

Governance and Accountability

Gauteng Department of Education (GDE)

Non-compliance is non-negotiable¹

The Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) have developed an effective mechanism for holding staff to account for service delivery targets. These deliverables are linked to the 2009 to 2013 Strategic Plan and subsequent Annual Performance Plans. The case explores the internal governance and accountability processes of the Department to illustrate how compliance to regulatory frameworks can enable the delivery of results in schools and classrooms. This case reviews the reasons for achieving a level 4 for Service Delivery Key Performance Area 2, 2.1.1: Service Delivery Mechanisms.

The GDE has put in place a web of inter-connection that improves service delivery to schools in Gauteng. This process has been in development since 2009 as a specific focus of the Member of Executive Council (MEC). The experience of the GDE demonstrates that it takes time and resilience to put effective compliance and improvement systems into place. Furthermore, quality improvements seem to follow compliance. The system of reporting (showing compliance) is directly linked to performance (showing accountability). Staff are able to articulate how their tasks are linked to service delivery targets that are integral to the Strategic Plan and the goals for quality education.

The lessons that may be extracted from the way that the GDE works to delivery on its mandates are:

- Leadership should be consistently exemplary and accessible
- Internal governance and accountability processes should comprise a regular and rigorous process of monitoring interactions linked to targets
- Performance monitoring through peer review is effective for ensuring compliance and improvement
- It takes time to establish, define and action systems of monitoring and improving quality

¹ This case study was written for the Department of Performance Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) by Ms Catherine Moat, with the support of Professor Anne Mc Lennan, from the Wits Graduate School of Public and Development Management (www.wits.ac.za/Academic/CLM/PDM/).

Introduction

The Gauteng Department of Education is responsible for the provision of basic education. Gauteng has 1 052 000 learners. Approximately 60% of these learners are poor, at no-fee schools with access to feeding schemes. In addition, 57 000 learners are transported daily. The vision of the department is to ensure every learner does well and that “quality learning and teaching” takes place.

The key challenge the department faces is that despite near universal enrolments, the quality of education in terms of outcomes is not optimal. This had been a particular concern of the current Member of Executive Council who has, with her executive team, attempted to work with all stakeholders, unions, teachers and districts, to create an “army of hope” to change Gauteng schools by aiming to provide 80% support and 20% compliance to ensure quality, learner focused learning. This is on the assumption that “support leads to compliance”.

The Executive Management Team visits schools and districts twice a month. This means they “leave offices and see what is happening on the ground”. They return with the tracking grid. This process ensures that accountability and governance is in place - for oversight, but also to share experiences.

“The transformation in the Education system over the past fifteen years has made great strides in ensuring that the citizens in Gauteng have access to schools and learning institutions. Our learner enrolments in the province are near universal levels and female participants in our schools are amongst the highest in the world. We endeavour that the poorest of the poor are able to be in schools and benefit by ensuring that all learners in quintile 1 to 3 have access to free schooling, nutrition and scholar transport”.

“The problem we confront as a province is the evidence of poor outcomes of work in education to date. ... The quality of learning in the province will be at the top of the agenda for the next five years at all levels of the system to enable us to deliver on all the priorities. As a province we will work hard to ensure that all role players have a meaningful voice in what needs to be done and how this needs to be achieved. We will look at ways in which all participatory structures in education can be strengthened to give a greater voice to parents and learners.” (GDE, Strategic Plan, 2009, pii)

The 2009 to 2013 Strategy of the Gauteng Department of Education guides the service delivery systems and processes. Four strategic goals guide the annual performance plans, service delivery improvement plans (SDIP) and plans of action. In this regards, the GDE’s service charter, service standards and SDIP are widely consulted and engaged. The GDE also carefully manages and considers monitors compliance to service delivery standards. These considerations are used to inform improvements and targets to priority areas to provide support to schools to ensure quality education. These four strategic goals of the department are:

- Ensuring that Gauteng has effective schools and learning institutions. This means that schools are functional and supported so that learning and teaching can take place.
- That the GDE Head Office and Districts provide relevant, coordinated and effective support to schools through effective administration and programming.
- Enabling young people to make the transition from school to further education and/or work that provides further training opportunities.
- Strengthening partnerships with all stakeholders, resulting in education becoming a societal priority. Stakeholder involvement in schools is seen as critical to improving learning outcomes. In this regard, the department actively encourages stakeholder interactions at all levels.

