

# Half-a-million splurged on ministers' braai areas

By **THABO MOKONE**

● The department of public works spent R30m on five homes for ministers in Pretoria, Johannesburg and Cape Town without following open tender processes – fitting three of them with braai areas costing half a million rands.

This is contained in a report submitted by the department to parliament's standing committee on public accounts (Scopa) following concerns that the state was suffering unnecessary losses because the department doesn't follow proper processes when making certain purchases.

The report, which was submitted to Scopa last month and is yet to be discussed by the public accounts watchdog, shows that R500,000 was spent on the braai facilities at three ministerial homes in Cape Town.

These were described by the department

as “fit-for-purposes features” for ministers.

Of the R30m worth of houses bought for ministers without going out to tender, three are in the affluent Pretoria suburb of Waterkloof.

Two of the houses, bought for R6.7m and R4.5m, are on Graskop Road in Waterkloof Heights. The other one, on Club Avenue, was acquired at a cost of R9m in the 2016/2017 financial year without going through open tender as required by law.

The department continued to disregard proper tender processes in the 2017/2018 financial year when it bought another ministerial house, in Atholhurst, Sandton, for R6.3m.

In the same period, it also snapped up a ministerial home in the Cape Town suburb of Milnerton along the Atlantic seaboard, at a cost of R6.8m.

The department argued that it realised

savings after negotiations with the sellers.

It also argued that the open tender process to buy houses for cabinet ministers was simply too time-consuming.

“The department opted for the shopping procedure, instead of an open tender process, because in our past experience the latter did not yield the desired results.

“The major reason for opting for a shopping procedure instead of open tender process is that normally this process is prolonged, involving the securing of a procurement instruction followed by the setting up of various committees to oversee the tendering process, comprising of the bid specification committee, bid evaluation committee and the bid adjudication committee.

“In the case of ministerial houses, by the time the bid evaluation committee submits its purchase recommendation to the depart-

ment's national bid adjudication committee and supply chain management processes are concluded, the houses are no longer available on the market.”

Thamsanqa Mchunu, the spokesperson for public works, said the houses were procured to save costs following the expansion of the cabinet as some ministers were living in leased properties and hotels.

Mchunu also said it was not feasible to install security features in rented properties saying that would have amounted to fruitless and wasteful spending.

He said the braai facilities were a “fit-for-purpose feature of ministerial residences” in terms of the ministerial handbook.

“There were no braai facilities on the properties in question,” said Mchunu.

“The department was forced to rent portable movable braai facilities on request from clients every time there was a need.”