

## **ANSWERS TO OPEN LETTER FROM UNKNOWN PERSON VIA THE PRINCE ALBERT FRIEND**

**DATE: 25 MAY 2020**

### **ANSWERS COMPILED BY MUNICIPAL MANAGER**

#### **1. When will residents be able to review and comment on Prince Albert's disaster preparedness plan?**

Prince Albert Municipality have a Disaster Management Plan that is reviewed annually as part of the IDP process. The advertisement for public comment were invited on 25 March already. No comments were received. Please note that the Disaster Management Plan is a five-year plan, reviewed annually during the IDP process. See the following link

<https://pamun.gov.za/resource-category/integrated-development-plan?archive=05-2020>

The current pandemic is managed within the existing Disaster Management Plan. We have a Joint Operational Command (JOC) for local level that feeds into the district, provincial and national JOC's. The content of these JOC's, focus on operational and strategic matters, taking into account the continuously developed regulations. 85 new regulations were developed since the initial lockdown announcement on 15 March.

Prince Albert Municipality did develop a local COVID-19 reaction plan. This plan was developed with the guidance from the national and provincial governance spheres. It is regularly updated with each new relevant regulation that comes out. Please note that this COVID-19 response plan is a fluid document, guided by the regulations and developments via the relevant JOC's and sector departments. It focuses on operational matters mostly.

The document is available on the municipality's website under the COVID-regulations.

This municipality keeps the community updated via facebook and bulk e-mails and bulk messaging. We also use the WhatsApp groups of our councillors in the respective wards. During the last 28 days the Prince Albert Municipality facebook page posts' reached over 11 300 people, we had 3 500 engagements and 25 link clicks. Nearly 80 bulk e-mails were sent to our distribution list to keep the community updated on COVID-19.

The Municipal Manager also provided her direct cellphone number to the community for engagements via WhatsApp. Since 2 April to 25 May 12 757 WhatsApp messages were received with 4 709 sent via this format.

As this is a national disaster, press releases are also made by national and provincial ministers to keep the whole of South Africa updated via newspapers, social media, the radio and television. We urge all residents to ensure that they keep themselves informed via these mechanisms. If there is a specific question on the regulations or developments, you are welcome to contact the Municipality.

**2. With many of our businesses closed and income falling (and following on from the questions in Parliament this week to other municipalities), what are the prospects that Prince Albert will meet its financial forecasts? What will this mean to service delivery and disaster preparedness? Will the municipality hold community consultation via Zoom meetings, or other digital platforms?**

All municipalities are negatively affected by the impact of COVID-19. Our income dropped significantly over the past few months and it is estimated that it will continue to drop in the coming months. Council had to reduce over R2,8 million from the original draft budget put out for public comment. Council resolved during a workshop to first look inward and secure savings within the staff establishment and internal operations, so as not to compromise service delivery.

While capital projects were put behind schedule, the Municipality and all provincial departments engaged to ensure that it does not impact negatively on service delivery. The Municipalities are also subject to the regulations and we are still not operating at full capacity. Service delivery were not affected by this, except the cleaning of the transfer stations. EPWP workers were allocated in support to this function.

The pandemic brought severe challenges pertaining public participation. The more affluent is in a more favourable position to provide comments and input as they have better access to data and ICT equipment. Fortunately, we were able to open the municipal offices to allow for direct contact and input from the public, for those that cannot afford to communicate via zoom or e-mail. The Municipal Manager also provided her direct cellphone number to the community for engagements via WhatsApp. Since 2 April to 25 May 12 757 WhatsApp messages were received with 4 709 sent via this format.

Our council meetings will in future be open for the public to attend virtually. They can just send an e-mail to the following email address: [abridon@pamun.gov.za](mailto:abridon@pamun.gov.za) and then we can add them in.

No community meetings will be held before the regulations allow us to do so.

This is not business as normal, but exceptional circumstances that requires all of us to adapt the way we do things.

**3. Without facts, speculation and fear surround alleged plans for our correctional facility to house foreign nationals being held prior to their deportation. Please update residents about this transaction, when it is to occur, and for how long? What will be done with the facility's current inmates? What steps have been taken to ensure that the incoming people have not tested positive for Covid-19; if they are in fact carriers, how will you protect employees of the prison, their families and the wider community?**

The unilateral decision by the Departments of Home Affairs and Correctional Services (nationally) to allocate Prince Albert Correctional Services facilities as a temporary detainee centre for illegal foreigners until they can be repatriated caused great concern on the possible spread of COVID-19 in the communities. The matter was

taken up by the Municipality at a regional, provincial and national level with the request that the implementation of this initiative be stopped. The matter was discussed at cabinet level and though some of the prisoners held in Prince Albert Correctional facilities were moved to other sites, only one illegal foreigner from Helderstroom was moved to Prince Albert. All prisoners and staff are daily screened to detect any symptoms and prevent the spread of COVID-19.

