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Tshwane rocked by ghost workers scam again

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THE cash-strapped City of Tshwane has, once again, been hit by an alleged scam after nearly 500 ghost workers were fingered for illegally drawing monthly salaries from the metro.

This week, the City hailed its bid to identify ghost workers on its payroll, saying the exercise saved it at least R2 million in monthly salaries.

In 2020, the administrators appointed by the Gauteng provincial government to run the municipal affairs in Tshwane uncovered 1 400 ghost workers.

At the time, the City said those identified in the corruption were employed as part of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP).

The alleged corruption was uncovered through a process undertaken by the City to verify the legitimacy of more than 20 000 employees.

MMC for corporate and shared services, Kingsley Wakelin, said this week that the City conducted a full verification of all its 20 646 employees and EPWP participants to eliminate any potential ghost employees.

The exercise, he said, was done to prevent possible adverse audit findings and to demonstrate accountability to residents for the City's salary bill.

Wakelin said: "Following the successful completion of this process, the City has frozen salary and stipend payments totalling over R2 million per month."

He said the verification process took place over a two-month period, and required permanent and fixed-term contract employees to present themselves physically with proof of identity.

"This process achieved a 99,8% success rate, verifying 20 602 employees, including those on suspension. Of the 44 employees who did not present themselves physically for verification, three were in hospital, seven were on extended sick leave, and one was incarcerated," he said.

According to Wakelin, further internal investigations were to be conducted with the line managers concerned.

"A separate verification of EPWP participants took place, which confirmed 10 763 individuals (95,8%). However, 496 EPWP participants could not be verified. Once unverified employees and EPWP participants were identified, the City took immediate steps to halt their salary and stipend payments and further resolved to terminate their employment and participation in the EPWP," he said.

As part of the City's control measures, he said heads of departments would continue to sign off on salary bills each month, and the City intended to conduct employee and EPWP participant verification on an annual basis.

"This action confirms our commitment to clean audits and responsible use of the City's strained finances. We will continue to uphold good governance and make us a city that works for all," he said.

The exercise to identify ghost workers was announced at a time when the municipality has been at odds with workers over salary increases of 3,5% and 5,4%, respectively.

For almost three months, workers affiliated to the SA Municipal Workers Union have been on an unprotected strike, accusing the City of renegeing on the collective salary agreements it signed with unions.

The City has pleaded poverty, saying it was not in a position to afford the annual R600m required to meet workers' demands.