

Honourable Speaker, Members of Council, Acting Municipal Manager, Directors, and Members of the Public,

Good morning once again.

Today I rise to table the adoption of a budget that builds on the progress and difference we are already making in the lives of our residents.

As I said in March when I tabled the draft budget, last year we tabled a budget of difference. This year, we deepen that commitment — not only to extend that difference, but to ensure it is felt more clearly, more fairly, and more meaningfully across every corner of this great municipality.

This morning, I also table a budget of responsiveness – a budget shaped by listening to our people, acting responsibly and within the bounds of compliance, and now delivering practical support and sustainable governance.

Today, I ask Council to adopt this budget as a budget of responsible action.

With this budget, I ask that we stand together — regardless of political affiliation — to support the residents of George Municipality. Because that is what leadership demands of us.

Leadership requires more from us than slogans, noise, and political theatre.

Our residents are not interested in who can shout the loudest in this community hall. They want leadership that understands their realities and responds with practical solutions.

They want a municipality that listens when people are struggling, acts responsibly, and delivers where it matters most — in the daily lives of ordinary residents.

Mr Speaker, this final budget before Council today has gone through the full democratic process.

Public participation meetings were held across our municipal area, and once again I had the privilege of engaging directly with residents from all walks of life. Our people have had their say.

They spoke about affordability.

They spoke about electricity.

They spoke about rising costs.

And they spoke about the pressure households continue to face every single month.

We listened carefully.

And today, this budget reflects that.

Mr Speaker, Councillors, and residents of George, our draft budget also underwent rigorous financial scrutiny. National Treasury assessed the budget and found it to be credible, relevant, sustainable, and funded.

That matters.

Because in local government, a budget is not judged by what sounds good in a speech. It is judged by whether it is funded, whether it can be implemented, and whether it can survive contact with reality.

This budget can.

National Treasury did caution municipalities against leaning too heavily into social assistance in ways that could place future sustainability at risk.

Mr Speaker, we take that caution seriously.

But what we also take seriously is the reality facing many of our residents — families who are struggling because of economic pressures and failures elsewhere in the system that continue to place strain on local government and, ultimately, on households.

Local government cannot pretend that residents are unaffected by what happens nationally.

They are affected every single month:

when electricity costs rise,

when the economy struggles,

and when working families have less money left at the end of the month.

But let me be equally clear today:

George will not become a municipality that protects itself by abandoning vulnerable residents.

We will continue doing everything we responsibly can to protect poor households, vulnerable residents, and struggling middle-income families.

But we will do so responsibly.

Met ander woorde, Mnr Speaker, ons sal help, maar ons sal nie roekeloos wees nie. Ons sal omgee, maar ons sal ook verantwoordelik bestuur.

Mr Speaker,

The budget before Council today provides for a **capital budget of R797.2 million** and an **operating budget of R4.017 billion** for the 2026/27 financial year.

This is not a budget built on fantasy.

It is a budget built on priorities.

Because if we fail to protect infrastructure, financial stability, and service delivery now, our residents will pay a far greater price later.

That is why we have taken a deliberate and responsible approach to tariffs.

Residents of George, for the 2026/27 financial year, the municipality has kept increases on property rates, water, sanitation, refuse removal, and other general tariffs at **3.7%**.

As I said when tabling the draft budget in March, this is a conscious decision to protect residents, avoid overburdening middle-income households, and govern responsibly.

Mr Speaker, on electricity, despite Eskom imposing a 9.01% bulk increase to municipalities, we have chosen a different path.

The tariff increase we are approving today is **7.88%**.

That means the municipality is absorbing part of the increase ourselves instead of simply passing the full burden directly on to residents.

We are sharing that burden with you.

Again, Mr Speaker, that is what responsive governance looks like.

That is what leadership in action looks like.

It is not accidental.

It is not luck.

It is a deliberate choice to intervene where we can and to cushion residents against pressure wherever possible.

Because governing responsibly does not mean shrugging our shoulders and saying: "This is what national government has done."

No Mr. Speaker, we see the failings at a national government sphere, but we find ways to intervene.

Anybody can identify a problem. It is quite easy; it's something that some of our opposition parties are really good at.

But real leadership means looking at a problem and asking; "What can we do to help our residents within our means?"

Real leadership is found in the ability to bring forward workable solutions — solutions that are properly researched, financially sustainable, and capable of being implemented in the real world.

