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Ramaphosa defends ministerial 'perks'

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PRESIDENT Cyril Ramaphosa has come to the defence of the ministerial handbook, saying it was necessary to set parameters related to administrative and support assistance provided to members of the executive.

"The guide for members of the executive seeks to limit the extent to which the state would provide resources and enabling facilities (tools of trade) to members to ensure that the members perform their duties effectively, efficiently and prudently.

"The guide seeks to ensure that all departments and accounting officers apply consistent measures to ensure that expenditure does not exceed the prescribed limits and conditions," Ramaphosa said.

He was responding in writing to

parliamentary questions from DA MP Leon Schreiber, who asked whether he had commissioned a formal costing exercise to determine the total cost to the taxpayer of all benefits to ministers and deputy ministers.

Last year, there was a public outcry over changes to the handbook which would have seen taxpayers footing the total electricity and water bills for ministers and their deputies at official residences, and approval for additional staff. Following the backlash, the changes were placed on hold pending review.

Schreiber, a critic of the ministerial handbook, also wanted to know whether there was any specified legal provision on which Ramaphosa relied to implement the ministerial handbook and the reasons for the continued implementation of its provisions.

In his written reply, Ramaphosa

said a cost analysis on the staff establishment was done by the Department of Public Service and Administration and the National Treasury in respect of the guide for members of the executive.

"The outcome of the analysis revealed a cost reduction to the state," he said.

Ramaphosa also said the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure had similarly done a cost analysis with regard to ministerial residences.

The National Treasury concluded a transversal contract with original equipment manufacturers in terms of which vehicles for members of the executive were to be purchased.

Ramaphosa said the cost related to day-to-day matters, such as travel and accommodation, in respect of each member of the executive would vary depending on the nature and extent

of their respective duties. "The total costs incurred in this regard will be within the purview of the relevant department."

He said that the ministerial handbook provided a guideline for benefits, tools of trade and allowances to support ministers, deputy ministers, premiers and members of the executive council in the execution of their duties.

"This guide is necessary to set parameters related to administrative and support assistance. This is provided to members to ensure good governance with due regard to cost-effectiveness and efficiency."

Ramaphosa said the implementation of the ministerial handbook was informed by the Public Finance Management Act, the Public Service Act, their resultant regulations, the Executive Members' Ethics Act and

the applicable public service co-ordinating bargaining council collective agreements.

The president's response comes after the DA recently tabled an amendment bill to the Remuneration of Public Office-Bearers Act.

The bill seeks to ensure that there is transparency and oversight when Ramaphosa makes a decision about allowances, benefits or tools of trade for the ministers and their deputies.

"The DA's Bill would end this secrecy by compelling the president to report any proposed changes to Parliament, and to inform the National Assembly of the costs associated with all perks," said Schreiber, who estimated at R940 008 987 the different perks of ministers.

He said the bill would end the president's dictatorial powers over the handbook.