

State's R65m splurge

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According to reports, the renovations included R15m spent on the Cape Town home of Rural Development and Land Reform Minister Gugile Nkwinti. Picture: Thobile Mathonsi

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Cape Town - An enclosed braai, a kitchen makeover and converting a room into a private gym - these were some of the renovations at the official homes of cabinet ministers and deputies that set the state back R65 million.

Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi revealed in great detail on Monday the work carried out on the ministerial homes in a written reply to a parliamentary question.

These included the “total upgrade of the kitchen, bathrooms, floor coverings, ceilings, internal painting, electricity (and) enclosure of the upgraded braai” in one instance.

In another case, the double garage was converted into a guest cottage and a new double garage built, along with domestic quarters, paved driveway and landscaping.

In one home, a room was converted into a gym and airconditioning and security measures were added.

In January, the department said it had spent R65m on “renovations and improvements” on state-owned houses in its prestige portfolio, allocated to members of the executive.

About 27 properties were involved.

According to reports, these included R15m spent on the Cape Town home of Rural Development and Land Reform Minister Gugile Nkwinti, R10.67m to upgrade a house for Transport Deputy Minister Sindi Chikunga, and just under R5m to upgrade a house for Agriculture Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson.

The department emphasised at the time that the ministers had no say in the extent of work or the sums spent on their homes, which were its responsibility.

Earlier this year, Nxesi told Parliament he had asked the Special Investigating Unit to focus on the prestige portfolio, where he suspected the same pattern of collusion and inflated prices that bedevilled other projects in the department had been repeated.

“High-profile cases of alleged over-pricing in relation to leases, renovations of ministerial houses and security provisions for the residence of the president... all tell the same story; collusion and corruption are endemic within some elements of the department,” Nxesi said.

Within the prestige portfolio, R4.7m had been paid for a development in Pretoria without supporting documents.

DA public works spokeswoman Anchen Dreyer said Nxesi’s reply had provided interesting insight into the “demands or needs of ministers”.

She had been “fascinated to see the extent and nature” of the renovations, which showed the ministers were “not shy to ask for all sorts of comforts”.

Political Bureau