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Anti-Fraud and Corruption
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SPECIAL EDITION

New Sheriff takes the reins at Joburg's Anti-Corruption Unit

INSIDE **metros**

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Photo by: Leon Sadiki

New sheriff takes reins

By Pearl Rantsekeng

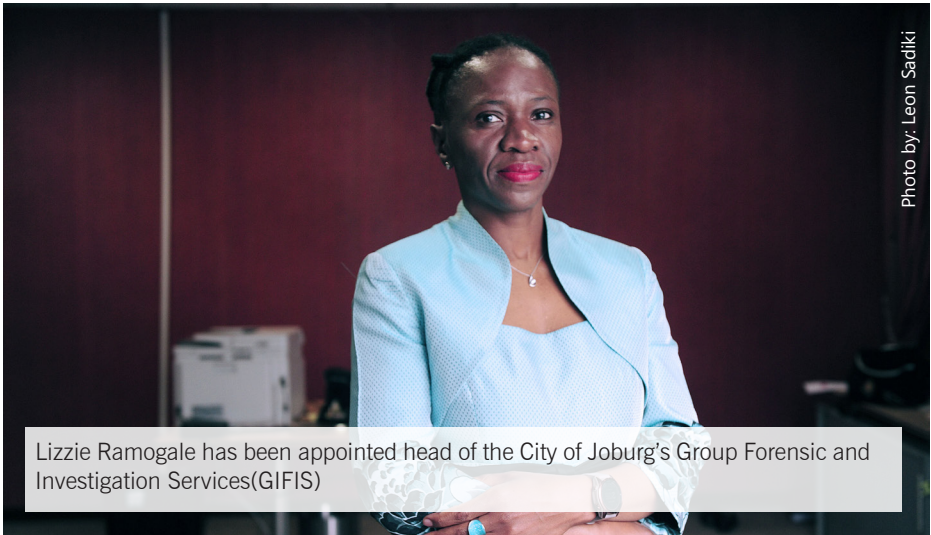


Photo by: Leon Sadiki

Lizzie Ramogale has been appointed head of the City of Joburg's Group Forensic and Investigation Services (GFIS)

There is a new sheriff in town and her name is Lizzie Ramogale (49). She has been appointed Acting Head: Group Forensic and Investigation Services (GFIS), a position left void by General Shadrack Sibiya who has re-joined the South African Police Service.

GFIS is an independent department that was established in 2014 by then-Mayor Herman Mashaba who had roped in

big guns to tackle the fraud and corruption that is crippling the City of Joburg. The department reports functionally to the City of Johannesburg (COJ) Audit Committee and administratively to the City Manager.

Although the unit has no prosecution powers it has a great working relationship with Chapter 9 institutions such as Home Affairs, the South African Police Service, National Prosecuting Authority,

and the Asset Forfeiture Unit. Beyond conducting investigations, GFIS plays a crucial role in following cases to conviction.

Ramogale is well prepared for the role, having been groomed by the General, a man she and others in the department hold in high regard. She has come a long way from her young days in the village of Makgodu in Limpopo. A librarian by profession, Ramogale moved

to Gauteng in 1996 when she studied for a Postgraduate Degree in B-Information Management at the then-Rand Afrikaans University, now the University of Johannesburg.

Upon achieving this qualification, she worked at various state entities including the Gauteng Department of Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture, monitoring library services at municipal and provincial levels. Ramogale also headed a reference centre in Pretoria Street which was responsible for sourcing and supplying libraries with the required books throughout the

province.

From Sports, she joined the Department of Community Safety as deputy director responsible for Police Performance Monitoring. A position she held for nine years. "This is where my law enforcement was enhanced as we had to manage and monitor the performance of police entities in the three Metros, from the South African Police Service to the Ekurhuleni Metro Police Department, Johannesburg Metro Police Department, and Tshwane Metro Police Department," she explains.

Ramogale says when

Mashaba introduced GFIS and appointed Sibiyi as head, she was working for what the City knew as GRAS – Group Risk and Assurance Services. "I was acting director of Performance Management Support and when the General came in he took certain people from different departments and that's when my journey with GFIS began. Which is how I ended up in my current position as acting head at the end of May," she explains.

