

Western Cape Housing Given Massive Boost

Western Cape premier Ebrahim Rasool has announced a massive cash injection into social housing in the province.

Delivering his State of the Province speech today, Rasool said the provincial government had to tackle a backlog of 400 000 houses, and in order to facilitate delivery of this vital service, the provincial government had increased the housing budget from R530-million to R1.2-billion.

Rasool's announcement followed hard on the heels of a speech by health minister, Manto Tshabalala-Msimang, to the parliamentary press corps yesterday in which she reported on plans for the government's social cluster that includes housing and health portfolios.

The minister said government's long-awaited aim of eradicating shacks by 2014 would be facilitated by a Housing Development Agency that would 'develop, manage and co-ordinate the development of housing across the country, including identification and purchase of suitable land for integrated housing development'.

In her speech, the minister said: As we finalise legislation to prevent further squatting and invasions, we are also prioritising metropolitan areas and large cities for interventions that seek to fast-track upgrading of informal settlements and ensure national spatial restructuring. The establishment of a Land Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) to acquire and package prime land for housing and human settlements purposes is at an advanced stage.

Rasool said the provincial housing budget reflected the importance of housing to the national government.

He added that 79 percent of people who applied for housing earned under R1500 a month, and that a huge gap in the market was affordable housing for those earning between R3000 and R7500 a month.

Rasool also said one way in which to alleviate the housing backlog was finding rental stock and helping first time home owners to get on to the property ladder.

He said the province was actively looking for state-owned land, in areas such as Bellville, Rosebank and Observatory, where low cost housing developments could be initiated.

Two years ago, the government revealed its vision for housing in a document called *Breaking New Ground: A Comprehensive Plan for the Development of Human Settlements*, that looks at housing across the spectrum, from speeding up delivery of better quality RDP houses and creating dignified human settlements around them to the issues of accommodating the burgeoning middle market who are earning too much for state-assisted housing but locked out of the primary market by soaring prices.

But putting the ideals of the document has proved to difficult, with landmark developments such as the N2 Gateway project impeded by political agendas rather than pushed by the need for delivery.