

## ● Former staffer paid herself through ghost accounts

# Ex-municipal officer guilty of defrauding city

**Siyamtanda Capa**

capas@tisoblackstar.co.za

A former Nelson Mandela Bay municipality public health official who created “ghost accounts” and paid herself money meant for cleaning wards has been convicted of fraud by the Port Elizabeth Commercial Crimes court.

Former community liaison officer Pumeza Schumacher (previously Klaas) will be sentenced on November 27.

She pleaded guilty to the fraud charges on Tuesday and was convicted immediately.

Details around the transactions and exactly how much money she defrauded the municipality of remain sketchy as National Prosecuting Authority provincial spokesperson Tshepo Ndwalaza was reluctant to divulge details.

The Herald has, however, established that the transactions took place over a period of three years.

Ndwalaza said Schumacher’s advocate had requested that the story not be published in The Herald as it might affect sentencing.

“The advocate dealing with the matter has asked the probation officer for a report on mitigation of sentence because the accused has little children,” Ndwalaza said.

“The advocate is adamant that publishing this matter now will definitely affect the sentencing processes as the presentencing report needs to be done by the officer.”

Schumacher’s advocate, Makhi Feni, who is also a Bay ANC councillor and the corp-

orate services political head, declined to comment, saying it would be unethical to do so.

“I cannot comment on behalf of the client because I am the instructing advocate.

“It is only her attorney who can speak on her behalf,” Feni said.

Feni refused to disclose any information on Schumacher’s attorney, even though the court roll states that he was the attorney representing her.

ACDP councillor Lance Grootboom, who was in charge of the public health department when details of Schumacher’s fraudulent actions

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**Frank du Plessis**

LABOUR RELATIONS OFFICIAL

came to light, said the payments to ghost accounts were picked up by the municipality’s internal audit department.

“[Schumacher] opened accounts for different people, creating a number of ghost employees for then ward-based cleaners as part of the EPWP [Expanded Public Works Programme].

“In March, our accounts department found out something was not right and linked it to her,” Grootboom said.

He said this led to the city gathering evidence against her.

“We took action against her and through the city manager we opened a criminal case

against her,” Grootboom said.

City manager Johann Mettler said they welcomed the judgment.

“We have a zero tolerance for fraud and corruption. This will send a strong message to staff and the general public that crime does not pay.”

The municipality’s labour relations official, Frank du Plessis, said Schumacher had resigned before she could be disciplined by the municipality.

“Schumacher tendered her resignation on November 17 2017 and it was processed the same day.

“She was responsible for coordinating pay schedules coming from the various depots dealing with litter-picking.

“Because she resigned, she was not charged [by the municipality] and could therefore not be found guilty,” Du Plessis said.

Schumacher is cited in the municipality’s draft forensic report by PricewaterhouseCoopers into the irregular appointments of litter-pickers.

Investigators found that she had a clear understanding of the appointment process of all ward-based litter-pickers.

She was also responsible for verifying and checking that there were no duplicates or other mistakes on spreadsheets before sending them to the accounts department.

Schumacher started working for the municipality as a depot clerk in 2007 and was promoted to community liaison officer in 2013.

She was also responsible for uploading timesheets on the department’s financial system.