RESEARCH REPORT

CITIES POLITICAL ADMINISTRATIVE INTERFACE IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

DATE: JANUARY 2019

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Executive Summary

This report is the result of a research process by the SACN Built Environment Integration Task Team. It aims to provide insights on the current political administrative interface in South African cities in relation to the built environment. It seeks to look at how the interface plays out in operating contexts, what it means for practitioners going about their work, and how it affects built environment projects. The report includes a description of the current political administrative interface, shares some strategies that administrators and MMCs have used to unblock project blockages and identifies some longer terms issues that need to be dealt with.

The research process consisted of a high-level literature review and nine semi-structured interviews with former local government senior managers and mayoral committee members, covering five of the metros. These interviews form the basis of the findings and tools that are presented here. All interviewees left management or leadership roles in municipalities between 2011 and 2018. Additional inputs are taken from discussions at the Built Environment Integration Task Team on 29 October 2018.

The Political-Administrative Interface in Cities – Findings and Analysis

The political administrative interface

Instability

Political instability has long been shown to cause administrative instability (Steytler and de Visser, 2009). The repeated changes of mayor and MMC, leads to repeated changes in city managers and executive directors or heads of departments appointed by council. This has been clearly demonstrated across all metros and most recently in Nelson Mandela Bay. Senior management instability also leads to uncertainty and low morale amongst mid-ranking officials, driving out those with transferrable skills.

Coalitions

The most significant change in the state of city councils since the last detailed research on the local government political administrative interface in South African local government was done in 2013, is the move away from the single party majorities in cities, to multi-party coalitions. These coalitions, in four of the eight metros take either the form of a majority coalition (Ekurhuleni) where the coalition partners form the majority in council and form an executive, and minority coalitions (Nelson Mandela Bay, Tshwane, Johannesburg) where the coalition partners form an executive with a minority of seats in council but enjoy the voting support of another party. Coalition based executives are inherently unstable, and minority coalitions are particularly unstable, with executives particularly sensitive to political wind changes.

In addition, with the fraught nature of coalition government, behaviour in councils has deteriorated, physical fights and bottle throwing occurring in at least two of these councils, a situation which officials do not want to be associated with.

Single party executives

Councils with majority parties in government are more stable in terms of the executive leadership, but they are also vulnerable to political instability within parties, which has led to mayco reshuffles in some instances (Interview, Respondent B, 2018).

But political stability does not guarantee administrative stability, even in fairly stable councils, with few executive changes, administrative instability can be sparked by poorly conceived or poorly managed organisational changes, such as department re-designs, can see highly competent and experienced officials leaving in numbers. For instance, poor management of a well-conceived organisational redesign of human settlements, transport and spatial planning departments functions in one of the cities has led to a significant departure of skills from the city (Interview, Respondent P, 2018).

Changes of Government

Changes of government after the 2016 local government elections have led to significant administrative upheaval in cities. All five of the cities whose former representatives and officials were interviewed for this study had appointed new city managers since the 2016 elections, four of these came alongside a changing mayor. In three of these cities there was a change to a coalition government. In two of these the senior coalition partner was a new party to government, and in the third, the party of the previous government became the senior coalition partner. So, despite in three cases the same party continuing to govern or be the senior partner in government, a new city manager was appointed, showing that party continuity does not imply administrative continuity.

Respondents were divided as to whether this was a significant problem. Respondents E, H and I felt that the lack of continuity of managers was a significant problem, while respondent A felt that it was understandable that a new mayor would want a new city manager, even if the mayor is from the same party as the previous city manager (Interviews, Respondents A, E, H, I, 2018). Previous research, though, has suggested that this is a persistent issue. Research by PDG in 2013 suggested that the five-year contract was limiting in terms of what could be achieved in a municipal term, with much of the early years spent on planning, leaving little time for implementation (PDG, 2013). Further respondents argued that a mature and professional city manager would be able to deliver regardless of who the mayor is and that the five-year contract hindered this (Interview, Respondent I, 2018).

Politically connected senior officials

Politically connected senior officials are still present in city administrations (Respondents A and B), and this can complicate the political administrative interface, but is not necessarily problematic and is sometimes useful. However, having a politically connected executive director can lead to a breakdown of the relationship between the ED and the MMC if the ED uses political connections to exercise power over the MMC. It can also lead to that department alienating engagement with councillors from the opposition, either in the s79 committee, or ward councillors, as the politically connected official seeks to satisfy their political connections in the governing party and neglects or ignores the opposition party requirements or requests as public representatives.

Politically connected mid-level to junior officials

The problem of mid-level or junior officials seeking to usurp the powers of their senior management and MMCs persists in some municipalities. However, "political connectedness" can also be a bluff that needs to be called out. Respondent A related that a colleague had once been called to a meeting at Luthuli House about a decision made at the municipality, only to discover that the meeting had been called by a personal assistant there, seeking to avoid eviction from social housing for non-payment of rent (Interview, Respondent A, 2018).

Centralising power in the Executive Mayor's office

Respondents from two cities cited concerns over consolidation of power in the mayor's office. In one instance this was attributed to a poor relationship between the city manager and the mayor leading to an increasing number of projects being managed through the mayor's office, and the appropriate hierarchy being circumnavigated (Interview, Respondent A and C, 2018).

> *"What we found is that when the mayor became frustrated with the city manager there were more and more projects being run from the mayor's office, and that's dysfunctional, because when you look at budget, suddenly the mayor's office has one of the biggest budgets and that is just silly. And you have these people who have authority but have no signing power"*
> *(Interview, Respondent A, 2018)*

The centralisation of power in the mayor's offices has also led, in at least one city, to deepening the divide between the administration and communities, and administration to ward councillors and s79 committees, with the mayor's office seeking to control all messaging coming out of the municipality. This has disempowered the administration from explaining projects to communities and ward councillors, and where necessary, the media.

The centralisation of power in the mayor's office also leads to bottlenecks, with all reports needing to be signed off before proceeding to s79 committees and council, slowing down project progress.

Weak city managers

Some respondents identified weak city managers as being a problem in the political administrative interface. The city manager was identified as needing to be a highly competent administrator, but also needing to see the long-term strategic vision for the city and having the strength to stand up to MMCs, the mayor and coalition partners where necessary (Interviews, Respondents C, E and H, 2018).

