



CITY OF JOHANNESBURG
METROPOLITAN MUNICIPALITY

11th Floor A Block, Metropolitan Centre
158 Loveday Street, Braamfontein, JHB, ZA

Tel +27(0) 11 407 7356

khathutshelomul@joburg.org.za

www.joburg.org.za

Welcome Address by the Executive Mayor at the SALGA National Municipal Managers Forum –
13 May 2026, Connie Bapela Council Chamber

**PROGRAMME DIRECTOR,
CEO OF SALGA, MR SITHOLE MBANGA,
CHAIRPERSONS AND OFFICE BEARERS OF SALGA,
MUNICIPAL MANAGERS, SENIOR MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS,
DISTINGUISHED GUESTS,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,**

GOOD MORNING.

It is both an honour and a privilege to welcome you to the City of Johannesburg for the SALGA National Municipal Managers Forum. We gather at a pivotal moment in the evolution of democratic local government in South Africa. As we prepare for the transition into the 6th term of democratic local government and the 2026 Local Government Elections, this forum presents a valuable opportunity for reflection, renewal, and strategic repositioning. The theme of this engagement—“Guiding the Transition: An Opportunity to Renew as We Usher in the 6th Term of Democratic and People-Centred Local Government”, could not be more relevant to the challenges facing our municipalities today.

Local government remains the sphere closest to the people. It is where citizens experience the developmental state most directly — through the provision of water, electricity, sanitation, roads, waste management, public safety and social support services. However, it is also the sphere that bears some of the greatest pressures within the state. Across municipalities, we are witnessing increasing urbanisation, deteriorating infrastructure, rising household distress, expanding informal settlements, climate-related vulnerabilities, institutional instability, and persistent fiscal pressures.

These challenges are fundamentally reshaping the local government landscape and require a new level of administrative capability and governance maturity. At the heart of this challenge lies the issue of financial sustainability. The sustainability of local government can no longer be regarded merely as an accounting or budgeting exercise. It has become one of the central governance challenges facing our country. Municipalities cannot deliver services without stable revenue streams. They cannot maintain infrastructure without capital investment. They cannot expand access to services while revenue collection weakens.

And they cannot sustain public confidence where governance instability undermines execution. The reality confronting many municipalities is that expenditure pressures are outpacing revenue growth. Bulk electricity and water costs continue to rise. Debt impairment levels are increasing, infrastructure maintenance backlogs are deepening, and ageing assets require significant reinvestment. Concurrently, municipalities are expected to expand services to growing populations under increasingly constrained fiscal conditions.

This is why the Review of the White Paper on Local Government is both necessary and urgent. Nearly thirty years since the adoption of the 1998 White Paper, South Africa's municipal environment has changed fundamentally. The original White Paper laid the foundation for developmental local government and established a transformative framework for democratic service delivery. However, the conditions under which municipalities now operate are significantly more complex than those envisaged in 1998.

The review process, therefore, presents an opportunity not merely to amend policy but to fundamentally rethink the sustainability and capability of the local government model itself. We must ask difficult but necessary questions: How do we build financially resilient municipalities? How do we modernise the revenue and service delivery model of local government? How do we improve governance without overburdening institutions with compliance requirements that weaken implementation capacity? How do we strengthen metropolitan governance in rapidly urbanising cities?

And importantly, how do we ensure that municipalities remain developmental while also remaining financially viable? For metropolitan municipalities in particular, these questions are becoming increasingly urgent. Metros are not merely administrative jurisdictions; they are economic centres that drive national growth, investment, and employment. Yet, they also carry the greatest infrastructure burdens, migration pressures, and social inequalities. In Johannesburg, we confront these realities daily.

As the economic hub of South Africa and the continent, our city faces immense pressures relating to infrastructure recovery, energy security, water resilience, public transport, informal urbanisation, housing demand and service delivery sustainability. It is within this context that the City of Johannesburg has embarked on Metro Trading Services Reforms. These reforms are intended to strengthen the long-term sustainability of municipal service delivery institutions and restore the financial and operational integrity of core utilities and trading services. The reform agenda recognises that municipalities cannot continue to operate under outdated service delivery and revenue models while infrastructure networks deteriorate and operational losses escalate.

We therefore have a responsibility to modernise systems, improve billing accuracy, reduce electricity and water losses, strengthen revenue management, enhance maintenance planning, drive operational efficiencies, and leverage technology to improve customer responsiveness and institutional accountability. However, these reforms must remain rooted in the developmental mandate of local government. Financial sustainability cannot come at the expense of social justice and inclusion. Equally, developmental objectives cannot be sustained without financially viable municipalities.

The challenge before us, therefore, is to build municipalities that are both socially responsive and institutionally sustainable. Colleagues, as we discuss transition management and institutional reform during this forum, we must also recognise the increasingly strategic role of Municipal Managers and senior administrators within local government. Today, Municipal Managers operate in highly complex governance environments characterised by coalition politics, fiscal constraints, heightened public scrutiny, and rising service delivery expectations. The role now extends far beyond administration. Municipal Managers are custodians of institutional continuity. They are guardians of governance stability.

They are stewards of public resources. And increasingly, they are central to restoring public confidence in the state's capabilities. As we approach the 2026 Local Government Elections, the importance of ethical, capable and resilient municipal administrations becomes even more critical.

Political transitions must not result in paralysis of governance. They must not weaken service delivery. They must not undermine institutional memory. And they must not compromise financial stability and accountability.

The ability of municipalities to navigate transitions successfully will depend significantly on the professionalism, preparedness, and integrity of municipal administrations. This forum, therefore, provides an important platform for collective reflection and practical engagement on strengthening local government institutions during a period of national transition.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The future sustainability of local government in South Africa will depend on our ability to confront institutional realities honestly while simultaneously building a renewed vision for developmental governance. We require financially resilient, administratively capable, technologically advanced, ethically governed, and people-centred municipalities. The renewal of local government is no longer optional. It is a national imperative.

On behalf of the City of Johannesburg, I wish you productive engagement over the next two days. May your deliberations contribute meaningfully to shaping a stronger, more sustainable, and more capable system of local government for the people of South Africa.

I thank you.