

■ GRILLING

Some top government officials are paying rent of only R75 a month

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THE Department of Public Works faced a grilling from members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) over the small amounts that ministers, members of Parliament and senior officials pay for rent in Cape Town.

This was after the department was blasted recently by Scopa for building braai areas for ministers at a cost of R500 000 each.

Yesterday, members of Scopa were back demanding answers as to why ministers, directors-general and MPs were paying small amounts for rent when the country was battling under financial strain.

The director-general in the department, Sam Vukela, had told the committee that ministers were paying R1 500 a month for their rent, deputy ministers were paying R950, MPs were forking out R207 and directors-general paid only R75 a month to live in a swanky apartment.

But MPs were livid, saying this policy must be changed as it was not acceptable.

IFP MP Mkhuleko Hlengwa described the amounts paid by these top officials as “a slap in the face” amid a sea of poverty in the country.

“Do you think this cost is justifiable? People are earning a lot of money to pay R75,” said Hlengwa.

Vukela said the department was

looking at the matter.

“It’s justifiable based on what the law provides. There may have been compelling reasons why it was crafted,” he said, regarding the policy.

“The rationale is that DGs come (to) Cape Town for work, and the employer must meet them halfway with their accommodation needs,” said Vukela.

But Hlengwa said such a lavish lifestyle could not be justified in the manner it has been.

He said it was unreasonable for people to pay rent of R75 a month when they live in upmarket areas.

David Ross of the DA said he agreed with Hlengwa that the rent was too low for the officials.

This matter needed to be looked into closely, he added.

“On the (matter of) houses of ministers and MPs, the ideal situation is that it should be market-related but we should consider that this is their second home,” said Ross.

However, he said it was an indictment that people lived in upmarket areas and paid only R75 a month in rent.

This related to the recently refurbished flats in Cape Town where each flat cost R3.6 million to be renovated.

MPs were not happy that, in such difficult economic times, ministers, their deputies and directors-general would pay such a small amount.

Vukela said they would look into the matter.