



MAKING ROOM: KSD municipal spokesperson Sonwabo Mampoza and home affairs district manager in the OR Tambo district, Khanyile Diko, stand in front of the department’s Mthatha offices. The municipality has closed off a section of the road at Owen Street in front of the home affairs premises to allow for people to observe social distancing while waiting in the queue. Picture: SIKHO NTSJOBANE

KSD moves to end people queuing in close quarters at home affairs offices

SIKHO NTSJOBANE

It’s an all too familiar sight in the Mthatha CBD — hundreds of people queuing outside the home affairs office on Owen Street from before dawn.

But now the King Sabata Dalindyebo municipality has come up with a solution to stop the essential service site turning into a Covid-19 superspreader.

It has closed off a portion of Owen Street in a bid to promote social distancing.

KSD municipal spokesperson Sonwabo Mampoza said they had decided to cordon off the street to enable better management of queues outside home affairs.

“We became worried seeing the long queues and observing people failing to observe social distancing. This will allow them to form shorter queues even on the portion of the street that has been closed off to motorists. The closure also ensures they don’t run the risk of being hit by

speeding cars while queuing.”

Khanyile Diko, the department’s district manager within the OR Tambo district, told the Dispatch on Wednesday they were working with the public works department to find new premises as the Owen Street site was getting old and no longer allowed for operational needs.

Diko said they dealt with about 500 people every day, mostly ID applicants who had just turned 16.

As part of the process, their biometric information and that

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of their parents was taken during the ID application.

“This is done to help stop identity fraud,” Diko said.

The long queues were because Mthatha was the main destination for many people from surrounding towns. To limit these numbers they had introduced a mobile service, using a truck to regularly visit far-flung areas of the district.

The truck is loaded with the latest technology to enable officials to process every service that people would normally go to the Mthatha offices for.

“It’s a live-capture system. Everything is done there, including birth registrations. This will relieve the pressure here and lessen the queues outside our building.”

In addition, home affairs has set up offices in local hospitals to help speed up issuing birth and death certificates.

Funeral parlours will also help collect data for death certificates.

“You get situations where a husband and wife have Covid-19 and the wife dies.

“But instead of being in quarantine, the husband will have to run around all over the place trying to get a death certificate. That increases the risk of him infecting others in the queue, and even our own officials, who will be oblivious to the danger of a person with the virus.”

Mampoza said KSD had brought law enforcement officials from its public safety department to help with home affairs queues. A huge tent will be set up to help shelter people from inclement weather.

“Home affairs and the post office are the busiest service points here in our town. Hence we decided to step in and help,” he said.

KSD’s special projects unit portfolio head Zukisa Gana said the municipality was part of a Covid-19 joint operations committee, which included all other government departments.