Real leadership requires solutions.

Practical solutions.

Sustainable solutions.

Solutions that can actually work.

So even though national government may caution that we are providing relief to our residents, we still find a solution that is responsible and that will help our residents.

Mr Speaker, we now move to one of the most important parts of this budget — support for vulnerable households.

Supporting vulnerable residents is not optional.

It is a responsibility.

In March, I indicated that we would introduce one of the most progressive indigent support frameworks implemented by this municipality to date.

Today, we are delivering on that commitment.

Level 1 indigent support will from 1 July 2026 apply to households earning between R0 and R9 680 per month — equal to four times the SASSA grant threshold.

Level 2 indigent support will apply to households earning between R9 681 and R14 520 per month — equal to six times the SASSA threshold.

Mnr die Speaker, ek herhaal:

Vlak 1-deernisondersteuning geld van 1 Julie 2026 vir huishoudings wat tussen R0 en R9 680 per maand verdien.

Vlak 2-deernisondersteuning geld vir huishoudings wat tussen R9 681 en R14 520 per maand verdien.

Leierskap vereis aksie, nie geraas nie.

Só maak ons 'n verskil.

Mr Speaker, this expansion did not happen in isolation.

In March, I shared the story of a resident, Mr Gouws, who attended a public meeting in Convent Gardens and asked a simple but important question:

“Kan die munisipaliteit nie meer krag vir ons deernis-inwoners voorsien nie?”

Daardie vraag het by my gebly.

Wel Mnr. Gouws, vandag is ons besig om u versoek 'n realiteit te maak. Ons het geluister aan wat u gevra het. Ons het aksie geneem, en vandag lewer ons aan u en die inwoners van George die resultate.

Mr. Speaker, we are increasing free basic electricity for indigent households from **70 units** to **80 units** per month.

That is **30 units** more than the national minimum requirement.

At a time when national policy only requires municipalities to provide 50 units, George Municipality has chosen to provide 80 units because we understand the realities facing our residents.

This is not symbolic relief.

It is practical relief.

Mr Speaker, I would also like to briefly address a question that was raised regarding the approach followed by Stellenbosch Municipality — a municipality widely recognised for strong governance and one that the President himself publicly referred to when encouraging municipalities to learn from good governance practices.

Stellenbosch is led by an esteemed colleague of mine and remains one of the country's leading municipalities.

The question raised was:

Why can Stellenbosch provide 100 units of free electricity while George follows a different approach?

The answer is simple.

Good governance does not mean every municipality must apply identical policies.

Different municipalities serve different communities, with different economic realities, service pressures, and support needs.

In George, we have deliberately adopted a broad two-tier indigent support model that extends assistance across a different income range.

In addition to free electricity support, many qualifying residents in George also receive relief through the waiving of basic charges relating to water, refuse, and sewerage services.

So while the approaches may differ, the objective remains exactly the same: protecting vulnerable residents in a responsible and sustainable manner.

That is what good local government does.

It understands the needs of its residents and responds accordingly.

And that is exactly what this budget seeks to achieve.

Mr Speaker, we are also strengthening support for low- to middle-income households and pensioners through increased rebates.

This includes:

- a 40% rebate for qualifying pensioners earning up to R429 000 per annum on the first R2.475 million of the value of their primary residence,
- a 40% property rates rebate for households earning below R198 000 per annum,
- and a 20% rebate for households earning between R198 000 and R217 800 per annum.

These are not abstract policy positions.

These are practical interventions in the lives of residents.

Because affordability is not a talking point.

It is a household reality.

But Mr Speaker, protection alone is not enough.

We must also continue investing in the future of this municipality.

We must continue investing in infrastructure so that residents can live in a municipality that works not only today, but for generations to come.

Over the MTREF:

- R266.2 million is allocated for sewerage pump station upgrades,
- including R32 million in 2026/27 for Themba lethu Pump Station 6,
- R72 million is allocated for groundwater exploration and alternative water sources,
- and R161.3 million is allocated for stormwater infrastructure projects.

The municipality is also allocating:

- R97.5 million for a second transformer at the Schaapkop substation,
- and R30 million for smart electricity meters to improve billing accuracy, monitoring, and fault detection.

That is what serious government looks like.

It does not only speak about growth.

It funds the infrastructure that makes growth possible.

It does not only speak about dignity.

