**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH SAYS NORTH WEST DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH NEEDS AN ACCOUNTING OFFICER, A HEAD OF DEPARTMENT**

**Parliament, Thursday, 25 February 2021 –**The Portfolio Committee on Health said one of the challenges that the North West Provincial Department of Health faces in its administration, is the lack of an accounting officer, the Head of Department (HOD).

The North West Provincial Department of Health briefed the committee yesterday on its healthcare services in relation to Covid-19 and on the vaccine rollout strategy.

The committee said the issue of the HOD position that remains vacant and the province being placed under section 100 (1) intervention is a matter they were informed about. Members of the committee said what they are aware and briefed on the challenges relating to the appointment of the HOD. The committee, however, noted that the situation that the department finds itself in, of not having  HOD, must have a serious impact on the management of the pandemic in particular, the implementation of the Covid-19 vaccination programme. The committee said, “we need to have people who would be held accountable”.

The committee was of the view that in order for the province to have stable leadership and be able to function and manage, the province needs to get out of the administration. The committee indicated that this is not a sustainable way of rolling out healthcare service in the province.

Mr Madoda Sambatha, MEC for Health in the North West, reiterated that pending issues relate to the appointment of the Head of Department, the issue of the pharmaceutical budget and the issue of correcting the budget baseline.

Briefing the committee, Ms Jeanette Hunter, the administrator in the North West, said currently, the province has sufficient equipment, oxygen and ventilators. Amongst the challenges that the province faces is contact tracing – wrong phone numbers and people not found at provided addresses, limited capacity of environmental health in municipalities, staffing for the vaccination programme and transport for persons to be vaccinated.

On matters relating to emergency medical services (EMS), Ms Hunter said they have strengthened EMS with additional vehicles and have contracted additional EMS officers to ensure that patients are safely transported from areas that experience bed pressures to the hospitals in Dr Kenneth Kaunda that have available capacity. The committee raised this as an area of concern for the province and one that it struggles with.

The department said it is continuously working with Provincial Treasury to reprioritize available funds to be able to appoint additional staff where required.

The department informed the committee that the vaccination of health care workers has started.

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, DR SIBONGISENI DHLOMO.**