In cities being led by coalitions, senior officials can feel inadequately protected from MMCs and the mayor. This is seen in coalitions led by both major parties. In one case, this was attributed to the city manager seeking to avoid conflict with their political principal, and in another case, attributed to a city manager having low self-esteem, being cowardly, and cutting political deals for survival (Interview, Respondents A and H, 2018), and experience was not necessarily a solution to this. "The [new] city manager is an interesting person… and I found him to be a coward… I said let's call the mayor and find out what he wants, and he said no" (Interview, Respondent A, 2018).

Strong city managers on the other hand were identified as being a 'go to' person for officials, able to negotiate conflict between officials and MMCs, in particular, and embed the long terms strategic vision for the municipality, despite the short termism of politics.

> "Secondly, I think not having institutional cover, if you don't know that you can go to your boss and say that there is this thing that concerns me, then it makes one very vulnerable. [The city manager] was fantastic in that way. I remember there was some advertising thing where I got a call from some person who was supposedly a big shot and they were name dropping, so I called the city manager and told him, that this person had called me and wanted this that and the other. I think that what they want is not right and the city manager said tell them to bugger off. And having that institutional cover makes a big difference." (Interview, Respondent A, 2018).

> "I again, drew the line in the sand, we had taken FIFA on in a number of restrictions on use, with open ended contracts. When the tenders went out, I wrote a letter, 12 pages about what [the finance minister] should do about collusion and corruption in the construction sector, cement pricing. A factual letter. And because I was the manager of [a city]. The Local Organising Committee called me to a meeting… [one minister] asked, "what right have I got to write to Danny Jordaan?" … I said you're not dealing with the substance of the matter, there's corruption and collusion going on... They doubted the engineering, so I got independent experts. The result was that national government should find more money for cities, because its illegal in terms of the MFMA to go to tender without money on your budget. And then when the tenders came in, they were too high, and I said there was collusion, and the competition commission agreed three years later. But by then its spent." (Interview, Respondent N, 2018).

> "The mayor was on a big policy rationalisation process. Empathetic to the mayor's cause because there was this old guard of ward councillors and officials… but it's wholly undemocratic to completely centralise power in the mayor's office, with the mayor's appointees. It marginalised the role and the stuff that comes bottom up through ward councillors, officials look very discomforted by that. In those instances, the executive director was kind of powerless and the city manager doesn't really want to take on the mayor and these things start to tread water and sink." (Interview, Respondent P, 2018)

> "There can be instruction, and there can be clear message sent through meetings with the city manager and there can be a culture of fear, where eventually everyone errs on the side of fear, where everyone starts to avoid conflict." (Interview, Respondent C, 2018).

Synthesis of Political Administrative Interface Findings

Administrations in cities across the board are currently unstable, with high levels of uncertainty that officials need to deal with. This applies in cities that have shifted to coalition governments through the 2016 election, as well as cities that have single party majorities in council, with the same leadership retained. Causes of instability include changing of mayors, organisational redesigns, uncertain coalitions, but a common thread through most cities is the changing of city managers, and the reluctance of senior managers to re-apply for positions for new contracts for new terms.

Administrative instability is exacerbated by a combination of increasingly powerful executive mayors and weak city managers, where mayor's offices become mayor's departments, where administrative decisions are taken, circumventing the city manager, and city managers failing to provide cover to officials from interference by mayors and MMCs. The result of this is that short termism and politics dictate the activities of a city, with insufficient insulation of officials from arbitrary dismissal, should good governance and technical decision making frustrate a political agenda (Group discussion, BEITT meeting discussion, 2018)

Political administrative interface and the built environment

Built environment projects require coherent management at both the political level and the administrative level for timeous delivery, owing to their complex nature with many and diverse stakeholders, urban and ecological systems and externalities to consider. They also require long term budgeting. The focus of this section is how the political administrative interface has played out in built environment projects.

BRT projects

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) projects are complex projects that have multiple workstreams, involve multiple city partners and have large numbers of complex stakeholders, including communities, contractors, national and provincial government and the taxi industry. They have also become central to cities spatial transformation agendas. In the South African experience, the political administrative interface has impacted these projects in many ways:

Political leadership

Strong political leadership in some instances allows politicians to drive a spatial transformation project, such as an additional route on a BRT system giving access to poorly serviced areas of the city. This is most often the case when politicians insist that the role of the administration is to implement the policy or manifesto of the governing party (Interviews, Respondents B and I, 2018). One respondent described that as the "primacy of politics" (Interview, Respondent B, 2018), and described this as being driven by the mayor. This is likely the most effective way to institutionalise and operationalised strategic transformative projects within cities, and within the duration of short terms of political office.

Poor understanding of project amongst councillors

BRT was a largely unknown idea in South Africa before it was adopted by the City of Johannesburg. This meant that councillors had a poor understanding of the distinction between this type of project and an ordinary bus system. In one city, this poor level of understanding led to multi-year delays in the rollout of the system, as councillors wanted a system with curb-side lanes and stations, with no regard for the capital cost implications of this and the actual passenger flow of the city's residents (Interview, respondent D, 2018). Eventually, after getting grant money restored after it was cut, due to lack of progress, the executive director responsible for implementation was forced to procure contractors and break ground with just the mayor's approval.

Provincial and national politics threatening roll-out

The political administrative interface is complicated by provincial and national politics. In one instance the rollout of a BRT was nearly scuppered by a competing provincial plan despite national and local support, and a cohesive political administrative interface in the city. The same project was delayed after the ANC president at the time, had told the taxi industry that the city should "hold horses for now" on the rollout of the project, in order

to ensure national taxi industry support at the then upcoming election (Interview, Respondent B, 2018). This was despite an extensive negotiation process that the city had undertaken with local the taxi associations.

Changing of management in the middle of the process

Two of the cities which respondents came from have seen executive directors' change mid-stream in the roll out of BRT projects, with the result being delays in the implementation phases of the project. In both instances the changes happened after an election, but in only one was this due to an unworkable political-administrative interface. In one of the cases the conduct of new executive director was a major factor in two key role-players in the project leaving (Interview, Respondent B, 2018). The new executive director was highly politicised, refused to engage with opposition ward councillors and questioned the approach to rollout of the project manager despite it being a relative success (Interview, Respondent B, 2018).

