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'Jailbreak warders' given final warning

TWO Fort Beaufort prison warders who were suspended after the Christmas escape of 15 awaiting-trial prisoners in December 2014 have been slapped with final written warnings.

The two were found guilty, in an internal disciplinary hearing, of failing to prevent the gang of prisoners from escaping and also of a failure to raise the alarm after they realised that there had been a break-out.

A further two warders, also on duty on the day, were moved to other sections of the prison.

This is according to a "restricted" correctional services department internal investigation report seen by

the Daily Dispatch this week.

The internal report reveals the two suspended officers were also charged "for negligence of their duties and responsibilities, and for encouraging an escape by failing to effectively do their duties as expected".

A second report drawn up by the national Department of Public Works, also seen by the Dispatch, identified security breaches and defects in the dilapidated Fort Beaufort prison, which holds 296 inmates.

The Correctional Services report, referring to the two officers who were moved to other sections, states: "While the two officials cannot be equated with the two members that were on night duty with them at [on] the day of the escape with regard to the roles and responsibilities, they however showed signs of coercing the two officials and thus have choreographed and collaborated their statements."

On Christmas Day 2014 the 15 men,

mostly awaiting trial for serious crimes such as murder, robbery and rape, broke through the roof of a prison cell housing 22 people.

Four inmates were arrested almost immediately, with three more recaptured later that day.

Some were handed back to the prison by their parents.

The internal prisons' report further states that security measures at the institution were not up to scratch and needed attention.

Various officials at the centre, who asked to remain anonymous for fear of victimisation, yesterday told the Daily Dispatch that none of the security measures were implemented.

"We met with our area commissioner on April 12 and raised our concerns over these security breaches. We asked her that they should at least prioritise erecting razor wire fencing so that if these people escape, they will not be able to leave the entire facility.

"She promised to look into the matter, but even two months down the line nothing has been done," said one officer.

Correctional Services' regional commissioner Nkosinathi Breakfast yesterday said a request was sent to their head office for the funding of Fort Beaufort Prison emergency capital works.

"Subsequent to that request, Fort Beaufort formed part of the priority list of facilities to be upgraded which

was sent to head office," he said. He, however, said he did not believe the lives of officials were at risk, saying the centre "was in better condition than other centres nationally and provincially".

The report by the national Public Works Department after a "site inspection" at the facility a few weeks after the breakout recommended that the prison's metal ceilings "need to be removed and replaced with pre-stressed concrete slabs".

It further highlighted issues of water leaks, damaged plaster, damaged doors and windows.

However, none of those have been addressed, according to officials at the centre. — asandan@dispatch.co.za