

# Public works' R1.3bn 'irregularities' probed by forensic investigators

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Forensic investigators have been hired by the provincial government to investigate how the department of public works forked out millions of rand in “duplicate payments” to service providers for 21 road projects across the province.

They are also looking into alleged irregularities in the pro-

vision of prefabricated classrooms and school laboratories.

This was revealed to the provincial Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) on Friday by public works CFO Lourens Coetzee.

He said the department was awaiting a report compiled by private investigators which has already been delivered to the office of the premier.

Scopa heard that public works did not have the capacity to investigate officials responsible for incurring irregular expenditure, which stood at R1.3bn in 2018/2019, and this was why the office of the premier had hired independent forensic investigation company iFirm to investigate.

“The office of the premier instituted an investigation of

the payments made to service providers pertaining to 21 roads projects and alleged irregularities pertaining to supply, delivery and erection of prefabricated classrooms and laboratories in various schools,” Coetzee reported.

The investigation included probing a service provider who had charged the department “rates that tend to be higher

than the contract rate” in the roads projects.

Public works head of communications Vuyokazi Mbanjwa referred queries to the premier Oscar Mabuyane’s spokesperson, Mvusiwekhaya Sicwetsha, but he had not responded to queries about the forensic report by print deadline. During the Scopa hearing, audit committee chair Singa Ngqwala said

the department needed to strengthen its enterprise risk management directorate, which would enable it to carry out its own investigations.

Earlier, the Scopa committee heard that though the department had R1.3bn in irregular expenditure in the 2018/2019 financial year, this was a big improvement from the situation in 2015 when irregular

expenditure stood at R3.2bn.

The department had paid 95% of its service providers within the prescribed 30 days.

Eastern Cape auditor-general business executive Shereen Noble said there was no evidence that the department had punished officials for irregular expenditure.

Scopa chair Veliswa Mvenya was dismayed that public

works acting HoD Mahlubandile Qwase, MEC Babalo Madikizela and Treasury deputy director-general Deneé Cloete-Page were absent from the meeting. She said the committee needed to look into their absence. The committee came to a brief halt when the power went out and the generator — ironically overseen by public works — failed to kick in.