

Concern over unoccupied low-cost houses

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The provincial department of human settlement has voiced concern about the Bushbuckridge local municipality's failure to allocate empty RDP houses to needy people in the area.

This comes as many residents in the affected areas are still complaining about the government's failure to provide them with housing, while a number of low cost houses have been built and remained unoccupied.

Some of these have also been vandalised by thieves, who have stolen windows and door frames as well as roof materials.

Residents are also complaining that the high number of unoccupied houses meant that criminals were sheltering in them, and some were being used as nests to plan crime, as well as causing fear among locals who are worried that they could also be used as a spot for rapists.

Human settlement spokesperson Freddy Ngobe said the department would dispatch a team of personnel to the area to inspect some of the houses.

"Our department is providing houses to municipalities in terms of the number of units that had been requested. These houses are allocated to the rightful beneficiaries but, if they are unoccupied, the department will force the municipality concerned to reallocate them to needy people," said Ngobe.

Ngobe said the department had also approved the funding allocations to build houses for people whose properties were damaged by floods late last year and early this year. "Especially those who were living in mud houses that easily wash away during heavy rains," he said.

Bushbuckridge municipality spokesperson Matume Malatjie shifted the blame, saying that the council had allocated the houses to rightful beneficiaries but that most people opted not to move into them. "The municipality has no right to take back the houses that have been allocated to people because they have title deeds for those properties. We have to follow numerous processes, including applying for permission from the land affairs department before we could re-allocate any unoccupied stands or houses," he said, adding that the municipality had plans for residents who were affected by the floods.

A number of provinces have previously raised concerns about people who got government houses that they did not need. Instead of occupying the dwellings, some opted to rent them out, which has caused anger among those who are desperate for shelter.