Holding contractors to account

A cohesive political and administrative interface between senior management and the executive played a role in assisting one administration to hold BRT contractors to account to ensure delivery. Through calling collective meetings the MMC and senior manager were able to get middle management and contractors to collectively account for delivery that was not timeous or up to specification (Interview, Respondent B, 2018).

Political interest in supply chain management

Following a change of government in 2016, one official described a change in demands by politicians, from reports on project delivery, to an interest in supply chain management and who contracts were being awarded to for BRT projects (Interview Respondent D, 2018). This demonstrates, that despite significant change in political conditions, and increased political competition in cities, there is still inappropriate intent amongst politicians in some pockets of city government. Other city stakeholders have also identified supply chain management, and officials responsible for it, as needing to be ringfenced from politicians (Group discussion, BEITT meeting, 2018).

Planning

The planning department of a city plays an important role in unlocking investment and facilitating transformative projects, while also ensuring development is appropriate for the existing communities and promoting sustainable spatial form.

Political Interference

In two cities, officials have described instances where they have received instruction from the mayor's office to change the recommendation on a planning application from refusal to approval without any material change in the facts of the application. In one instance officials refused to do so and the MMC's office changed the report before sending it to council. The official was subjected to an investigation for insubordination (Interview, Respondent U, 2018). In the other instance the official allowed the mayor to change the report and sent a disjointed report to council where the facts did not match the recommendation (Interview, Respondent A, 2018).

> *And then I got taken to task, after the mayor's office, in this case [the chief of staff in the mayor's office], asked us to change a report through my acting ED, and I said no, saying "what am I going to write, nothing's changed and its contrary to a resolution" anyway the mayor eventually investigated me for whether there was prima facie evidence for insubordination. The mayor's office issued a direct instruction. The saving grace was that the acting ED never instructed me. But the message came down that the mayor's office can instruct officials, which I think is a problem, and the mayor was big on instructions (Interview, Respondent U, 2018).*

A Spatial Planning Experience: Excerpt from an interview

"The [an area of the city] is another story. We wrote our report, but the years and years of presenting technical reports, and the politicians always needed another report. It's like the officials were a grouping and biased, in the councillors' view, and they always needed another independent report.

In the application, it's always been controversial, the portfolio committee at the time said, "when you write the new SDF put an urban edge around it". The urban edge has always been a contentious issue. For the deputy mayor in particular. In fact, the politicians said put an urban edge around it and then, while we were drafting the SDF, an application came in to amend the guide plan in the [one] corner, and the recommendation of the officials was to refuse. The portfolio committee agreed, the council agreed, and the province went against them. So, the city was on the same page there.

Then some guys came to see me from [a developer], and said they want to develop a piece in the [that same] corner, what did I think? And I said, "I don't think it's a good idea", we're very clear on [the area's] value. And in that time trying to put in policy provision around the [the area] because the housing department was having a go at it. We did a lot of policy position papers for the portfolio committee and they kept saying, we need an independent group, so we got an independent group and got more studies, and they were ambiguous. So anyway, these guys put in an application, which we assessed and recommended refusal, the portfolio committee agreed, the mayco said "we want another study", before we take a decision, so the decision was deferred.

Three months later I got an instruction to rewrite the report, [the study] hadn't started yet. "Rewrite the report to recommend approval", and that's the story where the mayco member rewrote the report and I got investigated a couple of times. And they approved it and then carried on with [the study]. They set up a project management team, and said I couldn't be on it, because of bias, and it was run out of the mayor's department. There was a nominal project manager in the economic development department, being instructed by the Office of the Mayor. And they wrote the [the area] out of the brief of [the study], even though [the study] came out of the application to amend the edge of the [the area].

And then they approved it, and the province went against it, but it didn't matter because they had no locus standi and could only comment. Which was correct in terms of the constitutional court judgements in these matters. Then those developers came in, and I got copied into some emails from the mayor's office to my ED, saying we needed to have a meeting about some housing projects, and this was one of them. And there has been an exchange of letters, and we need to prioritise discussions around these projects. I have a copy of the letter to the mayor from the developer, which refers to a letter from the mayor to them (this is before I got the instruction to change the reports, so the mayor is engaging with an applicant before making a decisions, which you could argue is conflict of interest, but the mayor could argue, "well I didn't take the decision, it was a council decision"). Then we got the mayco instruction to change the report. Then the developer came in to meet with a bunch of EDs and said, "this development is not working, you must buy the land from us." And they said, "Really, put it in writing!". Then the city manager got an instruction from the mayor to buy the land, so the property official was given an instruction to put a report up to buy the land either on a price with rezoning or without rezoning. And then there was a whole lot of alleged interference, to expedite the approval of the rezoning, there were also some dodgy calls around that, which is subject to a legal review now. Basically, the city was now rewarding the developers for ruthless speculation on agricultural land. And now the developers were saying it couldn't work so you can't even sell it on need for housing." (Interview, Respondent U, 2018)

SPLUMA and appeals to the mayor

S51 of SPLUMA, which makes the executive authority of the city the appeals authority for Municipal Planning Tribunal appeals, has complicated the political administrative interface in the planning function (Interviews, Respondents C, G, A). It has sterilised the planning procedures in the administration, politicians are removed from strategic investment decisions and they are forced to play a smaller role in unlocking the silo related problems with planning applications and separating "mission critical issues" from minor issues.

The appeals process also now risks becoming political, with politicians ill-equipped to decide on planning issues without administrative support. So, the administration needs to find a way to provide that support while ensuring

that support is objective, despite the planning department having played a role in recommending the original decision. This stretched planning resources in a city very thinly.

