

MP dismayed at 'dysfunctional' Butterworth police station

LULAMILE FENI

One can be excused for mistaking Msobomvu police station in Butterworth for a chop shop or a scrap yard.

Visitors are greeted by a pot-hole riddled road, broken gates, decaying fencing and a sea of old and damaged police and private vehicles.

The South African and police flags flutter over the eyesore.

The outside lights have for many months not worked, compromising the security of police officers and community members.

Snakes slither from the debris of the vehicles and make their way to the community service centre (CSC), offices and cells.

These were some of things ANC MP Prince Zolile Burns-Ncamashe witnessed during his parliamentary constituency visit to the police station on Friday.

Accompanied by Mnquma councillors, Amathole acting district commissioner Brig Ngangema Xakavu and Msobomvu police station management, Burns-Ncamashe listened in shock as speakers painted a bleak picture of the station.

Station commissioner Lt-Col Mbalela Mtengwane said the CSC, offices and cells get flooded damaging communication equipment.

The visitors heard allegations of detectives defeating the ends of justice by persuading complainants to withdraw cases in exchange for cash. Some police members were also accused of protecting drug dealers and exposing whistle-blowers.

For more than a month, telephones have not worked. Only one vehicle, with smooth tyres services townships including Msobomvu, Cuba, Mchubakazi, Ibika, Zithulele, Extension 14,

Students Village and a number of other villages and informal settlements.

The station commissioner and his branch commander, Cpt Nosipho Sondlo, are kept busy day and night with complainants phoning them.

The station needs a work force of 10 police officers.

One detective is doing the work of at least four investigators and this has resulted in a huge backlog. Two detectives have been on sick leave since March 9.

Detectives have no laptops.

A scanner gathers dust as none of the detectives and support staff knows how to operate it.

To curb crime, community members conduct night patrols using their private vehicles.

"Police are exposed to attack and robbery of their firearms.

Many damaged vehicles are dumped in front of the CSC entrance," CPF member Zuko Peter said.

"The debris obscures the view and makes it easy for police to be waylaid and attacked at night. Pigs, donkeys and cows roam the yard turning it into an animal pound, rather than a

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police station."

Burns-Ncamashe was dismayed.

"What the community members referred to as a scrap yard is really what we found here. It poses a very serious security risk not only for complainants, but also for police personnel who could be robbed of their firearms which can then be used against them as happened in Ngcobo. They have only one vehicle," he said.

Burns-Ncamashe and Xakavu will appeal to the provincial and national commissioners and police minister Bheki Cele to urgently attend to Msobomvu.

"I will request the provincial commissioner's management to find another place for these vehicles; they are indeed an eyesore here," Xakavu said.

He said the police shortage

was a national problem.

"It will take three to five years to stabilise the situation. At this police station eight members have left and now two others are retiring this month," Xakavu said.

He said national public works department would demolish the whole structure and build it afresh.

Community policing forum chair Collegian Daniso said the station which was built in 1972, was becoming dysfunctional.

"We were promised to have the structure rebuilt in November 2015, but, six years later, we still have the crumbling infrastructure; we are only fed lies."

Burns-Ncamashe and Xakavu urged community members to open cases against police members who encouraged complainants to withdraw cases or colluded with criminals



JUNK YARD OR CHOP SHOP? ANC MP Prince Zolile Burns-Ncamashe, right, addresses community leaders at the Msobomvu police station in Butterworth during a parliamentray constituency office outreach programme. Picture: LULAMILE FENI

