

Prime council land shocker

CASES: *Over 30 properties have been illegally transferred*

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PRETORIA – The Department of Rural Development and Land Reform says no action has yet been taken against any officials at the Pretoria deeds office or the Johannesburg municipality following the alleged illegal transfer of more than 30 Johannesburg municipal properties.

The transfers were completed by the Pretoria deeds office and new media reports allege that about 30 properties of the Tshwane Metro and the North West Housing Corporation have also been illegally transferred.

The department is looking into all the cases, but said that the investigation was at a preliminary stage and therefore it couldn't answer any questions posed by the media, such as how it was possible for the transfers to take place without the knowledge of municipal officials and what is being done to prevent further recurrences.

The department did, however, note that it "upholds clean governance and a corruption free administration and has no place for corrupt officials". According to *Business Report*, the Johannesburg property transfers were all facilitated by the same official at the deeds office. This official had taken leave in the meantime, but the department says the official had applied for holiday leave which was approved and had nothing to do with the investigation.

The department's media office stressed that at this stage, it couldn't even confirm that the property transfers had been fraudulent. This is still in the process of being established. It therefore wouldn't specu-

late on what kind of punishment might be meted out to officials who are found to have been involved in irregularities. It did give the assurance, however, that any guilty parties would be brought to book.

Meanwhile the Johannesburg Property Company (JPC) which is responsible for the sale of all Johannesburg's municipal land says its matter has been reported to the police for criminal investigation. The conveyancing attorneys involved in the transfers have also been reported to the Law Society of the Northern Provinces.

Attorneys for the JPC are in the process of reclaiming the properties and nullifying the sales. A spokesman for the police's unit for priority crimes, the Hawks confirmed that it is investigating the Johannesburg property transfers. He couldn't, however, confirm that it had also been asked to investigate the Tshwane and North West matters.

Transfers of the Johannesburg properties had apparently been expedited through the deeds office on the premise that they were land reform transactions. It also appears that JPC Managing Director Helen Botes' signature had been forged on the power of attorney documents and no purchase prices were allegedly contained in them.

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