

Public Works speaks out on Madonsela's report

PRETORIA: The Department of Public Works (DPW) has noted Public Protector Thuli Madonsela's report on an investigation into allegations of a breach of the Executive Ethics Code by the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Tina Joemat-Pettersson.



In a statement issued on Wednesday, 28 November 2012, Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi said he took the findings "very seriously" as they pertained to Public Works.

"The department concurs with the Public Protector that the accommodation crisis faced by Minister Joemat-Pettersson in 2010 has its origins in the inability of Public Works promptly to provide official accommodation.

"This was due to the increased demand for ministerial accommodation after the 2009 election; the absence of transitional housing arrangements; and the tardy performance of Public Works in renovating and preparing housing for occupation," said Nxesi.

The department went on to say that these challenges were recognised at an early stage of their turnaround strategy which was initiated by Nxesi at the beginning of the year.

Concrete actions being taken by Public Works include:

- Establishing a joint technical team to oversee Prestige projects;
- Recruiting experienced property management and facilities management professionals from the private sector to review the business processes and systems of the property business of Public Works; the Prestige Portfolio will be prioritised in this respect. This also includes a major reorganisation and upgrade of the Property division of Public Works.
- Guidelines are also being drawn up (where none existed before) to control carefully expenditure in the Prestige

Portfolio.

Nxesi said he wanted to give the assurance that the department was sorting out challenges with Prestige projects, and remedial action was being taken.

"I am able to say that DPW coped with the demand for accommodation by newly-appointed ministers this year, and currently there is only one minister residing in hotel accommodation - the result of a fire in the house the minister was occupying.

"I am happy to share these developments with the Public Protector and have repeatedly stated my commitment to work with any authorised investigative unit to root out mismanagement or corruption in the public service," said Nxesi.

However, he said he could not comment on the Public Protector's suggestion that responsibility for ministers' Prestige accommodation be removed to a special unit elsewhere as the allocation of such duties fell outside his competency.

"I am concerned, however, that the Public Protector is quoted as having proposed that such special unit should also be responsible for security upgrades - as in the case of the President's residence at Nkandla.

"Given that the Public Protector is still investigating this specific project, it appears premature to issue recommendations in advance of the findings of the investigation," Nxesi added.

He said he would request a meeting with the Office of the Public Protector to clarify the report's findings and seek a way forward.

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