

■ ADDED PERKS

Ramaphosa rejects new ministerial handbook

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PRESIDENT Cyril Ramaphosa has rejected a new ministerial handbook that would have seen members of his executive, premiers and MECs receive additional perks.

Information obtained by the Daily News shows that Ramaphosa's Cabinet has ordered Public Service and Administration Minister Senzo Mchunu, Finance Minister Tito Mboweni and Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille to consult further on the financial implications of the new guide for members of the executive.

This was after the new document was presented to the Cabinet following its public release in June. Apparently, a newly revised guide was presented to the Cabinet last month and is awaiting the president's approval.

Issues flagged and addressed in the new guide include the staff complement in ministerial offices, the costs of official vehicles as well as the airline class of domestic and international flights. The guide also focuses on special travel benefits for ministers and their deputies and the occupation of state-owned residences.

Security upgrades at private residences, payment of water and electricity as well as domestic services also came under the spotlight.

Equipment including cellphones and benefits to former members of the executive after relinquishing office were also scrutinised as part of the review of the ministerial handbook.

The 33-page guide applies to ministers, their deputies, premiers and MECs, and was expected to replace

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the ministerial handbook approved by former president Thabo Mbeki's Cabinet in February 2007.

Mchunu announced that the guide had come into effect on June 8 this year. In a letter to his colleagues in the executive (ministers and deputy ministers) as well as premiers and MECs in June, Mchunu said Ramaphosa had approved the guide.

In terms of the new guide, the staff complements in the offices of ministers, their deputies, premiers and MECs has more than doubled in some instances. Ministers and premiers were previously entitled to 10 core support staff while deputy ministers and MECs could have up to six, according to the ministerial handbook.

The proposed staff establishment for the office of a member (minister, deputy minister, premiers and MECs) and administrative support staff has been capped to between 11 and 15 people.

Ministers' offices will have 15 posts while premiers and MECs will get 13 each, with deputy ministers having 11, the guide states.

The government will also increase the amount that can be spent on security at private residences designated as official residences from R100000 to R250000 and this will be adjusted annually by Mboweni and Police Minister Bheki Cele on July 1 each year based on the inflation rate.

Should the cost of security measures be more than R250000, the minister, deputy minister, premier or MEC would be liable for the difference.

The guide also gives Mboweni widespread powers to curb spending on luxury cars and other perks.

The DA had previously rejected the guide for being formulated without consulting Parliament, which the official opposition described as a smack in the face of the public and political parties' constitutional mandate to perform oversight on the executive.