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AMENDED GUIDE

CR caps electricity and water freebies for ministers

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PRESIDENT Cyril Ramaphosa has bowed to public pressure and partially stopped his ministers and their deputies from enjoying free electricity and water in their official residences at taxpayers' expense.

In April, Ramaphosa introduced the requirement that the costs of provision of electricity and water in the Tshwane and Cape Town official residences of members of his executive be covered by the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure.

The state, however, was not responsible for any rates, taxes or other municipal charges in private residences, in terms of the April guide for members of the executive, which replaced the ministerial handbook. The latest version of the guide retains the November 2019 provision for the government to pick up the tab for water and electricity in state-owned houses occupied by ministers and their deputies but is limited to R5000 a month.

Ramaphosa was forced to announce that he was withdrawing the April amendment relating to water and electricity pending a review after a public outcry.

"The department responsible for public works shall be responsible for the costs associated with the provision of water and electricity to a state-owned residence, provided that such cost is limited to R5000 per month per state-owned residence," reads the guide, dated November.

According to the new guide, any costs in excess of R5000 per month will be borne by the relevant minister or deputy minister.

In a letter to executive authorities (ministers, deputy ministers, premiers and MECs) in the national and provincial government, acting Public Service and Administration Minister Thulas Nxesi said Ramaphosa had ditched the provision of free water and electricity for members of his executive.

"The amended guide for members of the executive as approved by the president on November 2, retains the provisions relating to the water and electricity costs at official residences and the staffing arrangements for offices of executive authorities as those contained in the guide for members of the executive approved on November 20, 2019," Nxesi said.

Public Works and Infrastructure Minister Patricia de Lille has also revealed that her department spent more than R784 000 replacing generators in 13 official ministerial residences due to redundancy and they being too costly to maintain.

One generator was bought and installed last month and another three were in the procurement stage.

The review of the guide also included the possible removal of the limit on how many staff members can be employed in ministers' and deputy ministers' private offices. Nxesi added that Ramaphosa had decided to retain the staffing arrangements in the offices of executive authorities.

In June, the *Sunday Independent* reported that the April guide kept the number of staff in ministers' private offices at 15, but cut the staff complements in deputy ministers' offices from 11 to 10, while premiers and MECs have 12 and 11 employees in their offices, respectively, down from 13.

To manage staffing arrangements, Nxesi urged departments to ensure that any new appointments were aligned with the structures contained in the November guide.

The latest guide retains the number of staff in a premier's office at 12 while ministers' staff will be reduced to 14. MECs now have 10 members of staff, the same as deputy ministers.

"Any employee who has been employed in posts in the office of an executive authority or a deputy minister in terms of the provisions of the April 2022 guide shall continue to be employed on the terms and conditions applicable to her or his employment until that employee's employment terminates," Nxesi explained.