The Restructuring (Systemization) of Local Government
under the

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In recent years South Africans have become accustomed to the fact that the local sphere of government is part and parcel of the new democratic structure of government in the Republic. Today, all local governments are clothed with a new status, a new autonomy and a distinctive character with specifically entrenched constitutional powers and objects. Notwithstanding its newfound importance, all local government institutions had to be transformed and restructured to fit into an entirely new constitutional framework. Such a restructuring process was an often arduous and time consuming process. The restructuring furthermore required an entire overhaul of all municipal authorities since the new Constitution requires mainly parliament to add substance to a simple constitutional framework. Parliament has recently completed its constitutional obligations in respect of the restructuring of local government and a completely new legal order regulating and managing all local government structures in South Africa has been developed and enacted. All municipal role players must now constructively and purposefully implement and enforce the various new legal requirements.

This new research under the title, The restructuring of Local Government under the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, now seeks to systemize and structure the new local government legal dispensation. Spanning over 22 chapters, this work covers almost all legal aspects of the new local government dispensation and addresses, inter alia, aspects such as the new status of local governments, the impact of the Constitution on municipal affairs, the various objectives and challenges facing all municipalities, the new legal nature of local government institutions, a discussion of the principles of co-operative government relevant to the local sphere of governance, a look at the new models of local authorities, the demarcation of municipal boundaries, the composition and functioning of local government structures, the role and importance of traditional leadership in municipal decision making, an overview of the entrenched powers and functions of municipalities, aspects concerning municipal services and sustainable service delivery, as well as the important principles relating to municipal finances and fiscal management.
### Key Terms/ Words

- Autonomy
- Agency
- Authority
- Bill of Rights
- Budget
- By-laws
- Capital
- Committee
- Community
- Constitution
- Co-operation
- Debt
- Delegation
- Demarcation
- Election
- Finance
- Government
- Levies
- Mayors
- Municipalities
- Organs of state
- Parliament
- Political
- Rates
- Revenue
- Service
- Ward
Local government, being the sphere of government that exists the closest to the people of a state, has often been described as the most important sphere of government. Since municipal institutions affect the life’s of all people living within the territory of a state, they are rightly regarded as the backbone of a balanced democracy and as essential service providers, from the cradle to the grave. An effective and efficient local government system is therefore of obvious importance. If the local sphere of government does not work properly then the state in general will not work. Furthermore, all municipal authorities are inextricably linked to the people of the state. If a sound and stable local democracy is not ensured, then the state itself is in danger of collapsing.

With the birth of a new constitutional order for South Africa, the entire local government dispensation had to be restructured and transformed. Contrary to the restructuring of the two higher spheres of government, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa 1996 only incorporated a simple framework for local government and mainly left the completion of new local government dispensation to parliament. Parliament, mandated by the Constitution, was tasked to enact various new laws in order to facilitate the new municipal dispensation. All new laws however had to comply with the new constitutional requirements and supreme constitutional demands. Over the last decade all local government institutions in South Africa were totally restructured and transformed into a single uniformed system of local governance in which all municipalities were afforded a new status, new powers and functions and a new constitutionally entrenched vision of achieving specific municipal objects and to be generally developmental in nature. This new legal and political system essentially requires a re-appraisal of the manner and effectiveness in which local governments fulfil and achieve their constitutional and other related legal duties and responsibilities.

In the new legal dispensation, local government institutions cover the entire territory of the South African state. This phenomenon is generally referred to as a system
of wall-to-wall municipal governance. Since municipalities are mainly tasked with providing essential services to their local residents, they directly affect the lives of all South African inhabitants. If essential services are provided in a sustainable and affordable manner, municipalities will facilitate the creation a sound foundation for economic development, poverty upliftment and the overall creation of a better future for all. Local governments can however not achieve their new goals on their own and the support and assistance of the two higher spheres of government is a *sine qua non* for any successful local government dispensation. All spheres of government must work hand in hand to ensure an overall government which fosters a system of truly cooperative governance, as is constitutionally required. As a whole, local government forms an important link between the people of the state and the highest political decision-makers. In essence, local governments create a nationwide network that not only links the three spheres of government together but also creates a laboratory for truly democratic governance and grassroots democracy.