Service delivery to learners is spread across all four goals, however accountability and governance is located mostly in Goal 2. Service delivery in the department is defined by the principles of transformation, equity, redress and Ubuntu. In this regard, the GDE emphasises the following key values for service delivery, derived from the *Batho Pele* Principles:

Professionalism: *Employees at all levels in the organisation are committed to the delivery of an equitable and efficient service to all stakeholders in education.*

Teamwork: *The holistic development of all learners through the delivery of quality education is the goal of all in the GDE.*

Consultation: *Managers and staff regularly consult with all internal and external customers to ensure client satisfaction at all levels of the organisation.*

Accountability: *Officials at all levels of the organisation have set service delivery standards that ensure accountability.*

Value for money: *Every service delivered, every project and programme embarked on, is value for money.*

It is with this vision and set of goals, and in this context, that the Education Policy and Planning Directorate manages governance and service delivery oversight. In addition, the team manages strategic planning processes, policy implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting and accountability.

What is the good practice about?

The story is one of radical leadership committed to action and holding staff to rigorous account for service delivery targets. Radical leadership is manifest in that the Head of Department (HOD)'s performance contract is published and his performance targets are directly linked to these deliverables found in the APP. The performance contracts of each senior staff are in turn linked to APP/Strategic Plan deliverables and thus to the HOD's and Deputy Director General (DDG)'s performance. As such every senior official is accountable to each other and the DDG and HOD for delivery in the department - and their continued employment.

Senior decision-makers who are directly responsible for deliverables have direct and regular access to the HOD and the DDG. This accessibility lubricates responsiveness and rapid problem-solving. It also enables regular on-going reporting with inbuilt mechanisms to check progress against targets that are ultimately signed off at the political level. It is a web of interconnection that works towards achieving delivering services to schools in Gauteng.

The system of reporting (showing compliance) is directly linked to performance (showing accountability). Staff are able to articulate how their tasks are linked to service delivery targets that are integral to the Strategic Plan and the Goals for quality education. Given that this is linked to targets, there are clear systems for internal compliance that leads explicitly to service delivery. Performance management systems are clearly and unambiguously linked to the attainment of results that impact on the quality of education.

The driving force of service delivery

The MEC, with her HOD and the DDG are the champions of creating and maintaining a work ethic based on rigorous checking and holding to account of their own and their teams' performance. The role of leadership is a critical driving force to achieving the goals. Several times in interviews, their relationship of working in alignment, explicitly towards the same goals was cited as a positive motivation for others in senior management and throughout the department. The MEC and HOD manage to balance the interface between political objectives and public administration.

“Once you have that leadership above you and have that kind of support to you, that really stretches every point of your imagination, and that is how is it.”

