

MENTAL HEALTH

MPs demand an explanation for hospital fiasco

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It is a decade behind schedule with a cost six times more than originally planned, but the Kimberly Mental Hospital will finally be completed in March, Northern Cape officials assured sceptical MPs on Tuesday.

To add insult to injury for mental patients, there is now a question mark over whether the Northern Cape provincial health department has the money to run the facility.

“There will be financial challenges on completion of the project,” Northern Cape health MEC Lebogang Motlhaping told Parliament’s portfolio committee on health. Documents presented to the committee showed the Northern Cape health department projected a R188m budget shortfall to run the hospital at only 75% capacity in the 2018-19 financial year.

The tender for the 286-bed hospital was awarded to Vista Park Developers in 2005 and construction began in 2006.

It was originally supposed to be handed over to the Northern Cape health department in 2008, but the project was repeatedly delayed, partly due to a legal dispute between the provincial department of public works and Vista Park Developers, its first contractor.

The department fired Vista Park Developers after realising it was not coping with the magnitude of the project, and was then mired in litigation for the next four years.

During that time, the site

stood empty and the weather took its toll – so much so that the next contractor, Inyatsi Construction, had to demolish part of the original structure.

Inyatsi was later bought by the local subsidiary of Portuguese construction group Mota-Engil, which in November 2017 asked for a deadline extension to March 31.

Over the past decade the cost of the project ballooned from R290m to R1.86bn.

The Northern Cape health department’s head of infrastructure, Lesetja Mabona, told Parliament that nine of the hospital’s 31 blocks had been completed, and only minor snags needed to be rectified in the remainder.

The hospital would replace the 142-bed Free State Psychiatric Hospital (previously known as the Oranje Hospital), which would be decommissioned, said Steven Jonkers, Northern Cape health department head.

MPs challenged the Northern Cape delegation to provide more details on why the project had taken so long and cost so much, and were so dissatisfied with their answers they instructed them to report back to Parliament in a fortnight in a more comprehensive manner.

They also quizzed the delegation on the status of an investigation into the tender with Inyatsi, which ran behind schedule because it did not have the capacity to do the job.

“This is taxpayers’ money. Tell us what went wrong with this project,” said committee’s chairwoman Lindelwa Dunjwa.

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