

■ 'NO RULES'

# Top officials held for fraud, graft

*Probe ongoing, more arrests are expected*

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TWO senior eThekweni Municipality officials have spent the last two nights in jail after being arrested on Tuesday in connection with fraud and corruption concerning waste removal and orange bag tenders.

The Hawks' National Clean Audit Task Team arrested the two managers – Robbert Abbu (deputy head of strategy and new development) and Sandile Ngcobo (supply chain manager) – and seven contractors in the wake of ongoing investigations regarding alleged fraud and corruption at the municipality.

They appeared in the Durban Specialised Commercial Crimes Court.

"Another tender was advertised and it closed in November 2017. There were about 300 applicants, but only about 36 were appointed. When the list was finalised, Abbu was instructed to include four particular companies on the list. Those are the companies that got the tenders in the end and they started invoicing even before they started the job. What's worse is that the tender was supposed to run from December 2017 to March 2018, but was continuously renewed illegally," said an inside source.

Another source said he was happy with the arrests, but it was not enough. He said some of the service providers arrested were fronting for politicians.

"This is corruption. All the companies that tendered for the contract were compromised for the benefit of politicians. We will wait and see if this investigation will touch on these politicians. It is questionable how the city manager approved this tender," said the source.

He said the two managers were also implicated in the multimillion-rand orange bags scandal. "The orange bags investigation is ongoing and very soon there will be arrests," he said.

Abbu, Ngcobo and contractor Hlenga Sibisi were refused bail.

Five other contractors – Mzwandile Dlodla, 24, Sinthamone Ponnann, 55, Sithulele Mkhize, 38, Bongani Dlomo,

53, and Prabagaram Pariah, 61, were granted bail of R50 000 each, while Khoboso Dlomo, 50, got R30 000 bail.

Hawks national spokesperson Brigadier Hangwani Mulaudzi said as part of their bail conditions, the court ordered the suspects not to interfere with witnesses and not to access eThekweni Municipality premises.

He said Abbu, Ngcobo and Sibisi were expected to apply for bail today, while the others were expected to appear again on August 8.

Hawks national head Lieutenant-General Godfrey Lebeya said: "I appreciate and commend the work of the team which has been going on for the past nine months. The work will continue until all those who played a role in abusing the taxpayers' monies answer for their actions in a court of law."

Investigations are continuing and more arrests are expected.

Mayor Zandile Gumede's spokesperson, Mthunzi Gumede, said: "We note the statement by the Hawks regarding the recent arrests. We will wait for the law to take its full course."

Two other senior eThekweni staff were arrested and released on bail in January in connection with the expanded public works programme (EPWP) recruitment process.

Xolani Vilana, administration manager at Safer City, and Robert Nkosi, an EPWP recruiter, were arrested by the Hawks for fraud and money laundering. Their case is ongoing.

IFP caucus leader Mdu Nkosi said the city was a shambles.

"There are no rules. The problem is that the ANC leadership fight their internal battles at the expense of the ratepayers. It's time that people see the ANC for what it is. If people can randomly cut the lights and water off because of what has been caused by the city leadership, then people need to change their way of thinking when it comes to voting," he said.

DA caucus leader Nicole Graham said she was glad to hear of the arrests, but that this was just the tip of the iceberg.