



Revolutionary more-ality

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Cost to spruce up ministers’ luxury homes rattles MPs

Public works lifts lid on ‘exorbitant’ bills for 140 properties

By **THABO MOKONE**

- R245,000 to clean curtains.
R142,000 to maintain carpets.
R758,000 for electrical repairs.
R64,000 to prune trees.

This is how much you are spending on the homes of the president and his deputy, and ministers and their deputies, in Pretoria and Cape Town.

So shocked were members of parliament’s standing committee on public accounts when they heard that R65m was being spent on the upkeep of ministerial homes and R28m on municipal rates in one year that committee chair Themba Godi said it lacked “revolutionary morality”.

It was the first time that the department of public works has revealed the extent of the “prestige portfolio”: where each house is, how much it is worth and the amounts spent on upkeep. This followed pressure from the committee on public accounts for transparency on state spending on ministerial houses.

A few weeks ago the Sunday Times reported that the department had spent R500,000 to install braai areas at some ministerial homes.

At a late-night meeting on Wednesday, public works minister Thulas Nxesi and his deputy, Jeremy Cronin, presented documents that showed there were 140 properties in Cape

Town and Pretoria worth R1.3bn.

But it was the amount spent on upkeep that had MPs frothing.

“Comrade Minister, to be quite honest, I think this issue of prestige accommodation, ever since we stumbled on it, has not been coming OK,” Godi told Nxesi.

“If you now look at just maintenance ... it’s a struggle we’re grappling with in terms of revolutionary morality when we look at public funds. And if it comes at the level that says, no there’s no morality, people just enjoy the luxury as and when it comes, then the entire edifice is undermined in terms of its moral standing and authority.”

Nxesi said they had “identified facilities management as one the most corrupt areas”.

MPs were also horrified by the amounts that the department of public works was spending on the general maintenance of 67 homes, with the upkeep of each house averaging R300,000 a year.

According to the documents, the government spent R2.8m in the 2017/2018 financial year on “scheduled” and “unscheduled” maintenance for President Cyril Ramaphosa’s official Cape Town residence, Genadendal, in Rondebosch on the slopes of Devil’s Peak.

Highstead, the Cape Town home of Deputy President David Mabuza on the Groote Schuur estate, also in Rondebosch, cost R1.1m to maintain, while the home of National Assembly speaker Baleka Mbete in Oranjezicht benefited from upkeep to the value of R590,000.

The official accommodation of Thandi Modise, chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, in Newlands was kept in pristine condition to the tune of R600,000.

MPs expressed further shock when it

R1.3

BILLION

The estimated market value of 140 houses occupied by ministers in Cape Town and Pretoria

R7.3

MILLION

The amount spent on municipal services, rates and taxes for 73 houses in Pretoria

R20.8

MILLION

Cost of municipal services, rates and taxes for 67 houses in Cape Town

emerged that the contract to maintain the 67 ministerial homes in Cape Town was being carried out by a single service provider, Broll Facilities Management, which pocketed R30.7m in scheduled and unscheduled maintenance in the last financial year alone.

The company billed public works monthly fixed rates of between R12,000 and R216,000 for maintenance of the Cape Town properties.

The department entered into a five-year contract with Broll Facilities Management in 2014, which is due to expire in August 2019.

Scheduled maintenance included the upkeep of swimming pools and jacuzzis, pest control, landscaping, handyman, electrical, plumbing and other services.

Unscheduled maintenance costs include curtain cleaning at a cost of R245,000 at 13 houses and a further R142,000 for carpet cleaning at 19 houses. Just over R64,000 was spent on “tree surgery” at seven houses and another R720,000 for “deep cleaning” and R758,000 for electrical repairs at 30 of the houses.

Public works director-general Sam Vukela conceded that the spending was “exorbitant”. He said the maintenance contract would not be renewed because the department was planning to take over the service through a “prestige management corps” to be established internally.

Nxesi said a review of the ministerial handbook, which sets out the office perks and tools of trade for ministers and has been almost 10 years in the making, was nearing completion.

He said curbing spending on ministerial homes would be addressed in the document, which he said was on its way to the president’s desk.