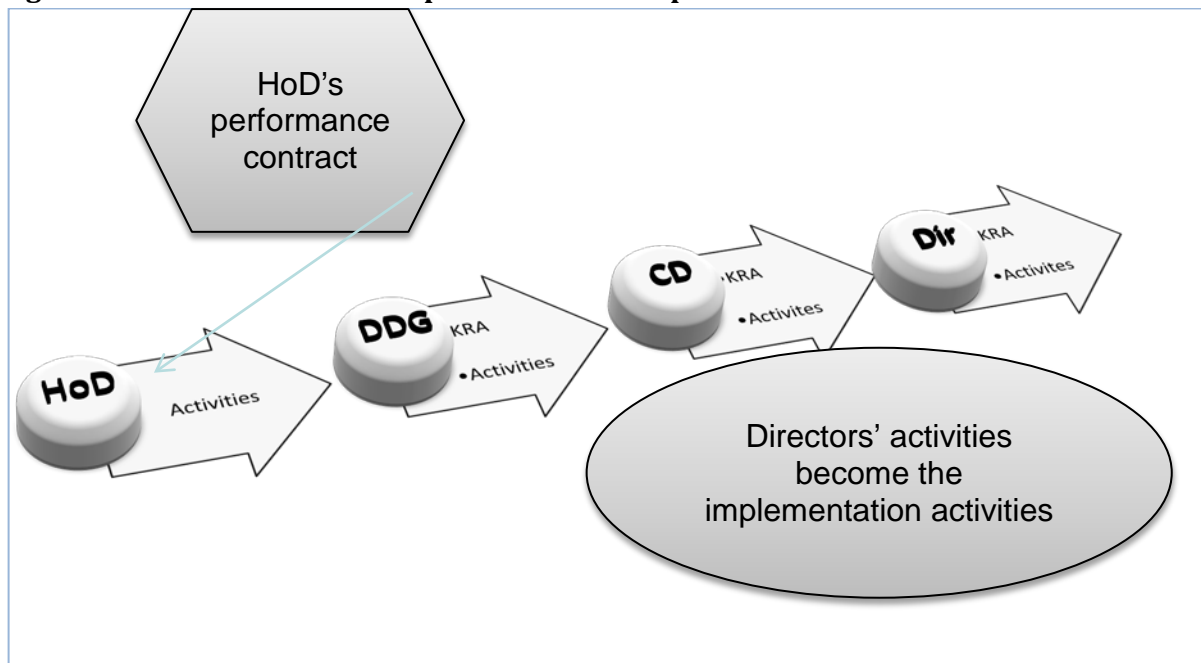
Managers do not have to “sit with a problem”, as there is an established culture of sharing information, seeking advice and joint problem solving. This is enabled by a positive morale where staff see evidence that interventions are achieving results sustainably, and that their work has meaning in this context. There is organisational success through high levels of commitment, openness, and honesty. The hierarchy is flat which staff see as an explicit confirmation of the imperative to “get things done”. Everyone knows that everyone has the imperative to deliver. This happens together with a willingness to listen to all opinions. The HOD is “no respecter of position” and even more junior officials are asked their opinion.

Discussions with key officials suggest that the strong and unwavering leadership and vision of the MEC and the HOD in synchronicity sends an unambiguous message to staff. The MEC and the HOD demonstrate personal and professional commitment in all pronouncements and actions. They embody the vision of the department to ensure quality education. In this regard, the MEC does not make pronouncements without have the assurance that the administration can deliver. There is continual communication between the HOD and the MEC in this regard.

The HOD has his performance contract printed in the APP. This inspires staff, as well as sending a clear message of how serious the department is about delivery against targets.

See Figure 1 for details. Together with this *'playing the ball not the player'* is a success factor that drives high levels of performance and compliance: the delivery of directors and managers is based on the delivery of HOD and DDG and *vice versa*.

Figure 1: Contracts linked to implementation and performance



Source: Presentation at MPAT Case Stories Workshop, 24 June, 2013, University of the Witwatersrand

In 2009, at the beginning of her term of office the MEC introduced a new strategy that brought new momentum for change and forced people into a strong performance imperative that was embedded and linked to delivery. She coined the term "an Army of Hope" to describe the work of the department in living out its vision and mandate. Her strategy is strongly focused on service delivery mandates and principles. They are integral to job descriptions and delivery is non-negotiable.

This is achieved through high levels of buy-in from the unions, right from the beginning. There is continued support from unions and other stakeholders. This support, combined with a strong performance orientations, has contributed to the department exceed matric pass rate targets. The 2014 target of 80% pass rates was achieved in 2012.

In addition, decisions related to improvement are based on research. In 2008 an assessment of primary schools was conducted with the idea of finding ways to maximise opportunities at all levels to create a good foundation for Grade 12 results; as a critical indicator of performance. This led to, among other things, the priority of providing an environment that enables education. This is a move away from a top-down punitive approach that makes demands on school heads to produce a high pass rate. Rather the focus is looking at elements that hamper learning.

In 2009, the MEC visited all the Districts as a fact-finding exercise in which she sought information on "what will make education work" in schools in the province. In July 2009, the findings were presented to stakeholders, including the Unions. At this meeting the

MEC shared her vision for education in the province. From this the Strategic Plan was developed. The main components of this plan for quality education was

- The Gauteng Primary Language and Mathematics Strategy (GPLMS) that was phased in and now provides support to all grades up to Grade 7.
- The Senior School Improvement Programme (SSIP) initially focused in Grades 10, 11 and 12 and has now been implemented in Grades 8 and 9.

In the Delivery Agreement in the 2012/2013 Annual Performance Plan all outputs are linked to these programmes. All targets are linked to internal compliance procedures.

