

THE WEEKLY

HOUSING SCAM EXPOSED

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Cracking the whip ... COGTA and Human Settlements MEC, Olly Mlamleli

Six senior officials have been suspended after they were fingered in various acts of fraud and corruption involving the awarding of RDP houses.

The MEC for Cooperative Governance, Traditional Affairs and Human Settlement, Olly Mlamleli has vowed to root out corruption after six senior housing officials in her department were suspended on fraud and corruption allegations.

In a scam said to have cost the provincial government close to R500-million, the six were suspended for allegedly being involved in the manipulation of the individual subsidy system (ISS), allocation lists of contractors and making advance payment to contractors before the completion of the job. The technical staff is accused of poor or non-inspection of the houses built by contractors.

The suspended officials include the chief director of housing programme management, Mamiki Mokhele; director of priority and intervention programmes Corney Twala; Fifi Makhaotse working in housing subsidies and development unit; Kaizer Maxatshwa from housing development planning and monitoring unit; Kabelo Kolo, who is Director of project management and technical Services, and Loyiso Ndenze, a director of informal settlements and land tenure.

In an exclusive interview with The Weekly, Mlamleli has promised “to root out corruption” in her department and ensure that the people of the province receive quality RDP houses. She told The Weekly that allegations of corruption against senior housing officials; shoddy workmanship on RDP houses as well as manipulation of the Housing Subsidy System, came to her attention during her tenure as the chairperson of the Free State Legislature portfolio committee on Cooperative Governance, Traditional Affairs and Human Settlements.

“Contractors, as well as community members, complained to me while I was the chairperson of the committee during my oversight visit to towns such as Brandfort and Bethulie.

We had raised the matter with the department. When I joined the department, I received phone calls and met with contractors and communities who complained about the same things. So I had to act," said Mlamleli.

The Free State province has been dogged by allegations of incomplete and shoddy houses and a brewing storm of legitimate housing beneficiaries who have been removed from the waiting list and replaced by undeserving recipients.

Mlamleli said this week that other allegations include the manipulation of the Housing Subsidy System (HSS) used to capture information of housing beneficiaries. Senior officials apparently tampered with the system to change the details of beneficiaries.

"We found instances where houses are allocated but there are no beneficiaries. In other instances, the system reflects that payments have been made but there are no details of beneficiaries and other critical information that will enable us to establish the veracity of the information," said Mlamleli.

According to Mlamleli, there are several houses throughout the province which have been left at the foundation phase, are incomplete or have structural deficiencies but the contractors were paid in full. "Some of the so-called houses literally shake when there is wind."

She said information also came to her attention from contractors that certain senior officials added more houses to the number of houses the previous MECs allocated to contractors under the ISS. "Clearly the added houses were for their own financial benefit. They would add up to 10 houses on top of the allocation by the MEC."

Mlamleli has called on the public to be patient while she "cleans the mess" at the department. She promised a speedy investigation and added that the suspended officials will remain innocent until proven guilty. "If they are found guilty action will be taken. If they are not found guilty, we will decide on how we proceed to handle the matter."

Human Settlements head of department, Nthimotse Mokhesi, said the six officials have been suspended on full pay. They will be forwarded the formal charges and appear before a disciplinary committee within the next 60 days. The internal investigation will be concluded on October 31 2012. Mokhesi said the department will ensure the matter is speedily resolved so that housing service delivery is not affected.

"We are aware that the suspended officials hold key posts in the department which are important for service delivery. We will ensure that housing service delivery is not affected by this action," said Mokhesi.

Meanwhile, Mlamleli said the department will not build new houses in the next two financial years. Government will fix and complete the incomplete and deficient houses.

[Source: <http://theweekly.co.za>]