

■ METRO

Probe into 'abuse' at shelter

Homeless 'locked in cage' at Bellville site

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THE City is investigating serious allegations of abuse and human rights violations against the company running the temporary shelter for the homeless at Paint City, Bellville.

Mayco member for community services and health, Zahid Badroodien, said: "The City can confirm that an investigation was instituted as soon as we became aware of the allegations."

The allegations were made to human rights monitors accredited by the SA Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), about illegal strip searches and other human rights violations allegedly committed at the Paint City site. The shelter is managed by Matdoc Projects, the service provider contracted by the City.

Community Chest chief executive Lorenzo Davids was, in September, the first person to draw the City's attention to problems at Paint City.

Davids said: "At the homeless site at Paint City, we have serious concerns. The human conditions are appalling."

In an letter to Badroodien, written on September 20, Davids said: "We encountered a cage in which people are locked. We have video footage of the cage with the people inside. I spoke with the two people detained inside the cage. They said they were being held there for drunkenness.

"I immediately went to the most senior person on site and asked her about it. She reported that they (homeless people) are locked inside the cage if they are drunk as the contractor can't handle drunk people...

"I want you to please treat this as an official report to you. Poor defenceless and homeless people are at the mercy of another 'service provider'

who lacks all the necessary skills sets, e.g. to handle a behaviour as basic as drunkenness. We were also told we can't photograph the facility or interview anyone, which I found strange because it's a government site."

One of the SAHRC-accredited monitors, Reverend Annie Kirke, said: "The service provider that the City got to manage the Paint City safe space is a security company with no prior experience in housing the homeless.

"The allegations against the contractors include the violation and intimidation of women, including strip-searching by an employee of the contractor, and the intimidation, victimisation and abuse of residents."

Dylan Yeo, 41, a homeless person, said: "I left the shelter on Tuesday, November 3 after weeks of intimidation and threats as a result of trying to seek redress, justice and accountability from the site management.

"I was assaulted and injured by the private security who work at the shelter, and evicted from the site by one of the directors of the service provider...

"On Sunday, September 20, two human rights monitors accredited to the SAHRC, Zona Morton and Eugene van Rooyen, came to Paint City.

"They had heard about the allegations of strip searching and received the footage of the cage," Yeo said.

"While they were outside, the management of Matdoc spoke to the residents and told us that we had the right to speak to the SAHRC monitors... At the same time, another of the Matdoc people began telling us that if we spoke to the SAHRC, they would close down Paint City..."

When the Argus visited the site, it was not allowed inside. A security guard said he would call the management, which he did not do.