

PARLIAMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF THE WESTERN CAPE

ANNOUNCEMENTS, TABLINGS AND COMMITTEE REPORTS

THURSDAY, 14 APRIL 2022

TABLING

The Speaker:

Tabling of documents in terms of section 132(2) of the Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003 (Act 56 of 2003):

Witzenberg Municipality

- (a) Minutes of special Council meeting on the Annual Report for 2020/21.
- (b) Oversight Report of the Municipal Public Accounts Committee for 2020/21.
- (c) Annual Report for 2020/21.

Copies attached.

COMMITTEE REPORT

Report 19/ 2021

Ref: Health Update /‘Adjusted’ Alert Level 3 lockdown

Report of the Ad hoc Committee on COVID-19, in performing oversight over the work of the provincial executive authority as it responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, including oversight over any part of the provincial executive authority, any provincial department, any organ of state and any provincial entity involved in activities dealing with the pandemic, on the themes/meetings covered for December 2021, as follows:

The Ad hoc Committee on COVID-19 consists of the following members:

Mr RI Allen (DA)
Mr D America (DA)
Ms DM Baartman (DA)

Mr G Bosman (DA)
 Ms LJ Botha (DA)
 Mr FC Christians (ACDP)
 Mr CM Dugmore (ANC)
 Mr BN Herron (GOOD)
 Ms PZ Lekker (ANC)
 Mr PJ Marais (FFP)
 Ms WF Kaiser-Philander (DA)
 Mr AP van der Westhuizen (DA)
 Ms MM Wenger (DA) (Chairperson)
 Ms R Windvogel (ANC)
 Mr M Xego (EFF)

Alternative Members:

Mr RD MacKenzie (DA)
 Ms LM Maseko (DA)
 Ms ND Nkondlo (ANC)
 Mr MK Sayed (ANC)
 Mr D Smith (ANC)

Procedural Staff:

Ms W Hassen-Moosa, Procedural Officer
 Ms S Jones, Procedural Officer
 Mr B Daza, Senior Procedural Officer
 Mr M Sassman, Manager: Committee Support

1. Introduction and Background

The Ad hoc Committee on COVID-19 (the Committee) was established by the Speaker of the Western Cape Provincial Parliament on 14 April 2020 in accordance with Standing Rule 119(1) (b) of the Standing Rules of Western Cape Provincial Parliament. The Committee was tasked with the responsibility to perform oversight over the work of the provincial executive authority as it responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, including oversight over any part of the provincial executive authority, any provincial department, any organ of state and any provincial entity involved in activities dealing with the pandemic.

The meetings have been held virtually, so as to comply with COVID-19 lockdown regulations issued by National Government, as well as a decision of the Programming Authority, to enforce social distancing rules.

2. Election of Chairperson, Adopted Themes and the Rules of Engagement

On 17 April 2020, Member M Wenger (DA) was elected to serve as the Chairperson of the Committee in accordance with Standing Rules 82(1) and 85. The Committee adopted 12 themes around which it would address the COVID-19 pandemic. The 12 adopted themes were as follows:

1. Health Department Responses and Preparations
2. Policing, Security and Police Brutality
3. Food Security
4. Protection of the Vulnerable

5. Disaster Management and Local Government Oversight
6. Economic Recovery, Support and Livelihoods
7. Transport and Infrastructure
8. Schooling and Education
9. Human Settlements
10. Citizen Surveillance
11. Intergovernmental Relations and Community Cooperation
12. Government Finance and Budgets

3. Additionally, the Rules of Engagement during virtual meetings were indicated as follows:

1. All meetings would be open to members of the public and media via livestreaming;
2. All Members microphones must be muted at the beginning of the meeting to avoid background noise;
3. Members are to flag Points of Order in the Chat Function of Microsoft Teams (the application through which virtual meetings are held);
4. All videos and audio must be switched off to improve the quality of the connection; however, if a Member/Minister/HOD/Official is speaking, they may put on their audio and video;
5. Participants must switch off their microphones once they are finished speaking;
6. In terms of maintenance of order, in accordance with the “Directives for Sittings of the House and Meetings of Committees by Electronic Means”, ATC’d on Friday, 17 April 2020, Section 8 states that “when a Member is considered to be out of order by the presiding officer, the presiding officer may mute the microphone of such a Member and call such a Member to order”; and
7. Section 10 of the Directives ATC’d on 17 April 2020 speaks to the application of Standing Rules. Section 10 states that “in instances where these directives are not clear or do not cover a particular eventuality in respect of sittings of the House or meetings of the committees by means of videoconferencing, the Standing Rules must apply as far as this is reasonably and practically possible and, in instances where they cannot be applied, the ruling by the presiding officer must be final”.

4. The themes/meeting covered in December 2021 included:

- 4.1 Health Department Responses and Preparations

5. THEMES: Health Update, ‘Adjusted’ Alert Level 3 lockdown and rollout of the vaccine

5.1 Overview and background

The Committee requested a briefing from the provincial Minister of Health and the provincial Department of Health on 01 December 2021.