This research was undertaken in an effort to help explain the new legal dispensation regarding local government in South Africa. The work explains the new legal requirements and also evaluates the extent to which the new system complies with the general constitutional obligations. The work further underpins the new partnership between the three spheres of government and sets out the local sphere’s duties and responsibilities. It also aims to systemise and structure the new local government legal dispensation. The work is presented in simple and plain language, which in turn should facilitate a better understanding of the legal rules and participation of all role players in the new legal order.

B Bekink

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Dedication / Acknowledgements

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## Table of Contents

### Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................ 19
1.2 Research questions and research methodology ............................................. 21
1.3 Founding principles of the new South African constitutional order .......................................................... 21
  1.3.1 Introduction .................................................................................................. 21
  1.3.2 Basic constitutional features and principles ............................................. 24
1.4 Key principles underpinning the new local government legal dispensation .......................................................... 30
  1.4.1 Introduction ................................................................................................ 30
  1.4.2 The creation of a non-racial and democratic local government dispensation .......................................................... 31
  1.4.3 The nature, rights and duties of restructured municipal governments .......................................................... 31
  1.4.4 Local government within a system of co-operative governance .......................................................... 32
  1.4.5 The new structure and internal framework for local government .......................................................... 32
  1.4.6 New boundaries for local government institutions.................................................. 32
  1.4.7 Compliance with the founding values of the Constitution and the obligations under the Bill of Rights .......................................................... 33
  1.4.8 The role and importance of the institution of traditional leadership in local government .......................................................... 33
  1.4.9 The allocation of specific powers and functions to municipal governments .......................................................... 33
  1.4.10 Internal functioning and new leadership requirements for local government .......................................................... 34
  1.4.11 Sustainable municipal service delivery .................................................... 34
1.4.12 A new personnel corps for local government .......... 34
1.4.13 Municipal fiscal management and the exercise of fiscal powers ................................................................. 34
1.4.14 Municipal governance and core principles of a new public administration .............................................................. 35
1.4.15 Principles of municipal development planning, performance management, capacity building and public participation ................................................................. 35
1.4.16 The new status and relative autonomy of local governments ........................................................................ 36
1.4.17 The essential objects of local governments ................ 36
1.4.18 Developmental duties of local government ............. 36
1.5 Conclusion ........................................................................ 37

Chapter 2: A brief introduction to local government in South Africa ................................................................................................. 38

Chapter 3: The origins of urban development and the early establishment of local authorities ................................................................. 41
3.1 Introduction ........................................................................ 41
3.2 The general development from farmland into urban settlements 42
3.3 The origin, creation and importance of local authorities..... 42
3.4 Conclusion ........................................................................ 44

Chapter 4: A brief history of local government in South Africa ............................................................................................................ 46
4.1 Introduction ........................................................................ 46
4.2 Financial constraints of former local government institutions. 48
4.3 Mobilisation against the former local government system ..... 48
4.4 Conclusion ........................................................................ 50

Chapter 5: The process of transformation and restructuring of local government ................................................................. 52
5.1 Introduction ........................................................................ 52
5.2 The restructuring of local government under the Local Government Transition Act ................................................................. 54
5.3 The role and impact of the interim Constitution on the transition process ................................................................................. 58
5.4 The importance of the 34 constitutional principles included in the interim Constitution and the certification process of the final Constitution ............................................................................................................. 59

5.5 The impact of the final Constitution and the commencement of the new local government legal dispensation ........................................... 65

5.6 Conclusion ................................................................................................. 67

Chapter 6: The current state of local government and the general impact of the final Constitution .................................................................................. 69

6.1 Introduction ................................................................................................. 69

6.2 Current financial constraints in local government ...................................... 70

6.3 New administrative challenges .................................................................... 70

6.4 Legislative complexity of the new system .................................................... 71

6.5 Global and national trends ........................................................................... 71

6.6 The influence of settlement patterns and trends ......................................... 72

6.7 General impact of the Constitution ................................................................ 74

6.7.1 Founding constitutional requirements and principles important to local government structures ................................................................. 74