The process also risks becoming subject to political deal-making, as one respondent explained:

> *"You can launder a dodgy planning decision through a very clean planning permission procedure. Because the decision is made, right, and now with SPLUMA you can appeal to the mayor, so the whole depoliticization of planning decisions is an own goal, because the mayor can overturn a decision on appeal. Which enables a mayor to set up an advisory committee on appeals, and this mayor setup the mayco as the advisory committee, but mayco members are beholden to the mayor for their jobs." (Interview, Respondent C, 2018)*

Use of strategic project steering committees

Strategic project steering committees, governed by a council approved process, involving officials and politicians across departments and functions, have helped determine what project issues are "mission critical" and what project issues are minor, and unblock processes when planning decisions are delayed by comments being low priority in other commenting departments. In one instance, a respondent described, the building of a R300 million factory was delayed by 6 months, and nearly moved to another city, because the company could not get planning approval because a roads engineer was reluctant to give approval. Once the mayco became aware of this, they were able to move to set up a project steering committee that could decide what issues could stop the projects, and what shortcoming in the planning could be accepted by the city (Interview, Respondent G, 2018).

> *"And roads sits on the report forever, not their priority. So, need to get someone to put pressure on it. Wrote something in to that investment process that if a department doesn't give comments in a particular timespan, we take it as positive comments. Helped to unblock it." (Interview, Respondent G, 2018)*

Human Settlements

Political promises

Humans settlements projects are often the centre of political promises to communities, placing human settlements officials in an invidious position between a ward councillor or MMC and the community and their own department's priorities.

> *"Election promises happened a lot with housing projects. Housing department would support it, would have subsidies, driven by land being offered, and the location often didn't make sense, and the planning department would say no." (Interview, Respondent A, 2018)*

Political courage

Administrators and politicians have identified a lack of political courage as being a blockage to the development of spatially transformative human settlements projects. The respondents indicated that this was typified by an unwillingness to sell unpopular projects to their constituencies.

> *"Start with the bigger picture, look at [the city], it hasn't changed at all and it's not only [the city]. Just drive through any area, you can tell by just driving through it that this is a white community, this is a coloured community, and this is a black community. There is this hierarchy of development, a hierarchy of public amenities and the blacker you are the less your area is developed, it's just so obvious. An obvious example of lack of political courage is the XYZ site. It was promised and planned as social housing development in the heart of [a suburb] and the provincial government and cabinet did an about turn at the last minute, after years of planning by professionals in the city and the province. So, it's a huge missed opportunity." (Interview, Respondent I, 2018)*

> *"So, I think the administration, some of it has been frustrated by a lack of political leadership or courage around spatial transformation. And there are also those in the administration,*

either because they are influenced by other politicians, or because they are also playing in the political space who are obstructing these projects. So, the administrators are not kind of these innocent players." (Interview, Respondent J, 2018)

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A Human Settlements Experience: Excerpt from an interview

Administratively there is appetite to take such risks, but you can't take that risk without the political backing. I think the politicians are afraid of their constituencies. They are very, very sensitive on the types of decision that they are taking.

If you look at the issue of [a well-located informal settlement], there were lots of proposals, but I don't regard it as political interference, but political blockage. I was seeing [the informal settlement] burning one year and two years before that. And I said listen you need to have a long-term plan, it can't go on like this. The majority of the [ruling party councillors] their response was quick, why don't you remove these people to [poorly located emergency housing]. I said, "Guys this is not the solution, these people are working here in [the neighbouring suburb]. Why don't we identify land?" I had already identified land, I had asked my planners to do that, around [neighbouring suburb], and I had asked them to negotiate. And said check if these guys are prepared to sell their land. There were guys prepared to sell their land to reduce the pressures in [the ward]. When I presented that proposal to the politicians, you will not believe, "It's not going to work", I was accused that I'm contravening legislation that put restriction on the growth of [the ward]. And the ward councillor of [the ward], a lawyer, lied and lied and lied and lied. And I said, "where is this proclamation that says [the ward] has reached its saturation point it cannot take more people?" I said, "What people are you talking about? Black people?" And they just killed it. An [the well-located informal settlement] is still burning today. They did not allow us to go and buy those pieces of land.

And the next moment I go to [an area 30 km away], there is an informal settlement there, not very dense, I say to the Premier and Mayor, you are putting me under a lot of pressure here. At least [the ward] compared to [the area 30 kms away] and [the poorly located emergency housing], at least [the area 30 kms away] is not very far to [the ward]. Maybe we can move people there?

They [the politicians] ask me to take them to this place. We go on a Friday afternoon, in convoy, with the premier and the mayor. They talk to the community, a coloured community. And the I see the premier's car go. And the mayor comes to me, and says, "This thing is not going to work, the premier is saying these coloured people and black people, it's just creating a lot of tension, let's forget about it". I don't want to say it is interference, but it's blockages. They are not genuine. It is more about their constituencies at the end of the day rather than really delivering and finding sustainable solutions." (Interview Respondent X, 2018)

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Human settlements mandate dispersed

The lack of autonomy over the human settlements mandate for cities has complicated the political administrative interface, and the delivery of spatial transformation projects. This manifests in at least two ways. First, it provides a route to blocking projects for councillors and officials who would not like these projects to occur. Questions can be raised over the cities' mandate for human settlements projects:

"They would use their delegations, cities are built on systems of delegations, a prime example is one of these land parcels we identified in the MNO area. The MNO site was valued at 20 million rand in 2014 and suddenly it was valued at over R100 million when it was about to be released to [the social housing developer] for this housing project. Four years later. It's impossible. So inflated valuation to scare off social housing partners. We had the manager for social housing go to this committee, […], made up of officials from the finance department and have a finance official, who has served on that committee for generations, ask him if housing is even a city mandate, and if we can release this land for

housing purposes. So, you have blatant, it's blatant for me. Those kinds of tricks." (Interview, Respondent J, 2018)

"We always define ourselves by what we expect from national government and until we remove that mindset we are going to miss a lot of opportunities. The cities are really supposed to be thinking creatively now, in term of land value capture, in terms of land use planning, we have SPLUMA now. They can be very creative in terms of promoting inclusionary housing. If a certain percentage of housing is going to private development, I have a certain amount of power in terms of planning, let me use that power, to integrate our city. We don't do this." (Interview, Respondent F, 2018)

Second, there is a trade-off between quality and quantity of houses delivered. When national and provincial governments are setting the housing targets and the budgets, the principles under which the city administrations seek to redress spatial inequality are compromised. This can cause tension between political executives in the city and their counterparts in national or provincial government, or it can create pressure for housing practitioners caught between spatial planning frameworks and their political principals.