Along with a specific focus on 792 priority schools (which were previously called under-performing schools) through the GPLMS and the SSIP, several programmes in areas such as nutrition, infrastructure and safety comprise the comprehensive support provided to schools to ensure a conducive learning and teaching environment.

Regular, rigorous and linked to targets

Compliance is non-negotiable. It is through synchronised tracking over time that adherence to the targets is measured. Officials found wanting are required to account for this in performance appraisals which are held quarterly. A focus on the vision as the compass for all action is followed through in systems of governance and accountability. Support to management staff to enable them to meet their specific targets is integral to the leadership practice of the DDG, HOD and MEC. A telling example is a disregard for protocol where frequent cell phone communication takes place at any time. This rapid responsiveness is in contrast to time spent making appointments to discuss challenges with delivery. The impact of this practice is consistent with the vision.

Strong leadership is backed up by a set of aligned reporting procedures that demand adherence and accurate information which is verified within the department by their own internal Reporting and Accountability Unit. A Calendar of Compliance and a Tracking Grid enable the unit is able to determine the extent of progress. These form an important component of the annual performance appraisals.

Regular surveys and evidence gathering takes place in districts and schools. Data based evidence that is gathered is synchronised with reports that are reflect progress (or not) aligned to targets and timelines. Reports in the department are living documents that are used continually to determine progress in relation to targets. Targets and performance, including employment contracts of senior leaders, all reporting mechanisms - financial and non-financial, plans of action, tracking grids are linked to deliverables and dates. Continual tracking and checking ensures adherence to the priorities stated by the MEC.

All evidence of delivery is data-driven and thus based on verifiable information gathered through business intelligence tools and survey information. There is a sense that the work that is done to monitor and evaluate the work of the department, are used to inform decision and work going forward. This gives officials a sense of value of their work to the department. Much of the work of evaluations is becoming focused on policy - tracking actions and progress against policy requirements.

A single reporting template has been developed. This provides quantitative information to support qualitative data. This is a quarterly report where each directorate reports against APP and Department priorities. This also links to both the

- Provincial Programme of Action Report - Planning and Targets
- Department of Economic Development
- Provincial Executive committee, which is linked to job creation requirements of the department of education)

Reports on progress against the APP are submitted every month. Every quarter the Auditor-General checks performance and financials against the APP. This report is presented at the Executive Council. A regular meeting schedule provides for on-going platforms for accountability. This is graphically represented in Figure 2.

- Broad Management Team (BMT): This is a larger meeting that takes place every quarter with over 100 managers attending. The focus of this meeting is on service delivery at school level. The HOD chairs the meeting.
- Executive Management Team (EMT): This meeting takes place monthly and is attended by DDG and Chief-Directors on the last Thursday of the month. The MEC chairs this meeting.
- Executive Senior Management Team (ESMT): This meeting also takes place monthly, every 2nd Thursday which the MEC chairs.

Figure 2: GDE Management Meetings

EMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The structure is chaired by the MEC •Consist of HOD, DDGs, Chief Directors, Director for Strategic Planning and Director for Strategic Policy development and Monitoring
BMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The structure is chaired by the HOD •Consist of the senior managers in the Department •Purpose – adopt quarterly reports and make strategic policy decisions
ESMT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •The structure is chaired by the HOD •Mainly consist of District Directors and other relevant managers from Head Office •The primary focus – the service delivery between Districts and Schools

