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Athol Trollip: The new face of Nelson Mandela Bay

There is no shortage of political figures to choose from this month in relation to local government, but one who is likely to remain in the lime-light is Nelson Mandela Bay (NMB)'s likely Mayor-to-be, Athol Trollip. Trollip, aside from celebrating the DA's lead role in the metro, has also dominated headlines promising stability in the administration for hard-working officials. But just how different are things likely to be under his leadership?

Deeply rooted in the Eastern Cape

Trollip was born in Bedford, in the Eastern Cape and speaks both English and Xhosa fluently, as well as Afrikaans and Zulu (www.iol.co.za, see his victory speech www.timeslive.co.za). He studied agriculture at the University of Natal - a career choice that was overtaken by his career as a politician, which began after joining the Progressive Federal Party in 1980, going on to become an Amathole District councillor for the Democratic Party in 1995 (www.iol.co.za).

Since 1998 Trollip has been the DA's Eastern Cape leader, serving as a member of the provincial legislature between 1999 and 2009, and again since 2013, with an interim stint as member of the National Assembly, where he was leader of the opposition between 2009 and 2011. Trollip has been canvassing as Mayoral candidate for NMB, where he now lives, since April last year.

Trollip has also faced some controversies; notably welcoming since-convicted King Buyelekhaya Dalindyebo into the DA in 2014, as well as facing human rights abuse charges against his family's farm practices. He vehemently denied these charges and the SA Human Rights Commission has since dropped the case (www.iol.co.za).

Trollip's first order of business as Mayor Elect is to forge together a coalition to secure a DA-led majority in NMB, and it will likely take some ongoing work to hold this together. However, at 57 seats, the DA's proportion of the 120 seats in Council is such that it won't necessarily have to negotiate with the combative EFF, needing only a further 4 seats to secure a majority. Notwithstanding the challenge of securing his Mayoral post, this hasn't held Trollip back on both demanding a new work ethos in the Metro, as well as reassuring staff of their job security (assuming adequate levels of competence), as well as undertaking a prioritising of infrastructure spending that will facilitate economic development (ewn.co.za).

Coalition partners, as well as his own campaign criticism of NMB's reliance on the bucket system (using Stats SA Non-Financial Census data which found that the Metro accounted for one third of the units in use country-wide, www.sabc.co.za, mzansilive.co.za), means that Trollip urgently needs to focus on basic service delivery. Unpopular porta-potties in Cape Town point to just how difficult a job this is likely to be.

For Trollip, with his new found power comes great responsibility.

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