"I think the planning guys are very innovative and would like to redress spatial injustices and the type of projects that they would support now, are the type of projects that are going to take a very long time for a housing practitioner to implement, because of the NIMBYs, and these guys want well located land. You have that pressure from them on one hand in terms of the spatial development framework. And then on the other hand you have this financial year, five billion and I am expecting you to be delivering so many housing units. And you have to work under those circumstances. Quick delivery and to support your transformation agenda. So that's the pressure you work under." (Interview, Respondent M, 2018).

"So, it is still sitting with national and provincial government so there are serious political games between national and province and the city, which is undermining the cities in a way... As much as you have your own political dynamics as a city, you now have to manage some of these dynamics, with regard to housing. There will be frustration with delivery targets, you will say to these guys, in terms of my planning, in terms of my financial systems, I will only be able to build 3000 houses, (this is what led me to leaving the city, the contentious issue) and then province has already made deals with national that in the provinces, this many houses will be built, 70% of their budget is in the city. So, we fight. National and provincial are at a higher level, they don't fully understand the issues on the ground, the planning issues, the community dynamics, all the things that are delaying the delivery of these projects. They say this year I am allocating you R600 million, and then they divide by the subsidy and say I expect you to build 5000 houses. They have not gone to the ground to check is the land ready, is there a project pipeline, if is there procurement in place." (Interview, Respondent F, 2018)

Relationship between human settlements, planning and transport

Planning requirements and processes are often not adequately met for human settlements projects, and need to be retrospectively dealt with, causing delays and creating tensions in the political administrative interface between MMCs and the planning departments. Silo barriers between human settlements departments and planning departments need to be significantly reduced. This has been attempted in Cape Town by bringing transport, human settlements and spatial planning into a single department. Respondents generally felt that this was a good idea.

"Well I think what I saw in the last 18 months since this joined up unit, with one ED responsible for much of the built environment and all of the levers that need to be pulled in order to achieve spatial transformation, that it can actually happen. Which is why I am quite angry that this change in government in [City]has this knee jerk reaction that this structure doesn't work, I think that it does work. Some of the obstacles are silo based approaches to the built environment, so what they plan now is to go back to a housing department a

transport department a planning department, which I think is a huge step backwards."
(Interview, Respondent I, 2018)

"I don't think that consolidation of the housing, planning and transport was a bad thing. The notion that it was transport led was a problem and putting a dictator in charge was a problem. You need people with the vision and the ability to drive their own stuff within a bigger vision, and then it will work. And I think the city is going to move away from it and that's sad because they haven't really tried it." (Interview, Respondent C, 2018)

When the departments are separate the functionality of the relationship between spatial planning and human settlements becomes heavily dependent on the personalities involved.

"So, I needed to work with the MMC housing quite closely. So, what I had done was, I asked him if we could have casual discussions of what projects were on his radar screen from his people, where they have told him the planning department is being difficult. So, we can explain to him why we are being difficult and see how we can work around it" (Interview, Respondent A, 2018)

Budgeting

Political instability and budgeting

Instability in the council and political executive of a city affects the allocation of budget to built environment and spatial transformation projects. In coalitions this manifests in difficulty getting the budget passed, whereas in majority governments, if there is division in the caucus of the governing party, this can lead to the loss of funding for projects driven by those who are seen to be aligned to a particular political faction. Projects that are insulated from this are those where there is allocated budget and work has started, because it will likely lead to findings of fruitless and wasteful expenditure from the Auditor-General if they are not completed.

"I think there were projects that were blocked by politicians because of how you were seen to be aligned. So, the administration was bashing against a political battle. That had nothing to do with their work. There were attempts to block projects, there were projects that were blocked. It has an impact on spend of budget, it has an impact on how budget is allocated. So, there was a lot of political contestation around this kind of split in the governing party's caucus, that has undermined delivery and projects." (Interview, Respondent I, 2018)

"When budget is committed there is not a lot the politicians can do." (Interview, Respondent C, 2018)

"One of the levers is the budgeting logic…. Out of the SDF, identifying what we call capital investment priority areas, which are weighted higher in the capital budget allocation, so these areas are prioritised higher than other areas, so by the time you are looking at projects it's [budget] already there." (Interview, Respondent R, 2018)

Administrative instability and budgeting

Instability in the administration of a city impacts on the ability to spend budget. This can be because of short staffing, excessive caution or poor morale.

"The last 18 months, since the introduction of this new structure there has been all this infighting. In some areas it's demoralised the administration. I tried not to be an active player in a lot of that stuff, so I think we got on with it." (Interview, Respondent J, 2018)

Poor budget spend because of administrative inaction has led to the loss of grant funding for built environment projects in cities.

"They became my go to guys, but for me to do that I had to teach about it. I walk into the meeting and the mayor says, I want this project by 2013, so I said go to the DORA, see how

much money you have for this project, you have zero, because the project has not progressed DoT took the money back." (Interview, Respondent O, 2018)

Top down budgeting

The current political administrative interface and budget and political arrangements in councils encourages top down budgeting. Highly centralised mayors' offices, that micromanage decision making, preference projects developed and championed by the MMCs and the administration over projects and plans developed at ward level. While this is sensible at an overarching strategic level, it squeezes out localised planning and transformative projects. Budget panels prioritise departments' projects and legacy projects over projects developed by ward councillors in communities. While departmental projects may also enjoy the support of a majority caucus in council, ward councillors are often a lone voice.

