



Publication: Cape Argus Late - Main
Title: Cops operating out of a repurposed RDP house
Publish date: 23 Sep 2022
Page: 2

Reach: 27662
AVE:R 28873.00
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SAFETY AND SECURITY

Cops operating out of a repurposed RDP house

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THE Lwandle police station in Helderberg has been a repurposed RDP house since 2001 – and the site will be cleared for construction of a proper police station only in four years' time.

The police station is also made up of Nutec and container offices that complement the RDP house, provincial police confirmed.

Lwandle police station became a satellite in 2003/2004 and it became fully fledged in 2008. In a parliamentary internal question paper, DA MP Benedicta van Minnen asked Police Minister Bheki Cele whether he had plans to house the police station in a fit-for-purpose building.

Her questions followed an MPs site visit to the police station on July 29, where they were updated by the provincial police figureheads on the state of the building and plans.

Provincial police spokesperson Warrant Officer Joseph Swartbooi said: "Part of the SAPS office as cited in your enquiry is located in a repurposed RDP house since 2001, while the rest of the offices are housed in park homes."

In the internal question paper, Van Minnen describes the park homes as "prefabricated containers (that are) utterly unsuitable for purpose, unable to perform its function and expose police personnel to unhealthy and unsanitary conditions".

WO Swartbooi confirmed plans for a new SAPS office were being discussed at a high level and were nearing the final stages.

"The site clearance is scheduled to commence during the 2026/2027 financial year," he said.

He said the police station was on a waiting list of the stations to receive new buildings from the Public Works Department.

Asked how many police officers were stationed there, he said: "The number of police personnel at the station cannot be disclosed to public for the purpose of the operation."

The police station was built in 1953 and has about 90 officers tending to the safety needs of around 60000 residents and 19 informal settlements.

Previously surrounded by a quiet area, the Lwandle precinct slipped into the top 30 murder hotspots in crime data for the first quarter of this year.

Van Minnen, who is expecting her answers next month, had asked Cele whether he had plans for the police station, whether he was aware of the Sir Lowry's Pass Village satellite station which was also in "perilous condition", and whether any progress had been made with regards to a problem house that was a hotbed for crime on the corner of Jubilee Crescent and Andries Pretorius Street in Somerset West.

Van Minnen said: "The Lwandle SAPS desperately need a new police station built. It's an old RDP house donated by the original developer."

Community Safety and Police Oversight MEC Reagen Allen said he is "deeply alarmed" by the state of the police station and will soon visit the station to get first-hand information of what exactly is happening there.

"In addition to this, I'll be writing to the SAPS provincial commissioner to enquire why after 21 years, there hasn't been any progress in the establishment of a fixed building for this station."