

One MPL said the **road repair** deal was no different to the tender awarded to Gupta-linked Mediosa

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They paid a firm of consulting engineers R103 million before it did any work and awarded it the contract without it going to tender.

This week was the turn of North West public works department officials to face a late-night grilling in the provincial legislature from a portfolio committee. Members of the Provincial Legislature (MPLs) demanded to know why they went “all the way to Mpumalanga” in March last year to find a company to manage an “emergency” project to repair flood-damaged roads across the province.

The multimillion-rand contract was handed to a Mpumalanga-based company to oversee the project at more than 30 sites in three months. The company’s directors were unavailable for comment yesterday.

In the meeting, which began on Wednesday evening and ended after 1am on Friday morning, MPLs asked how officials could justify the R103 million prepayment. They couldn’t do so and were allowed time to find a letter justifying it.

This follows a marathon meeting last week at which MPLs demanded answers from the province’s health department about how Gupta-linked company Mediosa received a R180 million three-year contract - and a R30 million upfront payment - for a mobile clinic service

R103M PAID before work done

without it going to tender.

During the meeting, public works officials said the contract wasn’t put out to tender because it was an “emergency”. The committee heard that before working in North West, the Mpumalanga-based firm had worked on water projects for the Mbombela municipality.

Committee member Boitumelo Moiloa questioned why the company received the upfront payment “on the eve of financial year end last year”. She asked if the department thought: “We will take this money, dump it somewhere (for it to appear) as if it was put to use.”

Another member Wendy Matsemela said there was “no difference” between this contract and the one awarded to Mediosa.

MPL Alfred Motsi told the meeting the company, little known in North West, could have been earmarked for the project by someone influential.

He said the premier’s letter was signed on March 7, the company’s letter of acceptance on March 14 and, 10 days later, it was paid R103 million. “Someone somewhere knew about this company.”

“We requested a report on the company last year October and it’s only coming now, at the end of February, meaning it was being doctored,” Motsi said.

In a letter to then transport minister Dipuo Peters titled “Request to redirect funds for addressing flood-damaged road infrastructure”, North West Premier Supra Mahumapelo explains the urgent need to prioritise damaged roads and to have other projects deferred to the

following financial year.

“An amount of R103 million has been put aside for this exercise. This amount is what could be salvaged while the actual quantification of the full extent for the flood damage is undertaken,” Mahumapelo wrote.

“It is on this basis that we request your approval to deviate from the approved 2016/17 project list, for the purpose of addressing flood-damaged roads and bridges infrastructure.”

Public works department head Pakiso Mothupi said they didn’t have the “human capital” and were dependent on external companies to manage the project.

During the committee’s questioning, a department official said the same company was given another R11 million contract to repair a road leading to the Oberon holiday resort near Hartbeespoort Dam, which hadn’t been budgeted for.

Seven days later, on March 14 last year, the company formally accepted its appointment as implementation agent for the massive road rehabilitation project, to be undertaken over three months ending in June. According to Mothupi’s report, the project was “completed successfully”.

Sources in the department told City Press that a senior official “signed twice for one chief director who deliberately stayed away from the office because he didn’t want to be part of what would later become a scandal”. The department is expected to appear before the portfolio committee this week.