> *"One of the issues is always understanding, the way council budgeting works is possibly part of the problem. Every department goes to the core budget panel and says, these are our projects, this is what we need, and there are historical legacy issues to be budgeted for, new infrastructure to be budgeted for, so projects emerging out of communities and being budgeted for is not how council works. In fact, if everything is bottom up planning, it can become much easier to have these conversations with communities." (Interview, Respondent Q, 2018)*

> *"So, a ward councillor runs an IDP process, the community say they want this that or the other, but the ward councillor, as far as the budget goes, is a small fish in the ocean. Makes noise, but difficult to get traction." (Interview, Respondent L, 2018)*

> *"The interface between what are community issues and pressing needs and the ability of the system to respond to those, there is a big mismatch. There is budget panel sitting up there, and the strategy panel making decisions, and the community down here, and how do you feed community needs down here into that process? I don't think we've got that right at all." (Interview, Respondent Q, 2018)*

The implications for spatial transformation

Spatial transformation projects are typically large built environment projects, or collections of built environment projects, with high levels of complexity that require significant political will to drive them. This goes beyond the complicated nature of local government structures and administration, and interacts with a wide set of stakeholders, and urban and natural systems. Political will is required to ensure budgets, manage competing vested interests, and to adhere to timeframes, but for officials to be able to leverage political will in these ways the political administrative interface needs to be functional, and administrators and politicians need to be pulling in the same direction. The 2010 World Cup provided a useful focal point around which leaders could pull administrators and politicians in the same direction, for the achievement of transformative projects beyond the football related infrastructure, such as transport and housing (Interviews, Respondents E, Q, 2018).

It is clear from the experiences of respondents participating in this research that integration and institutional commitment to spatial transformation is possible and does happen within the current city arrangements for built environment projects. This has been achieved in BRT projects, some housing projects and roads projects (Interviews, Respondents B, N, 2018). This is particularly when departmental silos can be broken down, and there can be strategic collaboration between senior management and the political executive, whether through formal steering committee structures, or less structured convening of key stakeholders and strong interpersonal relationships. But this but can be as easily derailed by personalities within the executive and the administration. The implication of this is that the personalities in play will be a key factor in the success of spatial transformation.

> *"Which is the big problem in local government, proper programming. Which is part of the problem to do these big spatial transformative projects take five years to do, 15-year, 20-year projects. So, it's not going to give this mayor much... So, built environment transformation projects are difficult to sell politically because they are not going to give immediate benefits. The short termism of the political agenda doesn't play into that. That's*

the challenge. Need a system that churns out quick wins and gets momentum in preparing a pipeline of transformative projects. Because these projects are complicated, expensive and they take a long time and then you drop the funding for a project and it stops for three years and you have to start again." (Interview, Respondent C, 2018)

Outside of the administration, spatial transformation projects require significant groundwork in communities, these processes need to be managed with the cooperation of ward councillors, MMCs and the administration and need to be proactive. Projects are often delayed after going to site because community engagement has not adequately carried out. This groundwork involves talking to communities, listening to them, explaining projects to them, getting them on board, before breaking ground. But the internal dynamics of the city political administrative interface will play an important role in the success of this groundwork and the trust built between stakeholders in project processes.

"There's a big issue about ward councillors, that relationship between the ward councillor and administration is often not defined. Have a ward councillor, and the institutional mechanism for recognising ward councillors, directly elected, I think our system hasn't been able to acknowledge them, but ultimately, they're accountable. So, a ward councillor runs an IDP process, community say they want this that or the other, but the ward councillor, as far as the budget goes, is a small fish in the ocean." (Interview, Respondent G, 2018)

Tactics used by officials

This section shares some useful tactics that officials engaged with have identified as having been effective for them in managing the political administrative interface.

Cultivate allies

Officials have described their ability to cultivate allies amongst officials in other departments, and MMCs in other portfolios. This allows them to work with others when trying to persuade their MMC, or the city manager, or the mayor of a course of action. This was considered to be a particularly effective tactic when the relationship between an official and an MMC is fraught.

Find political cover

Where mid-level and junior officials are politically connected this has been overcome in some instance through strong political cover for executive directors and city managers, with a strong relationship between the mayor and the city manager playing an important role. Political cover also comes from other sources, such as a strong support from the regional executive of the party, who can call a mayor or MMC to order (Interview, Respondent E, 2018).

Be flexible and willing to repackage – matrix of politically acceptable projects

To ensure long term projects survive changes of administration, officials described needing to be flexible and repackage projects to suit new political principles. Policies between political parties are not yet so disparate that the same projects cannot work for the two major political parties in local government administration (Interview, Respondent E, 2018). One official described preparing a portfolio of sellable projects in their department's pipeline, that could be repackaged to suit in the new incoming administration, "with ribbon cutting opportunities", as an effective strategy to handle change (Interview, Respondent C, 2018).

Stay above politics but be politically aware

Officials and MMCs described it as being important that officials are aware that they are operating in a political environment, that they must be aware of the politics at play, but at the same time remain apolitical. This has allowed officials to anticipate and adapt to changing political environments, and avoid projects being compromised.

"Where administrators see themselves as technically competent bureaucrats, wanting to get the work done, understanding that they work in a political environment, but they stay out of the politics of politics it helps." (Interview, Respondent B, 2018)

"But she is also politically sensitive, she can manoeuvre through sensitive political dynamics, and be apolitical at the same time. A mistake that some officials do is to go with political ideology, that links to a political party and then you are married to it, and people from a different part can't tolerate that. That's where the downfall is." (Interview, Respondent H, 2018)

Find the right messenger

Where the political-administrative relationships are fraught, a useful strategy that officials have used is to ensure that they use the right messenger to engage with MMCs and the mayor. Respondent officials, who had difficult relationships with their MMCs, said that finding the right person (an official seen more favourably to the MMC, or another MMC) to persuade them on a course of action, was an effective way of getting MMCs on board (Interviews, Respondents A and C, 2018).

"If you're not the right messenger get someone else to be the messenger. Get the right person to send the message. I built a close relationship with the CFO, maybe he can help get the message across. And then you concede something." (Interview, Respondent C, 2018)

Build an argument around money, and lock money into projects

Another effective strategy that officials have identified for persuading MMCs and mayors of a course of action is to build a case around finance, in built environment projects and particularly when there are politically driven delays around a project, or blockages that the appropriate political levers can unblock, such as siloed behaviour by departments.

"Like the ABC[1] project got stuck from a funding point of view, so we constantly made presentations, saying we're losing time, it's going to cost you huge amounts of money just to keep the site safe. To try, in some cases you win on rational grounds by building an argument around money." (Interview, Respondent C, 2018)

Be solution oriented

Being solution oriented as a technical official has assisted some officials in managing engagements with political principles with expectations that are not technically sound or are technically possible but unusual.

