

Concern over dysfunctional libraries

THE DA in the Province yesterday said that a reply to a parliamentary question last year, revealed that the Northern Cape had 10 dysfunctional libraries, with the worst libraries situated in the poorest areas of the Northern Cape.

"These 10 libraries have been closed for more than a year with no definitive answer on reopening or maintenance from the department. These libraries have suffered vandalism, staff shortages, arson during protests and building upgrades that have yet to be completed," DA spokesperson, Harold McGluwa, said.

He added that the number of dysfunctional libraries was "of grave concern" to the DA as it has an impact on the pass rate of students in the affected communities.

"Community members have appealed to the Department (of Sports, Arts and Culture) to reopen the libraries as the closure of the facilities has a knock-on effect on quality education for pupils," McGluwa said.

Department of Sports, Arts and Culture spokesperson, Conrad Fortune, yesterday said that the Department was committed to promoting a culture of reading and strived to ensure that the Province had community based libraries.

"We have opened two libraries in the John Taolo Gaetsewe District (Logananeng and Churchill), one in Pixley Ka Seme, Petrusville and will also soon be opening a library in Frances Baard (Ritchie).

"However from time to time the Department is faced with various challenges with regard the optimal functioning of our libraries in our Province.

"The Department is aware of several libraries that have had to be closed due to a number of reasons, including the resignation of staff, the destruction of some libraries, especially container libraries in some areas due to community unrest and occupational health and safety concerns," Fortune said.

He added that the Department had recently commenced with the process of recruiting relevant personnel for some of the libraries that do not have staff.

"We are confident that this process will be concluded by the end of next month. In some instances where the Department is not directly responsible for staff, we have been engaging the relevant municipality to ensure that provision is made in their business plans for staff at the affected libraries. With regard to those libraries that are experiencing OHS challenges, we commissioned and received various reports from the Department of Roads and Public Works for libraries that have experienced challenges with their roofing," Fortune stated.

He added that a tender was published during March 2018 by the Department of Roads and Public Works to finalise the appointment of contractors to upgrade the Barkly West Library.

"The Department of Road and Public Works will now complete the appointment process during May 2018. The Department is also in constant consultation with our district and local municipalities to discuss and agree on the process of replacing libraries that were destroyed as a result of community unrest. For example, the Department has already had discussions with the Phokwane, Gasegonyana and Dikgatlong Municipalities to discuss libraries that were destroyed in their areas," Fortune concluded.

– Norma Wildenboer