﻿ 14 May 2020

﻿

﻿Dear Premier Winde,

I regret having to write to you, but the serious issue of dealing with the Muizenberg homeless during lockdown seems to have become a football kicked around between the different levels of Government with none taking responsibility and acting effectively. The situation now is that, following release from Strandfontein, there is an increasing number of homeless arriving in Muizenberg who have now created what is a fast growing informal settlement in Muizenberg Park – this is no exaggeration. Principal Inspector Muizenberg M.P Mkwasi has described the situation as “out of hand” and said “  I personally investigated this situation and the park near the police station is quickly becoming a tent city with displaced people coming out of Strandfontein Safe Space”. This was on 6 May 2020, and the situation has radically escalated since.

While we recognize that there are multiple levels of government involved and that the blame cannot be laid solely on the CoCT’s feet, the fact remains that residents and businesses look first to local and provinicial government, and therefore hold CoCT and Western Cape Provincial government accountable. Residents are fed up and threatening civil disobedience. In short, there is a impending media disaster about to take place for CoCT and WC governance.

First a little background might help you understand what has happened and how.

Prior to lockdown Muizenberg had a homeless population of about 40 sleeping rough. For years the MID (Muizenberg Improvement District) has attempted to get a shelter created but to no avail.

When lockdown 5 arrived it was deemed imperative that all homeless persons were to be placed in central, controlled locations to ensure compliance with the regulations. SAPS immediately rounded up our homeless population, as well as homeless from surrounding areas such as Kalk Bay, and initially placed them in the park behind Muizenberg Police Station. This was obviously unsuitable having no shelter, water or ablutions. So they were moved to the beach area outside the LE offices where there was some shelter, ablutions, and food could be provided by community organizations assisted by MID.

Once Strandfontein was ready they were transported there and accommodated until April 30th. However, with Lockdown 4 from May 1st in operation the CoCT no longer had responsibility and so it was decided to close the facility and return the homeless to their places of origin. And so, over a period of several days, CoCT Law Enforcement vehicles transported some 40 persons back to Muizenberg and, literally, dumped them back behind the police station. Given that lockdown regulations continue the individuals were presumably not permitted to move, and should sleep under the stars, without water, toilets or food. And that, it appears, is the end of the matter as far as the CoCT are concerned.

This has created two sets of problems, one immediate, the other longer term. Your intervention in both is urgently needed if the welfare of those affected is to be protected and the interests of the nearby residents are to be respected.

SHORT TERM PROBLEMS

Some 40 individuals are currently sleeping in a few tents erected (illegally) in the Muizenberg Park by a community organisation. There are no ablutions and so the surrounding bush and grass areas are used as toilets which is creating a serious health hazard. Litter is everywhere and local residents are up in arms. Daytime sees door to door begging, bin picking and loitering outside every shop. With the current Covid pandemic, this creates a huge health risk to the homeless as well as the broader community, as the homeless are in constant contact with people, have no sanitation and no masks.

While there is certainly a criminal element among this homeless community, there are a great number of people who have no criminal intent but who simply have nowhere to go. Shelters are full and the City’s promise to relocate homeless to shelters is not occurring as there is simply no capacity.

Council deem the whole problem as belonging to SAPS, and SAPS understandably not having a solution, simply ignore it, despite it being quite literally on their doorstep (the park is directly opposite the Muizenberg SAPS station).

There is a further problem now in that LE have stated that no removal of structures once occupied is permitted during lockdown so they won’t act. This could easily escalate into a full on illegal informal settlement right in the heart of Muizenberg should other structures be erected. Responsibility ought to lie squarely with the CoCT which has seemingly abdicated. Which is why your intervention is now being urgently requested.

LONG TERM PROBLEM

What is particularly frustrating for the MID directors is that we foresaw this exact situation taking place and have for weeks been in talks with relevant CoCT officials, asking for assistance to fast track a place of safety. MID has some capex funds available to assist with creating a place of safety, as well as a strong working relationship with local Community groups to assist with the implementation of feeding schemes and this was all made abundantly clear during numerous correspondences.  Until very recently the CoCT gave assurances that it would provide a safe place/shelter in Muizenberg and that it would be ready by [May 20th.](x-apple-data-detectors://5) However, to date even the first step of choosing a location (MID suggested 3 options) hasn’t happened. In addition we have been informed that a debate is now happening between the CoCT and your Provincial Government about running costs. All of this suggests that it won’t be ready by the promised date nor any time in the near future. It is even unclear whether Capex has been identified and earmarked.

Should this promised facility now be fast tracked it will take care of both the short and long term problems.

As MID, we have been working tirelessly for a proactive solution to be in place before the homeless returned to the streets from Strandfontein, so as to ensure there was at least some form of shelter and food in place, which would have negated the above situation as the returning homeless would have been housed and fed and therefore not had any need to break regulations and place themselves and the entire community at further health risks. Yet, as outlined above, to date we have been met with nothing but unfilfilled promises and what appears to be one sphere of government simply passing the buck to another; from CoCT to Provincial, to National and then back again.

We have full correspondence on file should you wish to receive more detail.

Please urgently intervene before this already dire situation spirals out of control.

Peter Corbett

MID Chair