

Justice Deputy Minister appoints new persons as sheriffs to fill vacant offices countrywide

Sheriffs play an extremely important role in the civil justice system as they serve court processes and execute warrants and orders of court. They are officers of the court and appointed in terms of the Sheriffs Act.

The Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Mr John Jeffery, has appointed 33 new sheriffs to fill vacant offices countrywide.

The appointments followed an open process whereby the posts were advertised and successful applicants were shortlisted and interviewed by an Advisory Committee which was established in each of the nine provinces. Advisory Committees are chaired by Chief Magistrates or Regional Court Presidents and make recommendations to the Deputy Minister regarding fit and proper persons to be considered for appointment.

The Deputy Minister would therefore like to extend his appreciation to the members of the Provincial Advisory Committees for the work done.

The need to make the Sheriffs profession more representative in terms of race and gender was one of the factors that the Deputy Minister took into account in making his decision.

Of the 33 appointed sheriffs, 18 are African (54%), 8 are White (24%), 4 are Coloured (13%) and 3 are Indian (9%). The 16 women appointed represent 48% of the new appointees and the 17 men 52%.

Twelve of the 33 appointed sheriffs were already holding office as sheriff in other smaller areas and will therefore not affect the demographics in terms of race and gender.

The new appointments will now bring the **total** number of permanent sheriffs countrywide to 289. Of these 289 sheriffs, 122 are African (43%), 108 are White (37%), 34 are Coloured (12%) and 25 are Indian (8%). There are 90 female sheriffs (thus 31% of the total sheriffs) and 199 male sheriffs (69%).

The majority of the new appointments will take effect from 1 September 2017 so as to enable the incumbent sheriffs to set up office, to employ personnel, to attend the compulsory prescribed training courses and to ensure a smooth handover of court documents.

Unfortunately some of the vacant offices could not be filled as either no applications were received or the Advisory Committees were not able to recommend fit and proper applicants, as the case may be. This often occurs in small offices which are not economically viable and the Advisory Committees would therefore either recommend that the vacant offices be re-advertised, be allocated to an adjacent sheriff or that the sheriff's office for the high and lower court be merged.

The Judicial Matters Amendment Bill that was approved by Parliament last week will in future enable the Deputy Minister to appoint sheriffs to these offices after the recommendations of the Advisory Committee and the South African Board for Sheriffs have been considered.

It was decided not to fill the vacant office of Pretoria West, which is one of the larger sheriff's service areas, so that a more equitable division of the sheriffs' areas in the Pretoria Magisterial District can be done. It is the intention of the Department to recommend to the Deputy Minister to re-describe and allocate this service area to adjacent sheriffs to try and bridge the income disparities in Tshwane Central.

It is important that sheriffs perform their duties in a professional manner and continue to provide a reliable and effective service to the public, the legal profession and other role players in the justice system. The Department will continue to support and strengthen the sheriffs' profession in order to ensure that justice is accessible to all.

The names of the newly appointed sheriffs and the areas that each is responsible for are attached.

Issued by the Ministry of Justice & Constitutional Development

Enquiries: Advocate Mthunzi Mhaga

Spokesperson for the Department of Justice & Constitutional Development

083 641 8141