

Speaker, aldermen, councillors, members of the public, as I table the Annual report 2023/2024, I would like to reflect a bit on the progress that we have made. Our vision to position George as a national competitive and globally connected business hub is an ambitious one. Through our focus on SMART technology, resource efficiency, and strategic land use, we are laying the foundation for a sustainable future.

By prioritising higher densities within our city, we are not only strengthening urban efficiency but also enhancing accessibility to opportunities for all of our residents. A prime example of this vision is our **Go George Transport System**, which has proven to be a vital lifeline, connecting people to economic and social opportunities.

As a municipality, we are deeply committed to building safe, inclusive communities. This is evident in our work to provide excellent service delivery, ensuring that basic services are accessible not only in our formal urban areas but also in informal settlements and backyard dwellings. This commitment will ensure that future generations will inherit a city that is resilient, responsive and abundant with opportunities.

Over the past year, there have been several notable achievements that I am pleased to share with you:

Capital Budget Growth: In the May 2023 Budget Speech, we announced a significant growth in George's Capital Budget, now nearing R2.5 billion over the next three years. This represents a record investment and a remarkable 19% annual growth rate—double the growth rate from 2020 to 2024.

Debt Collection and Affordability: Despite the challenges posed by the current economic environment, rising unemployment, inflation and an increase in the cost of living our commitment to financial sustainability remains strong. We are pleased to report an improvement in our debtor collection rate, which now stands at 93.67%, a 2% increase from the previous year. This progress brings us closer to our target of a 95% collection rate.

Indigent Policy Adjustments: In line with national guidelines and Auditor-General recommendations, we have updated our Indigent Policy to ensure greater alignment with national standards. The revised policy offers substantial relief to vulnerable households. These households now benefit from 100% subsidies on basic water and electricity charges, as well as additional free services such as refuse removal and sewerage disposal. Here are the details of this relief:

For residents within the Eskom supply area, we provide 50 kWh of free electricity per month. We also offer full subsidies on refuse removal and sewerage disposal services and 6kl free water per household

per month. I want to mention once more that we are again in the process of revising our policy for the 2025/2026 financial year to assist even more residents.

Council also plays a key role in writing off arrears and facilitating the repair of water leaks and faulty electricity pre-paid meters for indigent households.

I am confident that the work we are doing today will create a legacy of inclusivity, sustainability and shared prosperity for the people of George. Together, we are building a city that is not only equipped to face the challenges of tomorrow, but one that offers ample opportunities for all.

I present to you, the Annual Report of 2023/2024.