municipalities may provide services through the following methods:

- Establish a business unit within the municipality, which then provides a particular service.
- Enter into an agreement with another municipality or another organ of the state (eg, Department of Water and Sanitation) to provide a service.
- Enter into an agreement with non-government service providers.

Before an agreement is entered into with a service provider, the community must be informed of this intention through the media. The service provider must be selected on the basis of a competitive tender, which should be fair, transparent and cost-effective. The tender should take into account the possibility of teaming up small and emerging providers, and when the agreement is entered into, the community must be told which service provider was awarded the contract.

When a service provider is contracted to provide a service, the community remains responsible for the effective delivery of the service and maintains the right to regulate the provision of the service, to monitor the delivery of the service.

Conclusion

The local government structure guide serves as a practical tool for communities, stakeholders, and policymakers to better understand how local government operates. Its focus is on clarifying the roles and responsibilities of different levels of government. By providing accessible information on structures, processes, and opportunities for participation, the toolkit empowers citizens to make informed contributions to strengthen local governance and decision-making. Ultimately, the guide emphasises that effective local government is not only about institutional arrangements but also about fostering inclusive participation, transparency, and accountability, which together build stronger, more responsive, and people-centred municipalities.

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