"Firstly, I think that built environment professionals need to refine their craft, I think it's possible that we have become lazy. Keep spewing up the same nonsense, but actually we are not providing solutions to the problems that [we] see." (Interview, Respondent R, 2018)

"For administrators, they are not dealing with the direct pressure that comes with politics, around politicians, so often there is a disjuncture between long term planning and strategy. And immediate needs and managing of contractors. Politicians are always kind of pushing the administration saying, what's going on, this is not up to scratch, without actually hearing what the officials are saying about the difficulties and constraints that they are facing, but also not feeling heard, about the community pressure on this matter, and coming up with innovation around how to deal with what communities are asking for." (Interview, Respondent Q, 2018)

Be proactive about public engagement

Respondents described built environment projects as often being delayed where there has been inadequate community engagement before going to site, causing friction in the political administrative interface. Dealing

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[1] Name changed

with community engagement proactively, on the ground alongside the MMC and ward councillor, and being honest with communities, will help to build trust with them and keep built environment projects running.

My experience is that you are better off doing the difficult things up front. The pain of going to the community, and three months of ground work, and if you get that right the process is solid. In the EFG[2] case, we started off that project, it was meant to be like a three-month project, in three months since we went to site, they hadn't done bugger all. Took three months to go back and sort out all these things, but one all this was sorted out it ran like clockwork according to the time schedule. Must spend the time and pain of going through the initial community engagement phase (Interview, Respondent L, 2018).

A public participation experience: Excerpt from an interview

"[An area in a large township], an area that was not a priority for development. Our precinct plan was spending money on suburbs because it's easy there. I then decided, using my position as ward councillor and MMC to engage civil society, so we involved about 36 organisations, for all environment, sports, etc, to come up with our on-precinct plan. The city (administration) did not want to budge …. So, we left them and went to [a planning NGO] and we developed our own precinct plan. And we had that close relationship with [the NGO representative]. It took us two years, but it was thorough. So, we had this document, we wanted to formalise it. It was finally adopted by council, became an official document. Went to [a city agency], saying here we have an official precinct plan, we want funding. A partnership with civil society.

Once the administration saw that 80% of their work was done, engaging with environment groups, writing a report, engaging with heritage groups, writing a report, all those reports were written for them. Photos of meetings, all sorts of meetings, big meetings. Everything that proved all this had been done. All we had to do was get a company that consolidates all this into one report and it becomes an official report. It didn't need much work from them. Doing public participation properly.

So, I think the "how" is also on genuine partnership with the beneficiaries, those that will benefit, mobilizing them, them being part of the solution, and then being honest with them. Politicians will promise you all sorts of things and then you get nothing, once they forget, but if you genuinely partner with communities you can become a lifetime councillor. You must be honest with them and tell them where the difficulties are… We did a survey in [the area], the area is 6000 houses, formal houses, and 42000 shacks for the area. So, its huge. What are we saying about water there, sanitation there, upkeep there, the housing plight? Interest groups, housing groups? We used a group there, [name of the organisation], it's a lobby group focused on housing and they will often help you as a ward councillor to do work on their behalf.

But you need administration there early, without it, it will flop. We had two administrations involved. Your own administration needs to be very good with your paper trail, your recording. If you don't document, you don't have a project. Then it's just talking, talking, talking. But if you can document and you can put your things into a document, then you have yourself a project. Then you have a very strong case that you are making. And then you can go to the administration inside [the city], and it's really convincing then. And how you do that is through different structure. In your one community, you have things that are social services, so you targeted those people and partner with them. Go to a different person, and say the police station is collapsing, we have these records, and you go where its relevant and show them this is the work that has been done. And you get buy-in and can set long time frames. If you say, "I want it now", they will tell you to go to hell. But if you work with people over time, and say, "you know, in a year, can you extend our police station?" So, we mobilised the community, came up with a CPF type thing, and from there pushed national to extend the police station, and its huge now, because of partnership. With the clinic, the same thing, show them the numbers, they increase the clinic. Knock at the doors where you know you will get a response." (Interview, Respondent K, 2018)

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[2] Name changed

Tactics used by MMCs

Use sections 79 committees to ask the right questions

Former MMCs have identified s79 committee as an important lever to hold their administrations to account, particularly when the political administrative interface is strained. Feeding the committee the right information to get them to ask the right questions of officials, and even contractors, can be an effective tool to keep projects progressing. Respondent MMCs have described either briefing their own caucus on the committee to ask specific questions, and probe specific items, or even in some cases sharing information with opposition councillors, privately, for them to probe and ask questions of the administration.

Use strategic project implementation teams

Using small cross-departmental teams of officials for important strategic projects has been used as a mechanism for successful and efficient delivery. It also creates leverage to improve departmental efficiency, by demonstrating to senior management what can be done with small teams, and how quickly projects can be delivered.

> *"But [the mayor] had made it clear he wanted to use the World Cup to leave a decisive legacy for things that had nothing to do with football, environment, housing, etc. The mayor's philosophy was how do we use the pressure of the World Cup to focus our energy and attention. This is giving us added impetus and resources. Long after the last whistle had blown, what will the people have to say our lives have improve because of this that or the other" (Interview, Respondent Q, 2018).*

> *"I established a strategic project team with the World Cup, it caused a bit of conflict in the city other people, architect felt they should be doing it. So, 7 people drove R6 billion capital projects… They had a good idea on what was going on in other departments. Produced things more efficiently more effectively, and I could say to other departments look how efficiently they are doing things. You have to live with silos but have a committee with a degree of power from the city manager to drive things. So, it worked very well." (Interview Respondent E, 2018)*

Use cross departmental steering committees to unblock projects

A few cities, either through the city manager, or the mayors and MMCs have used strategic project steering committees to speed up the delivery of projects. These teams should be at least cross-departmental, but could also include MMCs, contractors and community members. Tshwane has effectively used this approach in the past and passed a model for the process with rules governing how decisions are made, and departmental recommendations dealt with.

Call role-players to meetings for collective accountability

MMCs have described getting relevant role-players, including officials, contractors and sometimes communities and local forums into meetings to account collectively as a useful strategy for getting progress on projects and unblocking administrative muddying of issues. This is described as particularly effective in ensuring that administration holds contractors accountable to their commitments.

