

Outrage at R500 000 spent on braai areas in ministerial homes

Mary Jane Mphahlele

THE Department of Public Works came under fire from MPs after it emerged that R500 000 had been spent on braai areas at some ministerial houses.

Parliament's standing committee on public accounts (Scopa) was told the department bought ministerial houses in Graskop, outside Pretoria, for R6.7 million and R4.5m, and another for R9m

in Club Avenue, from the public purse during the 2016/2017 financial year.

The department had also spent R6.3m on 21 Dennis Road in Sandton and R6.8m to buy another ministerial house in Milnerton, Cape Town.

IFP MP Mkhuleko Hlengwa slammed the spending, saying this was a slap in the face for ordinary South Africans.

"There is no justification for this luxurious splurging.

"If prestige is going to be

an abuse, then we have to revisit it. We can't pretend as if the economic conditions of this country are made for us to pretend that we are in the first world.

"This is how Nkandla happened," said Hlengwa.

The department owns 148 residences – 67 in Cape Town, one in Durban and 80 in Pretoria.

The state buys ministerial houses, and the department is thereafter liable for their

The spending was a slap in the face for ordinary South Africans

maintenance and the costs of taxes and levies.

The department defended its spending.

Director-general Sam Vukela said: "These are not braai areas per se but a facility that has a braai in it.

"This means it is more of an entertainment area.

"On the houses, we are satisfied that what we are paying was within the market value. In some instances, we were also able to negotiate the amounts to a lower level," said Vukela. For the house to

meet the department's specifications criteria, it must have four to six bedrooms, a double garage, sufficient parking area to accommodate about four cars and a study, he said.

The kitchen must have a pantry, and an entertainment area (braai area). The house must also have a high wall with electric fencing and cameras. The committee was also concerned that there was no cap on the amount spent by the department when purchasing

ministerial houses.

Committee chairperson Themba Godi asked the department to provide in writing: "What informs the purchasing for these houses?

"It is really concerning that the department has no manual for those kinds of purchases.

"Scopa's contention is that it is inherent in this department to attract all sorts of characters who want to make a quick buck."

Public Works Minister Thu-

las Nxesi agreed with the committee after a grilling, that there must be changes in the costs of ministerial houses.

"There was a question raised about the morality of spending a lot of these millions. Clearly, the issue of the limits and whatever goes to the ministers needs a radical review in terms of the ministerial handbook, but unfortunately that review cannot be done by the officials," said Nxesi.