Ramogale says she has been touched by the support from her colleagues, despite challenges such as staff shortages. "I can't



Lizzie Ramogale

Photo by: Leon Sadiki



explain it, but so far it's been okay... I think the transition went well, but the fear of failure is also there and I think that is what is keeping me up at night. The General was good at what he did and there is a fear that I will not perform up to his standard. What will things be with him no longer there, as he is someone that I used to look up to and I learned a lot from him."

Ramogale's first port of call as acting head has been to recruit three directors. One will be responsible for the property hijacking investigations, fraud and corruption unit, the second is the

director of the operations Unit which is responsible for dealing mainly with fraud, corruption, theft of the city's assets, and special projects, as well as the local government statutes. While the third is the director of criminal prosecutions and legal services.

"This unit helps with the prosecution leads so that when our cases get to court they aren't dismissed due to a lack of evidence, among other things. Having a team makes it easier for us to tighten our cases and have fewer things go wrong," explains Ramogale.

In the short space of time that Ramogale has been at the helm, she has identified areas that need attention.

"We had to review our terms of reference for investigations so they could assist us in tightening up our internal controls for investigations. Secondly, we had to make sure that the recommendations emanating from our investigations are implemented. This will help strengthen our recovery processes for the monies due to the City."

Ramogale says they've also introduced the code of professional standard

investigations as they had been using the generic code for the City of Joburg employees.

“We aim to make sure that when you’re an employee of this department and an investigator, you can stand apart from the rest. This should reflect in the way you conduct yourself during interviews; how you manage confidential information; how you manage the crime scene; how you write a report and package evidence, and how you conduct yourself when testifying whether in court or a disciplinary pro-

cess.”

Ramogale’s post is not for the faint-hearted and has meant that she needs to be extra vigilant. “The fact that I am not a very sociable person and am very private, has helped.”

When not juggling work, Ramogale is out exercising. “I’m an athlete by nature and I love to cycle or just run to help me destress. Cycling is a newly acquired exercise that I started last year, which has been a nurturing experience.”

Asked what Women’s Day means to her,

Ramogale says it is an opportunity for men to learn about the role women play and also for women to ensure that men understand that women are here to make a meaningful contribution. “It is an opportunity to highlight the value of women and how they empower the community and society at large. For example, group forensics is seen as a male-dominated environment and for me, as a woman, to come this far means a lot. But more than that, it is the confidence the City has shown in appointing me to fill the position of acting head.”



GIFS employees

Photo by: Leon Sadiki

Protecting the City's budget

By Pearl Rantsekeng

Photo by: Leon Sadliki

GIFIS Director of Forensic Information Management Centre Helen Masera

Mashiane Helen Masera (43) has come a long way from her days picking grapes in Senwabarwana village in rural Limpopo.

As director of the Forensic Information Management Centre (FIMC), Masera now holds one of the most powerful positions in the City of Johannesburg, which is led by Executive Mayor Dr Mpho Phalatse.

As head of FIMC, Ma-

sera's task is to prepare information and evidence that will hold water in a court of law. "We have subunits, with forensics being one of them. We have the war room which is the cyber centre for digital forensics like imaging and we support the city in terms of dealing with crime, especially fraud. We are protecting a budget of R66-billion, as Executive Mayor Phalatse likes to say."

Masera, a former policewoman, says her position is the second most dangerous, after the head of the Group Forensic and Investigation Service (GFIS). As head of FIMC, she is the City's first line of defence as she is responsible for the vetting of City employees, contractors and those wanting to come in.

According to recent reports from various entities in the City,

Photo by: Leon Sadiki



Helen Masera

these include housing, City Power and Joburg Water. Most of the theft and fraud that is committed within the City, are criminals that have colluded with officials.

The City is investigating cases amounting to billions due to theft, fraud and corruption. "FIMC is about minimum information security standards which I am passionate about. Right now, as we speak, I am fighting because people in the City do not want to be vetted. In terms of section 195 of the constitution, it says we shall have a

professional public service administration that has ethical values and can move South Africa forward. The national development plan is about the development of people, and the national anti-corruption strategy is about fighting corruption.

"We can't give services to people if we are corrupt. How will I know that you are or aren't corrupt if I am hiring you and you don't want me to vet you? People are deeply rooted in corruption and the past 10 years have eroded ethical values and gov-

ernance and people have been entrenched in the corrupt system."

Masera says if an employee or potential employee is vetted and found to have negative outcomes, the minimum information security standards demand that they advise the City that the person is unemployable.

"But those people with criminal cases that can be expunged can be employed, however, cases like fraud, corruption and sexual offences can not."