6.8 Conclusion ................................................................................................. 96

Chapter 7: The status, objects, challenges and developmental duties of local authorities ......................................................................................... 97

7.1 Introduction ................................................................................................. 97

7.2 The characteristics of local governments .................................................... 100

7.3 The importance of being a sphere of government ...................................... 100

7.4 The status of municipalities .......................................................................... 102

7.5 The objects of local government .................................................................. 105

7.6 The new challenges and developmental duties facing municipalities .......... 106

7.7 Developmental duties of municipalities ....................................................... 108

7.7.1 Introduction ............................................................................................. 108

7.7.2 The constitutional obligations .................................................................. 108

7.8 Conclusion ................................................................................................. 121

Chapter 8: The legal nature and general rights and duties of local government institutions ............................................................................................. 123

8.1 Introduction ................................................................................................. 123
8.2 The specific character of local government ........................................ 125
8.3 The legal nature of a municipality ....................................................... 126
  8.3.1 General rights and duties of a local government ......................... 128
  8.3.2 Rights and duties of municipal councils .................................. 128
  8.3.3 Rights and duties of members of local communities .................... 130
  8.3.4 Duties of municipal administrations ...................................... 132
8.4 Conclusion ...................................................................................... 133

Chapter 9: Local government within a system of co-operative governance ......................................................... 134

9.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 134
9.2 Local government and intergovernmental relations ..................... 135
9.3 The constitutional foundation of co-operative government .......... 136
9.4 The impact of co-operative government on local government structures .................................................................................................................. 141
9.5 The recognition and protection of the obligations to support, strengthen, consult and promote local government matters ................. 146
9.6 National legislative protection of the principles of co-operative government .................................................................................................................. 152
9.7 Exploring the roles and responsibilities of national and provincial governments towards municipalities in a system of co-operative governance .......................................................................................................................... 153
9.8 National support and assistance to local government through national policies and programmes .......................................................... 157
9.9 Some comments on co-operative government in practice .......... 161
9.10 Conclusion ...................................................................................... 162

Chapter 10: The new institutional models in local government and the formal establishment of municipalities .......... 165

10.1 Introduction .................................................................................. 165
10.2 Important requirements regarding the functioning and roles of local governments .......................................................................................................................... 167
10.3 Categories of municipal government .......................................... 169
  10.3.1 The different categories of municipality ................................ 169
  10.3.2 The application of the relevant criteria .................................. 180
10.3.3 Parts of category C areas in which category B municipalities are not viable ......................................... 183

10.3.4 Special provisions for cross-boundary municipalities... 184

10.4 Systems and types of municipal government.......................... 186

10.4.1 Why different types of municipality are created ........... 186

10.4.2 The different systems of municipal government........... 187

10.5 Combining the different systems of municipal government to form municipal types ................................................................. 195

10.5.1 Introduction .................................................................. 195

10.5.2 The relationship between categories of municipality and types of municipality..................................................... 197

10.6 Application of municipal types to individual municipalities ..... 199

10.7 Establishing new municipalities – procedures and requirements........................................................................... 200

10.7.1 Introduction .................................................................. 200

10.7.2 The establishment of new municipalities and the so-called “section 12 notices” ...................................................... 201

10.7.3 Aspects regarding the amendment, repeal or replacement of section 12 notices .................................................... 207

10.7.4 Transitional arrangements in respect of the new local government dispensation............................................. 208

10.7.5 The relevant role players during the establishment process or subsequent amendment of the establishment notices .......................................................... 209

10.8 Conclusion .............................................................................. 209

Chapter 11: Demarcation of new local government boundaries ..................................................................................... 211

11.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 211

11.2 The importance of local government boundaries ............. 212

11.3 Re-determination of the municipal boundaries of the transitional period........................................................................ 213