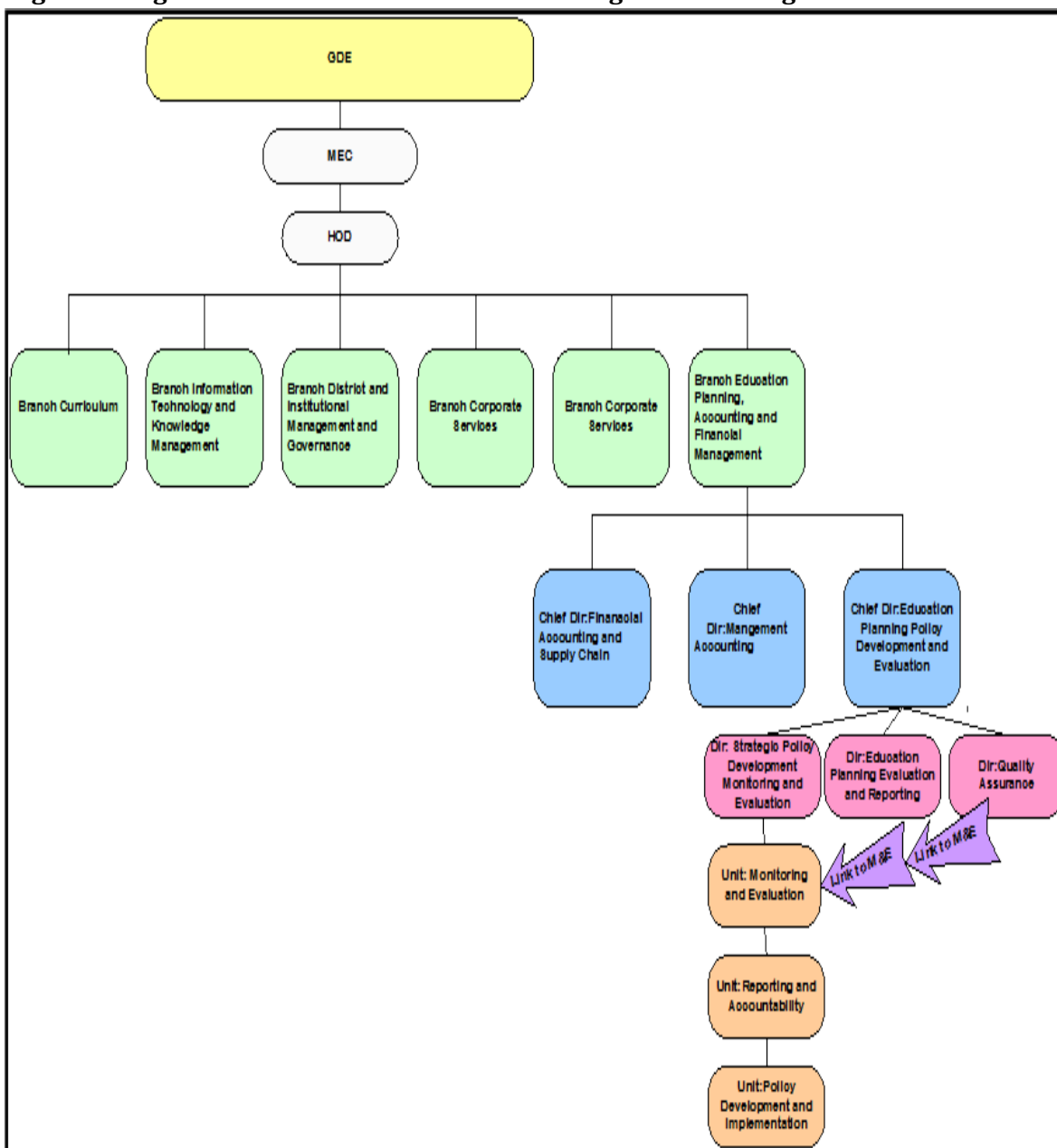
Source: GDE Presentation at MPAT Case Stories Workshop, 24 June, 2013, University of the Witwatersrand

In addition, there is also a top level meeting that includes the HOD, DDG, and Chief Directors (CD). This meeting is held weekly (except for the Friday after EMT). This is an issues meeting, it is non-formal and serves as a forum for an unblocking obstacles to service delivery that may have emerged. It allows the department to increase its responsiveness to service.

Performance Monitoring and Evaluation

The new strategy in 2009 brought new momentum for change and forced people into a strong performance imperative that is embedded and linked to delivery. Giving weight to this is that the service delivery mandate and principles are part of job descriptions and had buy-in from the beginning. This makes it possible to provide evidence of change and improvements or at the very least, to show progress. This is evident in the location of the Department for Performance Monitoring and Evaluation and its location in the overall organogram of the GDE (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Organisational Overview and Positioning of Monitoring and Evaluation