The purpose of the meeting was to receive an update on the progression of the COVID-19 pandemic with specific reference to the indicators, modelling and situational analysis of the fourth wave, an update on the progress of the vaccine roll-out, including vaccinations for 12-17 years old and the possibility of boosters for healthcare workers, teachers and 60+ individuals.

5.2. Briefing by the Minister of Health and the Head of the Department of Health

Observations and challenges

5.2.1. The Minister informed the Committee that Pfizer has applied to the South African Health Products Regulatory Authority (SAHPRA) to provide COVID-19 vaccine booster shots. Currently, the only people on boosters were healthcare workers who were part of the Sisonke rollout that started in late February. The older persons would get access to the boosters around January, February or March 2022.

The Minister indicated that there was an “Alert” phase, followed by a period known as a “Resurgence” and after that there would be a fourth wave. At the moment, the province was not in a fourth wave, instead, it had entered the “Alert” phase. The Department would have to wait for another three days before it could confirm whether the province was experiencing a resurgence or not. With regards to the new Omicron variant, the Minister reported that the Department was still gathering data and evidence, first from the Gauteng data, and then with a proxy using its own samples.

The Department was concerned about those in the age group from 50 years and above, specifically ages 50 to 59 years, where a number of people were still unvaccinated. There were about 1.4 million people aged 50 years and older and only about 60 percent of them had been vaccinated. Ideally, the target was to vaccinate 85 percent of people who are over-50 years old by the end of 2021, while 65 percent of other age groups would be vaccinated. Unfortunately, the Department was unable to meet this target. But it has done its part in exploring different innovative interventions, such as pop-up sites in the malls; pop-up sites at South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) offices; taxi ranks; and Emergency Medical Services vehicles that provided music for minstrels and other people.

The Minister reported that mandatory vaccination was discussed during the meeting with the universities on 30 November 2021. She stated that universities have been upfront and open about the vaccine mandate. The Department has also met with Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). There were 32 TVET colleges and 22 community education and training centers, which constituted a major concern for the Department.

5.3. Health update

Dr K Cloete, the Head of Department briefed the Committee, he provided a comprehensive COVID-19 and Vaccine Update. His briefing covered the following:

- Surveillance and response update;
- Expectations for the third wave;
- Triggered third-wave response; and
- Vaccine implementation update.

Dr Cloete informed the Committee that with regards to surveillance, the Department was tracking every metric being reported on. So far, the province has experienced three waves, and was beginning to see an increase in cases. With regards to the national trend, he reported that there were steep increases in Gauteng and other provinces except the Free State and the Northern Cape. The Western Cape was currently recording an average of about 100 new cases per day. He stated that the province was in a “resurgence”, as an increase of more than 20 percent sustained for seven consecutive days from the 21 to 28 November 2021 had been recorded.

With regards to the new variant, the rapid emergence of Omicron accounted for 68 percent of specimens in South Africa by 21 November, while more than 60 percent of Western Cape specimens had PCR markers for Omicron. As of 30 November 2021, the province has recorded 15 gene sequence confirmed cases with Omicron.

Regarding what the Department knew about Omicron, he reported that scientists were still tracking it to check whether it was more transmissible than the Delta or Beta variants.

In preparation for the fourth wave, the Department appointed and extended the contracts of an additional 863 COVID-19 staff until the end of March 2022. The Department also had 1 471 healthcare workers and support staff, which included 603 interns for the vaccination drive. There were also 803 additional applicants who could still be appointed if and when the need arises.

On the status of vaccinations, Dr Cloete reported that although 2.4 million people have received the first dose of vaccinations (which was roughly 50 percent) and 2.1 million people were fully vaccinated (accounting for 43 percent), there were still 2.5 million people aged 18 years and older who were yet to be vaccinated.

Administration of booster doses for the general population over the age of 50 years would start during the first week of January 2022 when people would be six months beyond their second dose of Pfizer.

The Department's fourth wave risk mitigation was targeted at the vulnerable. Grocery vouchers have been extended to those over the age of 50 years. The Department's key message remained that vaccination was important; people should wear masks even if they have been vaccinated; windows should be opened to ensure proper ventilation; and more meetings should be held outdoors.

Dr Cloete noted the President announcement on 28 November 2021 that the National Government would establish a task team to consider the possibility of making vaccines mandatory for specific activities and locations. The Department stated that being an employer of healthcare workers they could only make recommendations and not impose a vaccine mandate, considering that an employer-employee relationship would have to be taken into account. This was because this relationship automatically activated the labour laws. It was for this reason that the Department of Public Service and Administration (DPSA) was responsible for developing a policy framework to guide vaccine mandates. He stated that imposing vaccinations would lead to labour issues and court cases. He further reported that the Department was not in a position to impose vaccinations.

6. Acknowledgements

The Chairperson thanked the Minister and the provincial Department of Health for the presentation and their answers to all questions posed by Members. She also extended a word of appreciation to all healthcare workers for the tremendous work they are doing to save lives and keep everyone safe. The Chairperson also thanked Members for their participation in the meetings held so far.