She says that chal-

Helen Masera

lenges include stacks of unresolved cases regarding hijacked buildings. "To win, we use a multi-disciplinary approach. You have three spheres of government that are inter-related and inter-dependent – Home Affairs, SAPS as well as the State Security Agency (SSA).

"When I first joined the city, one of the things I noted was that there was a lot of economic sabotage with no consequences. People were burning substations and we started to work with the different units to follow through on these matters. That is what we mean by cutting-edge multidisciplinary col-

laboration."

Masera joined the department last December, having moved from Polokwane where she worked as director for the Transversal Ethic Security and Investigations Unit in the office of the premier. A position she held for two years. "There I had to ensure that we have ethical employees and strong investigation capacity. I had to make sure that we integrate with all state agencies that investigate corruption and establish forums led by the department of public administration," she explains.

She mentions her involvement in the Mu-

sina-Makhado Special Economic Zone (MMSEZ) as one of her career highlights. Masera's rise to the top has not been meteoric. She has had to work her way up from the moment she qualified as a teacher in 1999. She had no choice but to accept a post as a fruit picker at a local farm in her rural town of Limpopo. "There were no teaching posts available, and picking grapes paid a meagre R12 per crate," she recalls. While working on the farm, Masera decided to sign up as a police reservist and was lucky to get signed up into the police service in 2000, a job she held for 7 years. Working as

a police officer gave Masera an edge in investigations and experience in case management, which have both come in handy in her post as FIMC director.

“Case management is about whistleblowers calling in, getting cases, responding to them and referring them for investigation and updating them when the investigation is closed,” says Masera.

She is quick to point out that she joined the City of Johannesburg because of Former Hawks Head General Shadrack Sibiy, who was Head of GFIS. Sibiy has since

resigned to re-join SAPS. “The general is passionate about fighting fraud, just like me. I am an ethical person and I believe in the City. My desire is to one day become a police commissioner or City Manager, God willing.”

Masera says she doesn’t subscribe to the notion of a “boys or girls club”, but believes in gender mainstreaming. “The essence of women in leadership is to assert themselves but also respect men. Look at women like Professor Puleng LenkaBula from Unisa, former Public Service and Administration Minister Ayanda Dlodlo, for-

mer Public Protector Thuli Madonsela, and University of Cape Town vice-chancellor Mamokgethi Phakeng. We could learn a lot from these women.”

Masera says that nothing in life is guaranteed.

“When I leave the office, I pack it as if I am not coming back. It is also the job requirement of GFIS and we must lead by example – minimum security standard – clean desk policy.”

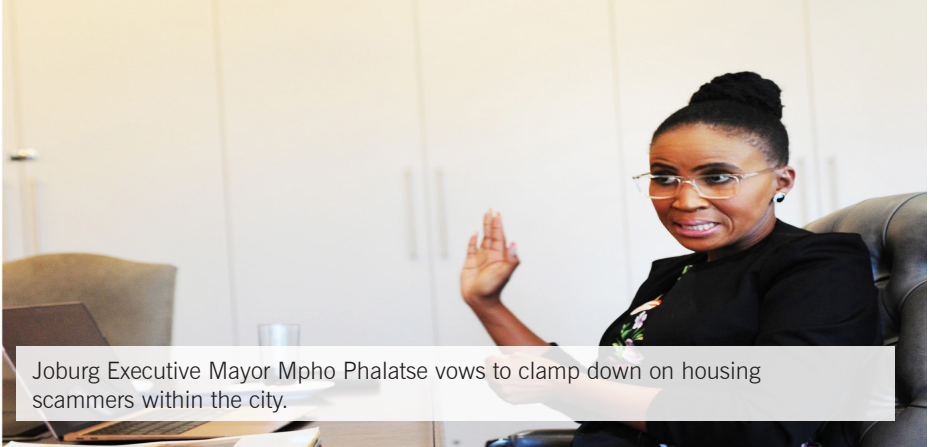


Helen Masera

Photo by: Leon Sadiki

Crackdown on housing scammers

By Pearl Rantsekeng



Joburg Executive Mayor Mpho Phalatse vows to clamp down on housing scammers within the city.

DESPERATE times call for desperate measures. Housing syndicates in the City of Johannesburg are resorting to sophisticated tactics to rob unsuspecting residents, and the City is clamping down.