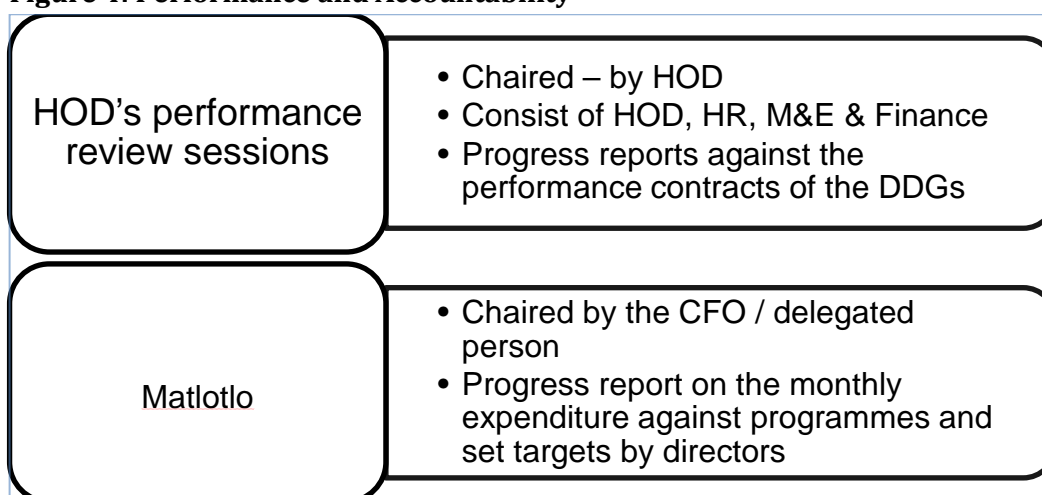
Source: GDE Presentation at MPAT Case Stories Workshop, 24 June, 2013, University of the Witwatersrand

Delivery is non-negotiable in the department and all actions are geared to reflecting the extent to which targets are being achieved. This system is based on verifiable outputs

that give shape to compliance through people and how they work. These outputs are linked to the vision, goals and the delivery agreement in the APP. Using the strategic plan, targets are set for each directorate and unit and each unit manager, chief directors, the DDG and the HOD. These targets are linked to deliverables and form the basis of performance appraisals.

Performance appraisals take place four times per year. Two are formal and two are informal. In each appraisal an official from the Reporting and Accountability Unit (formerly the Secretariat in the HOD's office) is present. This person presents to the HOD a report on the progress of the position. In this way the position (rather than the person) is answering to the reported account of performance. This serves to limit interpretative responses by individuals on their own performance and focuses rather on what needs to be done to achieve departmental delivery.

Figure 4: Performance and Accountability



Source: GDE Presentation at MPAT Case Stories Workshop, 24 June, 2013, University of the Witwatersrand

In the formal appraisals, the HOD conducts 1-on-1 sessions with all managers where performance, decisions and all branch sessions are reviewed, together with the Tracking Grid. Along with a member of the Reporting and Accountability Unit, an HR officer, the CFO and another DDG are present. This contributes to high levels of professional accountability and transparency among management, all with the aim of achieving the goals of the department.

In appraisals the reports, the Tracking Grid and the Calendar of Compliance are used to determine progress. There is a system of green, orange and then red indicating whether the targets are achieved or the extent to which this is happening. Meetings serve as accountability sessions using the internal reporting tools. This minimises interactions that are based on what people think happened.

A Calendar of Compliance provides for deliverables linked to dates and timelines, together with who is responsible for what. This openness about knowing 'who is supposed to be doing what' is a feature of the department's reporting and accountability practice. The tool is driven by middle management. There is an acknowledgement that in this regard Fraud Policy, HR, Finance, SCM and Procurement require improvement. This shift

to system wide balance-scorecard approach, linked to quality assurance and service delivery, ensures that people are assessed on performance and delivery.

Conclusions

"We want things done"

The vision of the department, along with strong leadership and a relentless focus on delivery, is at the heart of high levels of performance in the GDE. Over time high levels of trust in the leadership's commitment to excellence in delivery has developed. Seeing the results of their work informing the department's work going forward provides meaning and purpose for officials - it means that their efforts count. This seems to have the impact of nurturing high levels of productivity aligned to attaining agreed-to and strategically imperative deliverables.

It was also evident that consequences for under- or non-performance are to be expected, making a solutions-focused attitude critical to success, professionally and in the department. It would seem that by focusing on the deliverables, rather than the person delivering, people responsible for delivery are inspired to raise their game and live up to these stated expectations. In so doing, compliance to service delivery mechanisms become a channel for expressing the vision of the department.