11.4 The municipal demarcation board........................................ 214

11.4.1 Establishment, functions and general powers of the Demarcation Board .......................................................... 214
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11.4.2 Membership provisions of the Demarcation Board</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.4.3 Operating procedures of the Demarcation Board</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5 Requirements regarding municipal demarcation</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5.1 Specific boundary determinations</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5.2 Demarcation criteria</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.5.3 Demarcation procedures</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.6 General administrative and other matters regarding the Demarcation Board</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.6.1 Manager of the Board</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.6.2 Aspects regarding the finances of the Board</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.6.3 Miscellaneous matters concerning the Demarcation Board</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.7 Conclusion</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter 12: The composition, election and term of municipal councils</strong></td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.1 Introduction</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.2 The composition and election of municipal councils during the local government transitional phases</td>
<td>227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3 The composition and election of municipal councils under the final Constitution</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3.1 The composition and establishment of municipal councils</td>
<td>240</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3.2 The determination of the number of councillors of a municipal council</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.3.3 The election procedures of metropolitan, local and district councils</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.4 Membership of municipal councils and the qualifications of councillors</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5 The terms of municipal councils and councillors</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5.1 Terms of municipal councils</td>
<td>262</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.5.2 The term of office of councillors and the vacation of office by a councillor</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.6 Municipal by-elections</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12.7 General legislative provisions relevant to the local government electoral process and procedures .......................................................... 267
12.7.1 The provisions of the Electoral Commission Act ........... 267
12.7.2 The provisions of the Electoral Act .............................. 272
12.7.3 The Local Government: Municipal Electoral Act, 2000.......................................................... 273

12.8 Conclusion .............................................................................. 274

Chapter 13: The role and importance of the institution of traditional leadership in local government affairs .............................. 276

13.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 276
13.2 A brief historical overview of traditional leadership in South Africa ............................................................................. 277
13.3 Important considerations relating to traditional leadership from a South African perspective .......................................................... 278
13.3.1 The structure of traditional leadership ................................. 279
13.3.2 The appointment/recognition of traditional leaders ...... 279
13.3.3 The role of women and children in traditional leadership ............................................................................. 281
13.3.4 Party political affiliation and the remuneration of traditional leaders ............................................................................. 282

13.4 The new legislative framework and requirements regarding traditional leadership .......................................................... 283
13.4.1 The basic constitutional foundation regarding traditional leadership ............................................................................. 284
13.4.2 The formal recognition and establishment of traditional leadership ............................................................................. 285
13.4.3 Legislative requirements regarding traditional leadership under the Local Government Transition Act .................. 289
13.4.4 Participation of traditional leaders according to the Municipal Structures Act .......................................................... 294

13.5 Conclusion .............................................................................. 296

Chapter 14: The powers and functions of municipal governments ............................................................................. 298

14.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 298
14.2 The constitutional basis of municipal powers and functions.... 301
   14.2.1 Direct constitutional directives regarding municipal powers and functions ................................................................. 301
   14.2.2 Constitutional provisions that indirectly impact on municipal powers and functions.................................................... 309
14.3 National legislation to enhance the constitutional foundation on the powers and functions of municipal councils ...................... 312
   14.3.1 Functions and powers of municipalities under the Local Government: Municipal Structures Act........................................... 312
   14.3.2 Aspects regarding municipal functions and powers under the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act............... 318
14.4 Executive and legislative functioning ...................................... 321
14.5 Legislative procedures and requirements .................................. 322
14.6 Municipal financial powers................................................................................................................................. 327
14.7 Municipal powers and functions regarding municipal law enforcement.................................................................................. 329
14.8 Conclusion............................................................................... 334

