Speech notes on the Budget Vote 1, Office of the Premier – Edmund van Vuuren (MPL) – 02 June 2015

*The Premier is not serious about fraud and corruption if only R7 million is made available*

* 250 backlog cases for fraud and corruption and only a measly R7 million made available to fight fraud and corruption.
* Litigation cases regarding service delivery within the province because of Legislative prescripts not followed.
* Irregular expenditure on services not delivered.

Honourable Speaker, protocol observed, the Democratic Alliance is accepting the report tabled here today as it captures the inputs made by all and sundry during our deliberations with the officials of the said department.

Honourable Speaker, the Premier has said, in this House, that the Office of the Director General would be bolstered through the Technical Support Unit that will provide support and intervention to departments and municipalities. The Premier has also said that an initial allocation of R10 million has been set aside for this purpose and that support to the Department of Health and Education will continue. Honourable Speaker, the Democratic alliance would like to know how long this support will be given to these departments, and whether the support given to these departments has yielded any positive results. If so, can it be quantified and qualified and if not, will these Departments be continuously supported by the Office of the Premier, irrespective whether there are measurable outcomes or not? What will be done differently by a Technical Support Unit that cannot be done by the management of these departments? Are certain personnel within these departments being paid to only warm and occupy their seats, whilst outsourcing is the order of the day? In a Democratic Alliance Government, like that which is going to happen in the Nelson Mandela Bay Municipality in 2016, appointments will be made based on capabilities and not on allegiances and affiliations, in order for departments, to be effectively managed, through the utilisation of personnel on their staff establishment. It has been said on many an occasion that one of the challenges of departments to deliver services effectively and expeditiously, is the challenge of capacity.

So then if capacity is an issue, what than are the root causes for capacity to be an issue, and what steps are being taken by the Office of the Premier to ensure that this challenge is addressed once and for all?

Hon. Speaker, the Democratic Alliance is not happy with the slow speed at which the Office of the Premier is addressing the case backlog of fraud and corruption in the province.

There are currently 250 case backlogs dating back as far as 2004 that are still outstanding - seriously.

Hon. Speaker, this is unacceptable. It seems that perpetrators of fraud and corruption are untouchable.

Hon. Speaker, if the Office of the Premier is serious about crime and corruption, why is the Mayor of Buffalo City Metropolitan Municipality and her colleagues who are facing charges of fraud and corruption in the Mandela burial fraud cases still working in an ANC controlled municipality, and not suspended until their case is finalised by court.

Hon. Speaker, the Democratic Alliance is appealing the Premier to use his executive powers to suspend all those, the Mayor of BCM and her colleagues included, that will send out a clear and unambiguous message that this Premier is serious about rooting out corruption.

Hon. Speaker, if the Office of the Premier was serious about fighting crime and corruption in this province, why then was a paltry R 7 million allocated to this sub-programme that is supposed to be on the fore front in eradicating fraud and corruption. It says a lot about this Province’s commitment in its fight against fraud and corruption.

Hon. Speaker, the budget management within the Office of the Premier leaves much to be desired. The Office of the Premier has awarded a national IT company, Internet Solutions, a contract for the installation of new telephones. This company was contracted for a period of 24 months, starting in June 2014.

Hon. Speaker, this company was paid in full, an amount of R2, 227 million without the work being completed. To make matters worse, there are delegated powers regarding the amounts that can be authorised by the different levels of officials, but in this case, not even the accountable official was aware of this payment of R2, 227 million to the service provider. This Office of the Premier was uncontactable for quite some time, because of phones not being operational on the old numbers, denying the public access to discuss matters of provincial importance, whilst people are being paid for not having fully complied with the conditions of the contract.

Hon. Speaker, it is unheard of that the Office of the Premier has paid the full amount of the 24 month contract (R2, 227m) instead of paying the installation fee of R77 634.00 plus monthly rental of R89 558.35 per month for 24 months. This implies that the service provider has been pre-paid an amount of R1, 8 million. This is an irregular expenditure, and the Premier as the leader of the department should be compelled to deal with the affected officials in ICT and payment sections.

Hon. Speaker, this irregular payment is either as a result of dishonesty or incompetency, or should I say, the irregular payment was made because of capacity issues – just asking? This is messy, it is serious, especially for a department that is seen as the torch bearer for clean governance, and hopefully consequence management will not be delayed in this case.

Hon. Speaker, as the Democratic Alliance, we demand that the service provider return the money because services to the value of R1, 8 million have not been received. Hon. Speaker, the Premier should account to this house as to why, under his guide irregular payments have been affected.

Hon. Speaker, the Democratic Alliance fully agrees with the Premier when he said in the State of the Province Address that the rising costs of litigations in the Province will dent every effort being made to take this Province forward.

The Departments with high levels of litigation are Education and Health. Education is under siege with litigations, particularly from the Legal Resources Centre in respect of schools and suppliers as well as from own employees. These Departments have also made themselves guilty of contempt of court, thus further contributing to huge amounts of money been wasted, that is reflective of a contemptuous attitude that has become a norm rather than an exception in this Province. The number of court orders in this Province is out of hand. Poor or no adherence to the Promotion of Access to Information Act, as well as poor document management in the Provincial Administration are major causes for the increasing number and value of litigation, as well as the reputational damage caused to an administration where legislative prescripts are discussed but not effectively implanted.

The increase in litigation cases, due to malpractices in the Departments, especially in Education and Health, erodes public confidence in government services.

Honourable Speaker, the Democratic Alliance is of the firm belief that these litigation cases are not adequately addressed and curbing of litigation costs will only be effective if there is total compliance with set legislation.

There should also be an on-going capacity building amongst all officials within the Provincial Administration in relation to the Legal Compliance Framework and Litigation management plan, amongst others, and not only the monitoring of litigation cases. The office of the Premier should be the final arbitrator on litigation cases.

Currently there is a case in court against the suspended Superintendent General of the Department of Education, and honestly I am not holding my breath that the Province will litigate successfully, if the record on litigation is to be considered. Litigation is costing millions and it is one of the factors that retard service delivery.

Hon Speaker, hopefully the Premier will respond positively to issues raised here today.

We are all concerned what is happening and we all want opportunities created in order to improve the quality of life of all our people in a fair and caring way.

I thank you.

The Democratic Alliance supports the report.