

SAPS locked out of waterfront offices

Tamlyn Jolly

AN ongoing payment dispute between the Tuzi Gazi landlord and provincial government led to last Friday's temporary closure of the SAPS offices located at the waterfront.

SAPS Operations Rescue Service (ORS) Sea Borders Richards Bay received notification from landlord Rob Hughes that their offices, boat storage area and other strategic SAPS access areas would be closed from 10am last Friday.

This after the KZN Department of Public Works (DPW) failed to pay last month's rent for the SAPS offices, among many other rental and VAT disputes dating back to February last year.

'This was an absolute last resort and the only way I could get the attention of the department,' said Hughes.

'One office was kept open as the charge office and in case of emergencies.'

All other offices were locked for the duration of the weekend, with Hughes unlocking them on Monday morning so the officers could resume duties.

Hughes said he has had ongoing problems for the past three years, with the DPW not renewing lease contracts and other paperwork issues relating to tenders.

'On top of this, the special investigation unit conducted an audit of the property and, after measuring the floor-to-ceiling heights throughout the SAPS' allotted office space, they deemed it attic space and promptly sent me a R750 000 bill backdated over the last 10 years.'

Hughes said according to SAPOA (South African Property Owners Association), a floor-to-ceiling height of 2.5m is acceptable, and that is what the SAPS' office space measures.

'The department then also failed to take the VAT increase into account and when I mentioned this, they deducted the VAT amount from what they owed me, rather than increase it.'

With Hughes' correspondence to

This was an absolute last resort and the only way I could get the attention of the department

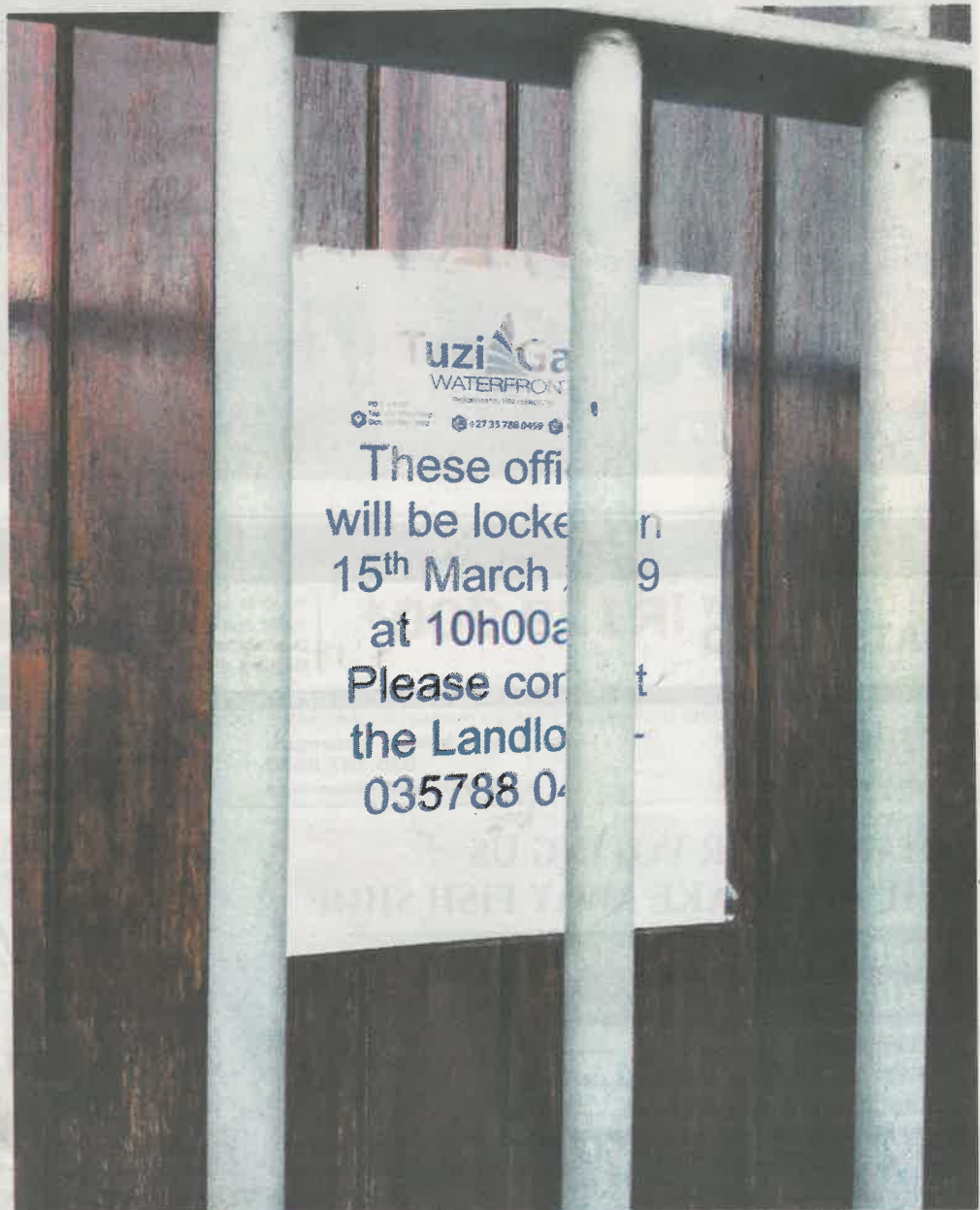
DPW and requests for a meeting with the department going unanswered, Hughes remains in the dark as to the way forward.

'On Tuesday the department paid the outstanding VAT amount and last month's rent, but there is still no meeting scheduled,' he said yesterday

(Wednesday) morning.

'This means the situation could continue, but that remains to be seen.'

The ZO has emailed a list of questions to the DPW, the answers to which will be reflected in a follow-up article on this ongoing issue.



One of the locked SAPS offices at the Richards Bay Tuzi Gazi waterfront

Tamlyn Jolly