

Daily Dispatch

Nothing to show for half a billion

Today we report that the Eastern Cape department of roads and public works spent R632-million fixing some of the roads in our province, without the projects going out to tender.

All these contracts were awarded between 2013 and 2016 – with the companies being hand-picked and appointed through deviations. This is allowed in law – where government departments, in extreme cases, bypass normal procurement procedures to acquire services.

And in the case of the 58 roads, the department deviated from normal tender processes, claiming that there was an urgent need to fix the roads.

These projects ranged from R391 000 to R110-million and included constructing speed bumps in Flagstaff, fixing potholes, re-gravelling and the tarring of roads in other areas.

So R110-million was set aside to fix potholes in the province, yet there is hardly anything to show for that work as the province's roads are still riddled with potholes.

In some cases some of the roads that were supposed to have been fixed, remain in a poor state.

For instance, the 24.5km road from the R61 in Ntlaza, Libode to the Hluleka Nature Reserve remains in a poor state despite millions having been allegedly pumped into its upgrade.

The budget for the road was initially R37-million but so far R23.7-million was reportedly spent. However there are no signs that any major upgrades have been done on that road in the last three years.

The investigation by the Premier's office into the questionable contracts should unravel the extent of the rot.

Already, there is prima facie evidence that some corruption had been committed in the awarding of some of the projects.

The premier's office has commissioned business management consulting company The iFirm to probe allegations of corruption at the departments of public works, education and social development.

The other two investigations relate to the R120-million "prefab" schools infrastructure project where millions were embezzled.

The probe is most welcome, but previous investigations of such nature have yielded little, with no one being prosecuted for the corruption and not a cent being recovered by the government.

Hopefully this investigation will not be another box-ticking exercise.

It is about time that those responsible for the corruption are brought to book.

Bhisho is currently sitting with hundreds of pages in reports that are gathering dust.

Ours has come to be known as the province where the corrupt thrive – with little or no consequences for cases of malfeasance.

Even if they resign from their current employment, these officials must face criminal charges. Acting against corrupt officials is important as it restores the people's confidence in the government.

The amount involved in the public works probe is over half a billion rands.

That is a lot of money, especially for a province that is regarded as the poorest in the country.

Every year millions of taxpayers' money is lost to corruption. If we allow this to continue, then our province will never develop. Heads must roll.