

# MPs grill dept over mental hospital

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THE NORTHERN Cape Department of Health was sent away with its tail between its legs, following a grilling by members of Parliament on the misuse of taxpayers' money, ballooning costs and unending delays in the completion of Kimberley's new mental hospital.

The portfolio committee on health met with the Northern Cape Department of Health, the Northern Cape Department of Public Works and the national Department of Health in Parliament earlier this week.

Officials from the provincial Department of Health assured the portfolio committee that the hospital would be completed by next month, although members of Parliament were not satisfied with its response.

Contractors on site have indicated that at least another six months are needed to complete construction.

"Handing over the site in less than three weeks is impossible. It would not be a good idea to rush things. We are still ordering products to complete the job. It has been over 12 years in progress, what is another six months?" the contractors asked.

They believed that pressure was mounting for the completion of the project as funds had again dried up.

"If they want to meet the deadlines, they must pay the contractors. The Department of Health will have to pay penalties of R85 000 per day if contractors are still on site after March 31.

"We are all on tenterhooks because no one knows what is going on."

The contractor failed to meet the November 2017 deadline and requested an extension until March 31.

The portfolio committee was disappointed with the quality of the presentations delivered by the departments this week, where members of the committee pointed out that the construction of the



hospital began almost 13 years ago and costs have ballooned from an initial R290 million to R1.86 billion.

The committee indicated that the departments failed to provide a detailed update and did not disclose the challenges faced in completing the project.

The departments were instructed to provide a detailed report of all the issues pertaining to the psychiatric hospital and to report back to the committee and submit all the relevant documents to the committee within the next five working days.

The committee expressed concern regarding the delays in the project, which might have violated the Public Finance Management Act in terms of the economy, efficiency, effectiveness and transparency in the use of public resources.

Chairperson of the committee, Lindelwa Dunjwa, stated that the

committee came to the conclusion that there might be huge corruption and wastage in the project.

"The committee is awaiting the submission of the Gobodo and the accountant-general's report on the project, which the departments have promised to share. The reports will shed some light on the extent to which public resources have been utilised."

Dunjwa added that the committee wanted to know the problems being faced by the project and why it was taking so long to complete.

"The committee was of the view that the provincial departments came to present without making the necessary preparations as requested. The presentation by the departments was a matter of compliance to honour the invitation to the meeting. The committee was of the view that the departments were not prepared to provide any

information regarding the project."

She stated that members of the committee advised that the national Department of Health needed to take responsibility for the delays.

"As a member of the joint task team that is tasked with dealing with the management of the project, the department failed to alert the committee of any challenges.

"We have listened, and having a second round of questions will not assist the committee as we will become frustrated. We are not going anywhere."

Questions were also raised in the portfolio committee regarding whether the department, which is already struggling financially, will have the funds to run the facility.

Members of Parliament also questioned the Department of Health on progress into an inves-

tigation into a tender that was awarded to Inyatsi Construction where work fell behind schedule because it did not have the capacity to do the job.

The tender for the 286-bed hospital was first awarded to Vista Park Developers in 2005, but this ended in a protracted legal dispute between the Department of Public Works and Vista after the contract was terminated because the department was not satisfied with progress on site.

Documents were presented to the portfolio committee on health on a projected R188 million shortfall to run the hospital at 75 per cent capacity during the 2018/19 financial year.

Cope MPL, Pakes Dikgetsi pointed out that this was the umpteenth time that the department had set and missed deadlines for the completion of the hospital.

"We will neither be surprised nor shocked if another deadline goes by, unnoticed. This is the product of an inability to manage resources," said Dikgetsi.

He believed that maladministration and corruption was weighing heavily on the project.

"Even if by some miracle, the hospital is completed, the Department of Health will not be in a position to operate it.

"Funds must still be found to buy equipment and recruit clinic staff, medical professionals and trained psychiatric experts. There is currently no budget for salaries. The department is struggling to keep the Kimberley Hospital afloat, how will it manage to operate a hospital of this magnitude?"

Dikgetsi was convinced that expenditure had exceeded R1.86 billion. "This figure was reported two years ago and must have since escalated. No one is being held accountable, despite this monumental mess and endless money pit."

The Department of Roads and Public Works said that it would respond to media enquiries today while the Department of Health indicated that it would provide a response next week.