It funds the services that protect dignity — water, sanitation, electricity, roads, and refuse removal.

Mr Speaker, the capital budget remains strongly focused on core infrastructure and trading services, with major allocations to Civil Engineering Services and Electrotechnical Services.

Some of the projects residents can look forward to include:

Civil Engineering Services

- More than R6 million for stormwater upgrades in Haarlem,
- Nearly R9 million for stormwater upgrades in Thembaletu,
- R10 million for street upgrades in Uniondale,
- R3.6 million for the upgrade of Nelson Mandela Boulevard,
- and over R14 million for upgrades to Pacaltsdorp Pump Station 3.

Electrotechnical Services

- R2.5 million for high-mast lighting,
- R5 million for upgrades to the Tamsui Substation,
- and R3 million for street lighting improvements.

Mr Speaker, as stated in my earlier Mayoral Address, this budget also positions George for a more resilient and affordable energy future.

The municipality continues supporting Small-Scale Embedded Generation, giving residents and businesses greater control over electricity costs and supply.

To date:

- more than 1 200 SSEG applications have been received,
- over 450 applications have already been approved,
- contributing close to 24 megawatts of installed capacity.

We have also made participation easier and more affordable:

- the export tariff has increased to R1.03 per kilowatt-hour from 1 July 2026,
- smart meter costs have been reduced by more than 50%,
- and compliance requirements for smaller residential systems have been eased.

At the same time, the municipality continues progressing independent power procurement programmes aimed at securing more affordable electricity over the medium to long term.

This forms part of a deliberate strategy:

- to reduce reliance on Eskom price shocks,
- to stabilise tariffs over time,
- and to provide residents with greater energy security.

National Treasury further commended the municipality's financial governance and confirmed that this budget reflects sound planning, prioritisation, and oversight.

And that matters.

Because good governance is not exciting until it fails.

And when governance fails:

- the poor suffer first,
- service delivery declines,
- and public trust disappears.

So yes, Mr Speaker, there is good news in this budget.

But the good news is not spin.

The good news is this:

- the budget is funded,
- tariffs have been contained where possible,
- support for vulnerable households has been expanded,
- infrastructure investment remains strong,
- and George continues to prove that disciplined government can still deliver.

Inwoners van George,

Hierdie begroting is meer as net syfers op papier.

Dit gaan oor keuses.

Keuses om ons inwoners te beskerm.

Keuses om in kritieke infrastruktuur te belê.

Keuses om die munisipaliteit finansiëel sterk en volhoubaar te hou.

En keuses om nie korttermyn gewildheid bo langtermyn stabiliteit en dienslewering te plaas nie.

Dit is wat verantwoordelike regering beteken.

Mr Speaker,

Residents do not expect perfection from government.

But they do expect honesty.

They expect discipline.

And they expect leadership willing to stand with them during difficult times.

This budget reflects exactly that commitment.

At its heart, this budget makes a very clear statement:

We will not govern through panic.

We will not govern through populism.

And we will not govern by passing every shock directly onto residents.

We will govern with discipline.

We will govern with compassion.

And we will govern with the long term in mind.

Because every rand in this budget is a choice.

And with this budget, we are choosing:

- stability over drift,
- delivery over excuses,
- infrastructure over neglect,
- and responsible leadership over empty noise.

Mr Speaker, I would like to conclude by reminding this Council that this budget is for the residents of George.

It is a budget designed to provide relief, protect our future, and continue moving this municipality forward.

A vote for this budget is a vote for practical support, responsible governance, and continued progress for our residents.

Political maturity requires that we sometimes look beyond party lines and recognise when a budget is genuinely aimed at helping people.

Leadership requires that we place the needs of residents above political point-scoring and short-term grandstanding.

Today, every councillor in this hall has an opportunity to decide whether they want to contribute toward solutions or simply contribute toward noise.

So I ask this Council: let us do what is right for the people of George.

Laat ons ons inwoners eerste plaas.

Laat ons wys dat goeie regering steeds moontlik is wanneer mense belangriker raak as politiek.

Mr Speaker, residents deserve leadership that is willing to act, willing to lead, and willing to make difficult but responsible decisions in the interest of progress.

This budget reflects exactly that commitment.

Leadership requires action, not political promises, posturing, and problems.

This budget demonstrates solutions, action, and progress.

Mr Speaker, I so move.