The organised syndicates have an individual pretending to be Councillor Mlungisi Mabaso, the newly appointed MMC for Human Settlements in the Johannesburg Multi-Party Government.

Addressing the me-

dia, Executive Mayor Mpho Phalatse accompanied by Mabaso and Gauteng Forensic and Investigation Services (GIFS) Acting Head Lizzie Ramogale, said victims of public housing scammers were being asked to pay between R3,000 and R20,000 to speed up their housing applications.

This money is supposedly meant to "help move things along" or "kick-start the process". Only two people have been arrested but it is suspected that certain Johannesburg

housing officials may be assisting criminals.

"As we dig deeper into this matter, it is becoming clear that we are dealing with multiple syndicates who might be working closely with human settlement officials. The law enforcement agencies are working together to try to centralise all cases," said Phalatse.

The City has roped in law enforcement agencies at all levels to bring criminals to book. These agencies include senior officers



Photo by: Leon Sadiki

from SAPS Hillbrow, the Hawks, Organised Crime from National SAPS Head Office, as well as GFIS. This approach aims to repair and rebuild the country's economic capital so that Johannesburg can truly be called a City of Golden Opportunities.

The deliberate action by MMC Mlungisi Mabaso and the Department of Human Settlements is a result of a growing trend, where scammers create fraudulent social media accounts to swindle unsuspecting victims by promising them an opportunity to either jump the

Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) housing queue or to sell them non-existing houses.

"As a multi-party government, we wish to make it very clear on this matter, the Department of Human Settlements, its officials and entities, would never ask that beneficiaries pay for RDP homes and would not assist them to jump the queue. RDP houses, the application thereof, and the allocation are free of charge to qualifying residents," Phalatse clarified.

The immediate action by the City came after numerous complaints by walk-in clients as well as callers who have lost their hard-earned cash to scammers.

Modus Operandi

The scammers use various fake social media accounts with the councillor's face and the department's name to offer credibility to their fraudulent endeavours. They often use phone calls and social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, LinkedIn and Twitter to lure their victims, as it offers a sense of an-



Photo by: Leon Sadiki

onymity.

They target Johannesburg-based residents who are in dire need of housing and they get them to pay a “deposit”. The perpetrators convince victims to pay via Pep, Shoprite, Standard Bank and Capitec Bank.

“Those that qualify for RDP houses are already destitute, and asking someone who is already struggling to live a life of dignity to pay for a free service is beyond immoral, it is something someone without a conscience would do,” said Phalatse.

The alleged fraudsters are said to have registered cellphone numbers in the councillor’s name. Last July, a case of fraud was opened at the Johannesburg Central Police Station. The case was later handed over to the Hillbrow Police Station and in February this year, three suspects were apprehended in Limpopo. The suspects were found in possession of fake posters emblazoned with pictures of the councillor.

Tokolli Sedibe (29), Thuli Katjedi (29) and Ronny Magabe (35)

appeared in court for their bail applications in February, and their next court appearance will be on 1 September.

Preventative Measures

The Johannesburg Department of Human Settlements is currently in the process of getting all its social media accounts verified, to distinguish fraudulent accounts from the department’s official pages.

Councillor Mabaso and the Department of Human Settlements will continue to issue statements, conduct



media interviews and carry out awareness campaigns warning against these scams. "We will lay charges against anyone who seeks to defraud the City's residents."

Furthermore, the police have advised the department and the councillor to encourage victims to open cases of fraud to help strengthen the current case with the Hillbrow SAPS. Last month, the City visited Braamfischerville and Phiri in Soweto to help scammed residents open cases.

Where to report housing scams

Residents are urged to remain vigilant, scrutinise all the information they receive, and follow only the official social media platforms of the City of Johannesburg.

The Johannesburg Department of Human Settlements is calling on all community members to report any suspicious activities or individuals to GFIS at the Sappi Building, 48 Ameshoff Street, 6th floor in Braamfontein or to call the fraud hotline number on 0800-002-587. Another option is to send an email to whistle@joburg.org.za.

In addition, there are

outreach programmes to educate communities, and confidentiality is guaranteed.

The official social media accounts of the Department of Human Settlements are:

Twitter: @COJDOHS
 Facebook: City of Joburg Human Settlements Department

Instagram: Department of Human Settlements

Picture Gallery

Photos By Leon Sadiki

City of Joburg's Group Forensic and Investigation Services(GIFIS) employees during a recent wellness campaign at the Alexandra Mall, Johannesburg.





