

KwaNonqaba police vote for urgent change

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All of the KwaNonqaba Police Station personnel unanimously voted on Thursday, 29 August to request no longer having to work from the current premises.

They want the present police station permanently closed and a new police station to be built on the available land earmarked for it, so working conditions may enable the officers to serve their community effectively.

Although acutely aware of the need for - and most concerned about - effective service delivery to the most densely populated and largest geographical policing jurisdiction in the greater Mossel Bay area, police employees have indicated an unwillingness to continue working under the dire conditions they are subjected to.

This decision follows too many years of having had to endure working conditions that were declared problematic by the health department of the Garden Route Municipality on 12 June.

Rats again

For a second time since 30 May, rats have gnawed through computer cabling at the station. The latest discovery was on Monday, 26 August.

This has once again paralysed the station's online communications, hampering service delivery to both the community and the courts.

Apart from rodents, staff also had to endure a flea infestation and suffer the smell of rat and even dog carcasses accumulated under the temporary park home-type offices perched on stilts. Several employees are suffering from health complaints. They can't seem to shake their health problems. Absenteeism is higher than usual.

Drastic decision

At Thursday's station meeting called by the station commissioner, Lieut-Col Azisa Mandongana, all police employees voiced their concern that a step as drastic as closing down the station will leave the community they serve and protect in the lurch.

However, considering that the Mossel Bay Municipality some time ago made suitable, valuable land available for a new police station, it seems unfair to expect the employees to continue to endure unnecessary hardship.

The dismal working conditions of employees at the KwaNonqaba Police Station have over several years been brought to the attention of the Western Cape MEC for Safety and Security, the Mossel Bay Municipality as the landlord, and other government departments.

Similarly, numerous articles on the topic were

published in the *Mossel Bay Advertiser* and online.

No maintenance

Recently the *Advertiser* reported that the spokesperson for the national Department of Public Works (NDPW), Thami Mchunu, emphatically stated that the department would not effect maintenance at this facility any time soon.

He insisted, "The facility belongs to the municipality and [is] leased to SAPS via NDPW. In terms of the lease agreement, NDPW is responsible for maintenance, however, the client should provide funding for such repairs and renovation."

The municipality recently renewed the lease for the premises for another three years. One of the conditions of the lease agreement is that the NDPW must maintain the infrastructure. The police station has been in existence for approximately 15 years.

To date, the only upkeep to the premises was done piecemeal by the municipality and by the local police members themselves, who used donations or their own funds for the jobs.

Minister asked to intervene

On 15 July the executive mayor, Alderman Harry Levendal, wrote a letter to the Minister

of Police, Bheki Cele, to urge immediate intervention regarding the undesirable and unhealthy working conditions at the KwaNonqaba Police Station.

This letter urged the ministry to avail the necessary funding to have a formal police station built that will best serve the poorest of the poor.

Service delivery

KwaNonqaba police spokesperson Sgt Kapp said that while the police personnel were unhappy with their working conditions, they were more concerned about serving their community. "The members are worried about how best to serve and protect the community despite the dismal conditions. There is so much to take into consideration. It was a difficult decision."

The employees now want the authorities to facilitate the closing of the police station in such a manner that service delivery is affected at little as possible. With gang violence and crime in the area on the increase, the members are aware the community expects effective policing.

Copies of the minutes of the meeting will forthwith be distributed to the Da Gamaskop Police Cluster command for consideration and instructions. Until then, the police personnel are placing their hope on the local leadership of the various authorities to finally find an amicable solution to the problem.

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