

WATER UPDATE

Infrastructure plan in pipeline

STAFF REPORTER

A COMPREHENSIVE plan to address infrastructure challenges hampering development in Kimberley, including the provision of water, will be presented to Northern Cape Premier Zamani Saul within a week.

This follows an urgent meeting held yesterday between Saul, accompanied by three of the Members of his Executive Council, Bently Vass, Abraham Vosloo and Maruping Lekwene, with the leadership of Sol Plaatje led by the executive mayor Patrick Mabilo.

The spokesperson for the Office of the Premier, Monwabisi Nkompela, said the objective of the meeting was to receive a “comprehensive report on the water situation that has affected and inconvenienced many people and businesses in the city”.

“The premier is very concerned about the supply of water and the long-term plans that the municipality has to address infrastructure challenges in the Sol Plaatje Municipality.”

According to Nkompela, the Sol Plaatje team indicated that the scheduled work that took place at the Riverton Water Treatment Works had been completed successfully. “The work essentially entailed the full switchover from the old to the new pump station, in an endeavour to provide a permanent solution to the water situation in the city.”

He added that the premier had mandated the team to work around the clock to ensure that the water supply is restored to households as speedily as is practically possible, and that this kind of disruption should not be repeated again.

“The meeting further agreed

to put together a team of engineers and planners from Sol Plaatje, Coghsta, Public Works and Provincial Treasury, to develop a comprehensive plan to address the infrastructure challenges, which includes water provision, road re-sealing, electricity supply, storm-water drainage and housing, that are hampering development in Kimberley. The team should present this plan to the premier within a week.”

While the lack of water in Kimberley has hit local businesses hard, the Northern Cape Chamber of Commerce and Industry has criticised the lack of communication from the relevant authorities.

The CEO of Nocci, Sharon Steyn, described the situation yesterday as “unacceptable”.

“Neither the premier nor the executive mayor are available to answer questions, while no one can get hold of the directors at the Sol Plaatje Municipality. Even the call centre is not operating,” said Steyn.

“This situation is a disaster and businesses want answers. They need to know when they can expect water so that they can make decisions regarding their businesses. There are old age homes as well as businesses like hairdressers and carpet cleaning services that need to know whether to remain open. But there are no answers from anyone. It is a total disaster.

“People are looking at us for answers but even we have none. We advise residents to ensure that they have sufficient water to meet their needs, but there is no water available.”

The DA in the Northern Cape yesterday criticised the “casual and ad hoc way” in which the water shutdown has been handled



THE QUALITY of water that some residents have seen since the repairs were completed.

Picture: **Danie van der Lith**

by Sol Plaatje Municipality.

“The water shutdown, intended for infrastructure maintenance and upgrades, commenced on Wednesday evening and was scheduled to be concluded by Friday evening. Five days later, however, the city finds itself in a situation where some residents have yet to see water flowing through their taps since the water was turned off. Meanwhile, others are experiencing random streams and such low pressure that their geysers and washing machines cannot even work,” DA leader in the province, Andrew Louw, said.

“On Sunday night, school hostels were forced to call on the public to urgently assist them with water for their pupils,” he pointed out, adding that at the Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe Hospital, the toilets apparently had to be flushed with bottled water.

According to Louw, infection control at the hospital has been severely compromised after the hospital’s water supplies ran dry last week already.

“We appreciate the fact that residents have drummed together to help each other, with individuals, businesses and organisations with excess water supplies assisting those whose water has run out. The onus, however, falls on the municipality, who unlike the residents of Kimberley, has made little effort to assist those who find themselves without water.”

Louw pointed out that the situation has become untenable.

“Worst of all is that the communication by Sol Plaatje Municipality has amounted to a series of false promises that have simply not materialised, followed by what seemed to be a total shutdown of Sol Plaatje, leaving residents completely in the dark.

“This is unacceptable.

“People do not want to be undermined by being told half-truths and untruths. They want the full truth. They want to know the extent of the situation so that they can determine what measures to put in place in order to be able to mitigate the water shutdown.

“These are people with families, people with babies, people who are sick and people who are elderly. What suffering are they not enduring as a result of this water fiasco?”

Louw added that the current

water crisis in Kimberley was more proof that Sol Plaatje Municipality has become one of the worst run municipalities in this country.

“Our city is dirty and potholed, and aside from the regular water shutdowns experienced, residents also continue to endure nightly water cuts.

“We appreciate the fact that Premier Zamani Saul indicated that he would be having an urgent meeting with Sol Plaatje Municipality. We must emphasise, however, that the time for talking has long passed. There can be no denying that this municipality is in need of a dire intervention before the little that is left of our once sparkling city also goes to rack and ruin.”

The DA caucus leader in the Sol Plaatje Municipality, Chris Phiri, meanwhile questioned the lack of contingency plans to deal with disasters like this. “This is a major crisis and there has been no information from the management or the political leadership. Where is the mayor?”

Phiri also questioned what had happened to the Jo-Jo tanks previously used by the municipality to provide communities with water during previous shutdowns. “We will be investigating this?” he added.

While several schools in Kimberley were forced to close and send pupils home, Mediclinic Gariep/Kimberley indicated that they were still fine and still had enough water reserves to continue service delivery at full capacity at both hospitals.

“At this stage we have not been affected negatively by the water situation in Kimberley,” hospital spokesperson Denise Coetzee said yesterday.