Long term challenges

This research process has sought to briefly document the current state of the political administrative interface in South Africa's cities in relation to built environment projects. It has outlined examples where the interface has both hindered and helped projects, and shared tactics that officials have found useful as means to overcome problematic manifestations of the interface. Additionally, there are structural challenges in the interface that will require long term approaches to develop solutions. These issues include leadership and organisational culture, delegations and decentralisation, building mechanisms to enable stability, and defining the role of ward councillor.

Leadership and organisational culture

Changing the nature of the way conversation happens between politicians and administrators has been identified by respondents as a way to improve organisational culture in cities, including reducing the hierarchies in council. The aim should be to create an atmosphere of respectful conversation that is not dependent on office or title, and focus on serving communities, and ensuring high levels of technical skill (Interview, Respondent Q, 2018).

Delegations and decentralisation

Respondents have identified that mayors have large amounts of power, and if they choose to centralise that power, with narrow rather than broad delegations, there is risk of bottlenecks in processes, slower delivery and increased risk of political interference (Interviews, Respondents R, P, 2018).

Respondents also argue that while decentralisation is better for delivery, it requires trust and makes room for mistakes to be made and resources for proper programming, particularly in relations to very long-term spatial transformation projects, with 10 to 20-year timeframes (Interviews, Respondents I, C, 2008).

Mechanism to enable stability

Mechanisms need to be established to encourage stability and professionalism in senior management, particularly the city manager positions in cities. These mechanisms need to be open and transparent, and ideally cross-party and set at a national level, above local and provincial politics. Senior management should be removed if it is incompetent, rather that if the contract has expired, or if the mayor has changed. A national recommending body on the appointment of city managers may be appropriate (Interviews, Respondent I, E, 2018).

Defining the role of ward councillors

The role of ward councillors in relation to the political administrative interface is poorly defined in large cities, where there are large numbers of wards and big administration. The current system "has not been able to acknowledge them, but ultimately, they're accountable" (Interview, Respondent G, 2018). Therefore, clarification of the mechanisms through which they can engage the administration and functional MMCs around developing plans for their wards is necessary.

The disjuncture between political party hierarchies and equal spheres of government

The disjuncture between the hierarchical nature of party politics in South Africa, where progression is viewed as moving from the local sphere, to the provincial sphere, to the national sphere with increasing power and influence, and the horizontal nature of administration in South Africa, where the spheres are equal contributes to short termism and a subservience of city strategy to national politics. The result of this is that for politicians, roles in city government are seen as stepping stones to higher positions, in provincial governments and legislatures and national government and parliament. This has meant that political representatives in local government are often inexperienced as councillors, MMCs, and mayors, seeking to serve the interests of more senior party politicians, rather than assert the independence of local government, and who move on before they have acquired experience. This exacerbates issues of political instability and will continue to have knock-on effect for built environment projects, particularly those with long lead times (Group discussion, BEITT meeting discussion, 2018).

Conclusion

The political administrative interface in cities in South Africa is fraught with challenges to spatial transformation. Instability in both the politics and the administrations threatens the long-term strategic vision for spatial transformation and the ability to land spatially transformative built environment projects. The ability to allocate budgets to spatial transformation projects and spend those budgets are particularly threatened by political and administrative instability.

On the ground, human settlements, transport and spatial planning are complicated by intergovernmental politics that place additional strain on the political-administrative interface in cities. A lack of control over budgeting and target setting in human settlements creates tensions between planning and human settlements departments. Expedient declarations by national politicians can place at risk months of meticulous work by city politicians and officials on a transport project. This speaks to the wider state of intergovernmental relations in South Africa, beyond the political-administrative interface in cities.

Within cities, politically interested and connected officials use their delegations or connections to obstruct spatial transformation projects, and politicians lack the courage to sell unpopular projects to their constituencies. This frustrates the work of politicians and officials working towards the spatial transformation agenda. There are areas where there is little the administration can do about the lack of political will, as decision making power rests with councils, such as disposal of land decisions, but if officials can creatively package projects to be political palatable, some success can be achieved.

The former officials and MMCs interviewed for this report are adamant that the current system to manage the political administrative interface can work well, and has done so in administrations that they have worked in. However, all acknowledge that successful working relationships between councils and administrations are heavily dependent on the personalities involved. Personality clashes between MMCs and officials or mayors and officials can derail projects, as can difficult management styles, and some may be interested in the abuse of the state for their own ends. This is a significant threat to built environment projects and spatial transformation.

In the short term the effective implementation of the spatial transformation project will rely on senior managers ability to develop effective working relationships with the political role players. A suite of tactics that practitioners have relied on has been identified but a common thread is understanding the political and institutional dynamic that exists. The dynamic is dependent on which politician is leading and for what purpose and how is (and who in) the administration linked to this agenda. It is clear that the situation differs for each individual working in the space, regardless of the city. Thus, it is impossible to suggest a single set of recommendations applicable to all. The principle that serving communities should be at the core of the approach is consistent across the interviews and can provide the pillar for all strategies to centre.

However, in the current system, personalities change regularly. For instance, municipal managers in local government last an average of 3 and a half years (PDG, 2013) and with 70% of mayors and MMCs in local government holding positions for less than five years (PDG, 2018). A system dependent on personalities will remain unstable if the personalities change regularly.

Therefore, in the longer term, more structural changes will be required to institutionalise an operational model that professionalises the political and administrative roles of local government. These structural changes should ensure that appropriate personalities are put in place and are protected. These changes must be both internal to cities, such as structures to break down silos, and external to cities, such as a professional association for senior management in cities. This though can only apply to administrators, and not to politicians, unless citizens are also given the opportunity to recall ineffective councillors in mid-term. Alternatively, the system should be amended to make it less dependent on personality, and more dependent on process. Spatial transformation is only likely to succeed if this is addressed, and a conducive environment for long-term built environment projects created.

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List of Boxes
Box 1: A spatial planning experience: Excerpt from an interview
Box 2: A human settlements experience: Excerpt from an interview
Box 3: A public participation experience: Excerpt from an interview

Acknowledgements