

■ CRACKDOWN

# Hawks swoop on eThekweni Municipality

*More arrests imminent in graft probe*

## MERCURY REPORTERS

MORE arrests are imminent at the eThekweni Municipality as the Hawks delve into allegations of malfeasance, corruption and fraud related to millions of rands in the city.

Hawks spokesperson Brigadier Hangwani Mulaudzi confirmed yesterday that a special team from the crime fighting unit was currently conducting a wide-ranging investigation into the allegations.

"There are a lot of cases that have been completed. We know who the suspects are but we have to follow due process before the arrests are made. We are trying to ensure that we have watertight cases. Expect many more arrests."

Mulaudzi said the investigation was a multi-faceted probe.

"We are working closely with the integrity unit of the municipality because they have investigated some of these matters. Some of these cases had been sitting with the police but there was no movement on them. We came in to fast-track these cases."

Highly placed sources at the municipality said some of the cases the Hawks were investigating included:

- ◆ The creation of ghost employees in the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) which saw some officials colluding to create ghost employees. In May 2017 alone, a minimum of R1.2 million was paid to individuals who never did any work as part of the EPWP programme.

- ◆ The awarding of a R45m refuse collection tender to four contractors in December last year. The R45m budget was meant to cover six months of operations but was depleted after a month with contractors being accused of inflating claims. This later led to the disruption of refuse collection across the city.

- ◆ The awarding of a R25m tender in 2017 for the hiring and cleaning of chemical toilets. An internal investigation later found that some companies were paid despite them not having delivered any services.

- ◆ The irregular awarding of the R90m orange bags tender. The company which scored the tender, it was later found, lacked the expertise and capacity to execute the contract of supplying the city with the recycling bags.

According to a senior official, who

asked not to be named, the Hawks were also investigating the controversial employment of Thabisile Ncayiyane to the office of the mayor, Zandile Gumede.

Earlier this year, The Mercury's sister newspaper, The Sunday Tribune, reported that Ncayiyane was appointed on Christmas Day two years ago, with a R50 000 a month salary.

At the time it was reported that Ncayiyane had to be shuffled to other units within the municipality after questions were raised by fellow employees about her qualifications and appointment.

"She never really worked in the mayor's office and had to be redeployed to the Expanded Public Works Programme where she was earning R55 000 while at home. Apart from the fact that she was paid for not doing any work, her monthly salary was extremely higher than what the rest of the EPWP employees were earning," said the source.

Last week, the Hawks arrested three men, including an eThekweni employee implicated in the EPWP scandal. They appeared in the Commercial Crimes Court last Wednesday.

"These are mainly those matters that you as the media have reported on. The investigation is such that original documents had to be sourced from the eThekweni Municipality," the source said.

Mulaudzi would not say whether any of the targets of their investigations included councillors.

On Sunday media reports revealed that it was only a matter of time before the Hawks pounced on the mayor.

Mulaudzi said investigating allegations of corruption at the municipality does not necessarily mean that the Hawks were targeting the mayor.

He said the intervention team have also been working in other municipalities in other provinces where "there have been lots of complaints".

Mayoral spokesperson Mthunzi Gumede said the mayor was not aware of any investigation against her.

"We are consulting (lawyers) on this matter and it will be after receiving such legal opinion that we may comment further. Remember, this is not the first time that there is such a report," he said.

City spokesperson Msawakhe Mayisela said the mayor has always been at the forefront of the fight against corruption.