**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**QUESTION FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**PARLIAMENTARY QUESTION NO: 3669**

**DATE OF QUESTION: 30 NOVEMBER 2018**

**DATE OF SUBMISSION: 14 DECEMBER 2018**

**Mr W W Wessels (FF Plus) to ask the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services:**

1. In view of the need to promote equal and efficient administration of justice and the legal and administrative processes administered by the High Courts of South Africa, what (a) are the reasons for the backlog that is currently being experienced in the office of the Master of the High Court in Pretoria and (b) exactly is the extent of the backlog in the specified office;
2. Whether his department is taking any steps to address the backlog; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, (a) what are the relevant details and (b) what is the envisaged date of the resolution of the backlog;
3. What is the average backlog in the offices of the Master of the High Court in the other six provincial divisions?

**NW4241E**

**REPLY:**

1. (a) The Master of the High Court in Pretoria is making use of off-site storage for their

files which are not active files. During May 2017, the storage contract expired

and was awarded to a new service provider. The transfer of the Pretoria Master’s

files from the one service provider to another proved to be very challenging as

there were disputes with regards to what should still be paid to the previous

service provider, a matter which ended up in court. There were also delays

experienced with the transfer of the physical files as the previous service provider

struggled to locate all the Pretoria Master’s files. Once the files were transferred

to the new service provider, challenges were experienced with regards to the

way in which the files were stored, causing delays in the retrieval of the files.

During this period, the Master experienced delays in receiving files from off-site storage and thus could not deal with the amendments to be done on these files, causing a backlog.

(b) The Master has a backlog on Trust amendments, Trustee amendments and

correspondence in older files. All new registrations and appointments are being dealt with as they are logged, as attending to these is not dependent on the receipt of files from off-site storage.

1. (a) The Master has implemented the following measures to address the challenges

experienced and dealing with the backlog:

i) The Pretoria Master’s Office has started keeping all trust files as from 2016 in the office vaults instead of sending them back to off-site storage;

ii) Monthly meetings are being held between the Pretoria Master’s Office and the current service provider to ensure that all challenges are sorted out expediently;

iii) All requested files have now been received from the service provider and funds have been allocated and approved for 24 officials in the Pretoria Master’s Office to work overtime and weekends as from 15 November to 15 December 2018 in order to bring the backlog up to date.

(b) The backlog situation will be assessed again on 15 December 2018, but all

indications are that the backlog will be cleared by 1 March 2019.

1. There are no backlogs in the other fifteen (15) Master’s Offices that needs special intervention.