

Public works, North West in SIU crosshairs

● *Most court cases focus on alleged dodgy contracts*

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The department of public works is one of the worst government departments when it comes to the alleged mismanagement of taxpayers' money, according to the annual report of the Special Investigating Unit (SIU).

And the majority of the court cases stemming from the unit's investigations are focused on challenging that department's alleged dodgy contracts.

Now public works, the department that exercises substantial power in the building and leasing of government buildings, will need to convince President Cyril Ramaphosa that it is taking appropriate action to address the multiple concerns raised in an as-yet unreleased report by the SIU.

The SIU in October confirmed that it had handed more than 15 reports to Ramaphosa in 2018, including the findings of a potentially explosive investigation into alleged "theft, fraud, corruption, irregularities, malpractices or maladministration" at the public works department.

It has also given Ramaphosa its report on the North West municipalities, following a nine-year investigation into the allegedly unlawful and "disproportionate" appointment of often

unqualified municipal staff and their "excessive remuneration".

That investigation focuses on how allegedly nonperforming staff never faced disciplinary action, and probes the "loss of municipal funds due to theft, fraud and misallocation", as well as the mismanagement of municipal funds.

Its release to Ramaphosa comes after a violent strike left the province in flames earlier in 2018 and led to the removal of Supra Mahumapelo as premier.

The proclamation authorising the SIU's investigation into the public works department – into the "procurement and administration of leases by the department for itself or other national departments and organs of state" and alleged "irregular or fruitless and wasteful expenditure incurred by the department" – was issued by then president Jacob Zuma in 2014.

That was the same year in which the state's huge and irregular overspending on alleged "security upgrades" on Zuma's Nkandla homestead thrust public works' shaky procurement practices firmly into the public spotlight.

The SIU is still fighting to recover more than R155m it says was unlawfully spent on

the project from Zuma's personal architect, Minenhle Makhanya, who is opposing the court action.

The SIU has also completed and handed over to Ramaphosa a detailed report on the department of rural development and land reform's "application for and awarding of grants, the transfer of land and the payment of funds to beneficiaries and the administration thereof ... under the department's land reform programme". The report further investigates "the incurrance of irregular expenditure, fruitless and wasteful expenditure; or expenditure not due, owing and payable in relation to payments made, land transferred or grants awarded to beneficiaries, suppliers, contractors or service providers, in or relating to the department's land reform programme".

That investigation was initiated in 2011 through a proclamation by Zuma.

Given the intensity of the land debate in SA – and the ANC's stated commitment to amend the constitution to allow for expropriation of land without compensation – the SIU's report on the functioning of the state's land reform programme will be a subject of keen interest across the political spectrum.