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U-TURN

Homeless shelter in District Six scrapped

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AN ABOUT-turn on a proposal to establish an additional homeless shelter in District Six has been described as a “merry-go-round to nowhere”, as the metro experienced an uphill battle to alleviate homelessness.

This, as the provincial Department of Social Development yesterday said it would no longer move ahead with plans for an additional homeless shelter in Cape Town.

The department received 28 submissions in support of and against the development when the public participation period ended in July.

The department said it had considered community objections and budget cuts facing the country.

“The Western Cape Department of Social Development has taken a decision to reprioritise the funds to assist with the equivalent expansion of bed spaces for homeless adults at various NGO-run shelters both within the City of Cape Town and in other parts of the province,” the department said.

Carlos Mesquita, founder of Outsider, a community upliftment organisation for the homeless, said the decision by the department was not surprising.

“The provincial department’s contribution to reducing the number of homeless people in Cape Town has been less than zero during the past decade. They continue to fund the same organisations they were funding 30 years ago. To make matters worse, the shelter model they fund is the emergency/temporary shelter model which is only effective in housing people who have just lost their accommodation and find themselves in dire straits.

“There is no way it will help by adding extra beds to the existing shelters that those living on the streets, have learnt, through experience, are nothing but a merry-go-round on their way to nowhere. These shelters with the so-called upliftment programmes offered like EPWP and PEP are all time-bound by three months. The only benefit is reaped by the City and some service providers that are supplied with cheap labour and no labour issues due to the contracts signed.

“Those experiencing homelessness tend to land up back on the streets without a job every three to six months,” Mesquita said.

Siwaphiwe Myatza-Mzantsi, media officer at U-Turn Homeless Ministries, said the prevalence of homelessness in the country, especially in big cities, was evident.

She said targeting areas like the Cape Town CBD to provide for more safe spaces would enable homeless people to access support services.

“There are not enough shelters and rehabilitation programmes to help people off the street. The government needs to work with local NGOs and provide an adequate budget to turn the tide on homelessness.

“We hope the government can do more by having a proper national policy on homelessness and by providing adequate budgets/resources to the Department of Social Development that reflect the scale of the problem.”