Chapter 15: Political structures and internal procedures of municipal councils ....................................................................................... 337
15.1 Introduction............................................................................. 337
15.2 The basic constitutional framework regarding the internal procedures of municipal councils.................................................. 339
   15.2.1 Internal procedure with regard to municipal councils ... 340
   15.2.2 Aspects regarding the delegation of powers and functions in local government structures................................................. 360
   15.2.3 Quorums and majorities necessary to take lawful municipal decisions............................................................................. 365
   15.2.4 Internal procedures regarding municipal by-laws.............. 370
   15.2.5 Procedures relating to the size of a municipal council and its committees ............................................................................ 370
   15.2.6 The making of by-laws to regulate internal procedures............................................................................................................ 370
   15.2.7 Procedures regarding the manner of conducting the internal business of municipal councils........................................... 372
15.2.8 Internal procedures regarding the participation of members of municipal councils in council proceedings .......... 372
15.3 The privileges and immunities of municipal councils and their members ................................................................. 375
15.4 Internal municipal functionaries and procedures .................. 377
15.5 Code of conduct for councillors ........................................ 378
15.5.1 General conduct of municipal councillors ...................... 379
15.5.2 Attendance at meetings ............................................... 380
15.5.3 Disclosure of interests and personal gain .......................... 380
15.5.4 Undertaking of other paid work and the acceptance of rewards, gifts and favours ................................. 382
15.5.5 The unauthorised disclosure of information, intervention in the administration of the municipality and aspects concerning council property ................................................................. 383
15.5.6 Breaches of the code of conduct .................................. 384
15.5.7 Application of the code of conduct to traditional leaders ........................................................................ 386
15.6 The procedures regarding the election of municipal office-bearers ...................................................................... 386
15.7 Conclusion ........................................................................ 387

Chapter 16: Municipal services and service delivery and the basic functional activities of municipal governments ........ 389
16.1 Introduction ....................................................................... 389
16.2 The new vision of local government service delivery .......... 390
16.2.1 Assessing basic needs .................................................. 390
16.2.2 Basic principles and approaches on service delivery... 390
16.2.3 Some basic administrative capacities that will enhance municipal development .................................................. 397
16.3 The new legislative requirements regarding municipal services and service provision ............................................. 398
16.3.1 The constitutional legal basis ......................................... 398
16.3.2 General provisions regarding municipal services according to national legislation ........................................ 400
16.4 An overview of services that are generally provided by local governments .............................. 427
  16.4.1 General factors that impact on municipal services .......................... 427
  16.4.2 Municipal services to be provided under the Constitution ......................... 429
16.5 Conclusion .............................................................................. 444

Chapter 17: Municipal personnel, labour relations and staffing matters ................................................. 446
  17.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 446
  17.2 The broad organisational structure and overall personnel administration of local governments ........................................ 447
    17.2.1 Basic organisational systems ......................................... 447
    17.2.2 Internal mechanisms to enhance organisational efficiency ................. 450
  17.3 New legislative provisions regarding municipal staff matters .................. 453
    17.3.1 The appointment and employment conditions of municipal managers ........................................ 453
    17.3.2 Basic principles relating to local public administration and internal municipal organisation ......................... 458
    17.3.3 Municipal staff matters .................................................. 460
    17.3.4 The code of conduct for municipal staff members .......................... 462
    17.3.5 Miscellaneous aspects relevant to municipal staff members and the organisational structure of a municipal administration ........................................ 466
  17.4 Conclusion .............................................................................. 467

Chapter 18: Aspects relating to municipal finance and municipal fiscal management ................................................. 469
  18.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 469
  18.2 The new legislative framework for municipal financial management ......................... 470
    18.2.1 The broad constitutional foundation relevant to municipal finance ......................... 471
    18.2.2 The new basic policy objectives ........................................... 481
18.2.3 Financial matters under the Local Government Transition Act

18.3 Legislative control mechanisms over municipal finance
   18.3.1 Parliamentary control ........................................ 487
   18.3.2 Provincial control over municipal financial matters ...... 593
   18.3.3 Financial control by local authorities ..................... 593

18.4 General comments on the principles relating to municipal fiscal management
   18.4.1 Municipal budgeting ......................................... 593
   18.4.2 Financial records, auditing and financial management .... 594
   18.4.3 Municipal expenditure ....................................... 595
   18.4.4 Loan funds, stocks and capital goods ..................... 595
   18.4.5 Municipal credit control and debt collection ............ 596

