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■ OPINION

# Pat on the back for Water and Sanitation

LEBOGANG MASEKO

**THE** portfolio committee on human settlements, water and sanitation has commended the Department of Water and Sanitation for acquiring an unqualified audit outcome in the 2018/19 financial year.

This clean audit is only the second in 10 years. While this is not really something to write home about, this outcome is a step in the right direction in stabilising the department. These are the results of measures that have been put in place in turning the department around to ensure it functions optimally to implement its mandate.

However, the committee also noted that the department has lost millions in fruitless and wasteful expenditure from its main account.

The department said R46.7 million related to the management fees charged by its entity, Lepelle North-



Acting Director General: Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Mulelo Tshangana

em Water. An amount of R1.3m was charged for standing time and interest on overdue payments for the projects implemented by Amatola Water.

This follows Minister Lindiwe Sibusulu's announcement during a media briefing recently that 86 officials in the department were found guilty of fraud and corruption.

Millions squandered recklessly by officials is a concerning trend in government, especially in the tough

economic climate we are in.

For a department that is mandated to deliver a basic and significant service such as the provision of water and sanitation, it cannot be allowed that this kind of money is not recovered.

To address this, acting director-general Mulelo Tshangana has committed to work with his team to clean up the department through the effective implementation of a financial recovery plan.

This seeks to stabilise the department, its water boards and decisively deal with all the officials found to have transgressed and flouted the Public Finance Management Act.

Priority intervention areas of the plan include funding and budget management, which will entail the implementation of debt collection, a revenue enhancement strategy and a zero tolerance stance on overdraft.

Other factors to be considered in the effective implementation of the

plan include expenditure control, financial governance and enhanced accountability from officials.

In addition, a comprehensive reconciliation of assets and liabilities to enable maintenance of proper accounting records for management and reporting purposes is to be implemented by Tshangana and his team.

Sibusulu has issued a strict directive that the plan be implemented with urgency in order to turn the department around so as to improve and enhance the delivery of services to the public. Clean drinking water and suitable sanitation are basic human rights. Corrupt officials at the department cannot continue to squander taxpayers' money. They should face the full might of the law.

*Lebogang Maseko is a social media practitioner and works for the Department of Water and Sanitation.*