**4. How equipped is Prince Albert hospital for the inevitable arrival of the novel coronavirus? How many testing kits has Prince Albert been allocated? How many beds are available? How many are in an ICU-type facility? How many ICU-trained nurses do we have? How many ventilators, dialysis machines and other requirements for treating people who contract Covid-19 do we have? Does hospital personnel have adequate PPE?**

All staff have sufficient PPE. The hospital has 23 beds and 6 cots available. There is one ICU ventilator. This hospital does not have ICU trained staff. Critical patients will be transferred to a secondary hospital within the first 36 hours. There are two isolation rooms. All staff, patients and visitors are screened at the hospital. There are 50 testing kits available and they are added to as needed.

Should additional staff or support be needed, support will be mobilised from a regional and provincial level.

Across the Central Karoo District 300 youth were identified to undertake community screening and awareness for a three-month period. They are awaiting training from the Department of Health.

It should be mentioned here that you should not just visit the hospital or clinic – even if it is to obtain chronic medication. Clinic visitors must visit the clinic on appointment only. This is to limit the risk to visitors, patients and staff.

**5. Does Prince Albert have plans to establish any quarantine facility(ies)? If so, where? How many people will they be able to house?**

The establishment of isolation and quarantine facilities is the responsibility of the Department of Public Works. At this stage there is one facility in the Central Karoo, in Beaufort West. We have identified a possible site in Bushmans Valley with the request that it be investigated. The local tourism fraternity was also approached to determine interest, but no establishment wish to do so. The matter was handed over to the Department of Public Works and is closely monitored by the relevant local, regional and provincial JOC's. It is also monitored in Cabinet via the district executive mayor.

Should we have a case at this stage, the Department of Health, together with the JOC chair and Department of Public Works will identify the necessary interim site. It most likely would be in that person's own home or if need be can be in an established site in another region.

**6. What about those who might contract Covid-19 and die – how many people can our mortuary hold? Where will those who have been ill be buried and what steps will be taken to ensure the bodies/graves are unable to continue to spread the virus? In closing, we know how tirelessly our municipal representatives are working and we would like to celebrate all that you are doing; it's just that we do not know. More than ever public servants and their constituents need to rely on and trust each other. We want to have clear, targeted, specific hyper-local communication from all parties involved in protecting our health and safety.**

There are strict regulations on the handling of COVID-19 fatalities. The Department of Health organised several training sessions that were attended by undertakers, the Municipality and health staff. People will be buried at the same cemetery as the ones already in use, but with the necessary safety regulations. The specifics of this will be dealt with by the respective undertakers and funeral parlours. All fatalities must be handled in accordance to the following legislation and guidelines:

- National Health Act 61 of 2003;
- Regulations regarding the General Control of Human Bodies, Tissue, Blood Products and Gametes (as published in GNR 180 of 2 March 2012 in *Government Gazette* No. 35099);
- Regulations Relating to the Management of Human Remains (as published in GNR363 of 22 May 2013 in *Government Gazette* No.36473);
- The Health Directions issued by the Minister of Health in terms of regulation 10(1)(a) of the Disaster Management Regulations (see Government Notice No. 457 of 8 April 2020);
- Guidelines for case-finding, diagnosis, management and public health response in South Africa;
- COVID-19 Environmental Health Guidelines, dated 16 March 2020;
- COVID-19 Environmental Health Response Guidelines, dated 27 March 2020; and
- Environmental Health Guidelines for Management of Human Remains in the context of COVID-19, dated 27 March 2020.

The above basically comes down to the use of PPE, limited handling or exposure of any person to the deceased, double protection (bagging) and a speedy burial. Full details will be shared with the deceased family by the funeral parlour / undertakers.

**In closing, we know how tirelessly our municipal representatives are working and we would like to celebrate all that you are doing; it's just that we do not know. More than ever public servants and their constituents need to rely on and trust each other.**

**We want to have clear, targeted, specific hyper-local communication from all parties involved in protecting our health and safety.**

The Municipality, councillors and sector departments are trying their utmost to keep the communities informed per our bulk emailing, social media, sms messaging and WhatsApp groups. This, however, is a national pandemic and therefore it requires a coordinated approach within the national and provincial guidelines. We urge all to follow the developments via television, radio, social media and press releases. Should you require any specific information, and it is in our ability to share it with you, we will do so. Most residents feel free to email us or visit us during our open hours between 09h00 to 13h00 daily. We do try to limit contact, but can be reached virtually. Should you not have the facilities, please contact us and we can tell you how it can be accessed from the offices. Group meetings will not be able to take place but the Municipal Manager can be contacted on cellphone 0662297077. A WhatsApp message is preferred as it is not always possible to take a call, but we will do our utmost to continue to keep you informed. We would urge you to contact us directly. We may not have all the answers, but we can give you the best-informed answer available.

The end.