18.5 Important revenue sources of local governments ............. 602
   18.5.1 Property taxation ............................................ 603
   18.5.2 The valuation of property .................................. 605
   18.5.3 The basis of property valuations ......................... 606
   18.5.4 The levying of municipal property rates ................. 606
   18.5.5 Some important aspects concerning municipal property
         assessment and taxation ...................................... 608
   18.5.6 Introduction to the new Municipal Property Rates Act. .. 612
   18.5.7 Fees, service charges and tariffs .......................... 648
   18.5.8 Trading enterprises and subsidies ........................ 650
   18.5.9 RSC levies and intergovernmental transfers ............. 650
   18.5.10 Municipal loans and capital funds ...................... 651
   18.5.11 Municipal stocks .......................................... 652

18.6 Conclusion .................................................................. 652

Chapter 19: The principles of municipal public administration and the requirements of performance management, capacity building, accountability and public participation ....................................... 654

19.1 Introduction ................................................................ 654
19.2 Basic aspects concerning municipal public relations ......... 655
19.3 The constitutional requirements affecting municipal public administration ................................................................. 656
19.3.1 The basic values and principles governing public administration ........................................................................... 656
19.3.2 Issues concerning municipal administration .................. 658
19.4 Principles of municipal accountability and public participation ..................................................................................................... 660
19.4.1 Participation, communication and partnerships .............. 661
19.4.2 Channels of communication ........................................... 661
19.4.3 Participation through partnerships ................................... 663
19.4.4 The new legislative provisions regarding community participation ......................................................................................... 663
19.4.5 Local municipal accountability ....................................... 667
19.4.6 Establishing paths of accountability .............................. 668
19.4.7 Developing programmes for participation ..................... 671
19.5 Aspects concerning municipal performance management and capacity building ................................................................. 672
19.5.1 The new legislative requirements regarding municipal performance management ................................................................. 674
19.5.2 Creating and maintaining an effective system of municipal performance management ................................................................. 678
19.5.3 Implementing performance management ....................... 681
19.6 Aspects regarding municipal capacity building ............... 683
19.6.1 Introduction .................................................................. 683
19.6.2 Establishing a new local government training system ...... 685
19.6.3 Mechanisms to enhance municipal capacity building .... 687
19.7 Conclusion .............................................................................. 687

Chapter 20: Municipal development planning .................. 689
20.1 Introduction ............................................................................. 689
20.2 National principles concerning local government developmental planning ......................................................................................... 690
20.2.1 General requirements relating to municipal development planning ......................................................................................... 690
20.2.2 The contents and core components of Integrated Development Plans ................................................................. 692
20.2.3 Requirements regarding the process for planning, drafting, adopting and reviewing Integrated Development Plans ................................................................. 693
20.2.4 Miscellaneous aspects concerning municipal integrated development planning ................................................................. 697
20.3 Conclusion ................................................................................................ 698

Chapter 21: Basic legal matters relevant to local government structures ....................................................................................... 700
21.1 Introduction ........................................................................................... 700
21.2 Sources of local government law ........................................................... 700
  21.2.1 Legislation as a source of local government law .................. 701
  21.2.2 The importance of customary and common law principles ......................................................................................... 702
  21.2.3 Judicial precedent as a source of local government law ......................................................................................... 702
21.3 Important fields of law relevant to local government law .......... 703
  21.3.1 Common legal aspects relevant to local governments ......................................................................................... 703
21.4 Special legal matters pertaining to local government ............... 708
  21.4.1 Legal proceedings ........................................................................... 708
  21.4.2 Legal representation for employees or councillors of a municipality ........................................................................... 708
  21.4.3 Aspects concerning evidence ........................................................................... 709
  21.4.4 Fines, bail and the prosecution of offences .................................. 709
  21.4.5 Time of notices, payments and the service of documents and process ........................................................................... 710
  21.4.6 Public servitudes and the custody of documents .............. 712
  21.4.7 Restraint on transfer of property .................................................. 712
  21.4.8 Miscellaneous provisions ................................................................. 716
21.5 Conclusion ................................................................................................ 717

Chapter 22: Concluding remarks ........................................................................ 718

Bibliography ................................................................................................. 732