



**Complainant's electricity bill credited and tariff adjusted**



\*Mr. Shaun Potter lodged a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman after he discovered that the City of Johannesburg's Revenue Department had been billing him on an 80 Amps tariff when he in fact had a 60 Amps circuit breaker at his property. Upon conducting a technical investigation, City Power found this allegation to be true and recommended that the account be adjusted as such.

However, the department refused to action the recommendations causing the complainant further financial distress, resulting in a protracted "battle" with the City of Johannesburg.

As it is regulated by The Municipal System Act (no.32 of 2000), the city is responsible for essential service delivery, which includes the effective management of and correct billing and charges for electricity (amongst other services). Section 102 (2) of the same Act, states that residents have the right to complain should they want to dispute an inaccurate reading, irregular amount due and suspicious tariff increases.

As a last resort, Mr. Potter sought assistance from our office which led to an investigation and conciliation meeting with the Revenue Department - where they failed to substantiate their reasons behind the refusal to reverse tariff charges - the complainant's account was subsequently adjusted to the correct Amps tariff from July 2022 and his account credited.

While we were able to swiftly recover his payments, we implore residents to monitor and track inconsistencies on their monthly bills so that they can raise their concerns within the stipulated timeframes to allow the City sufficient time to address their issue(s) prior to escalation. It is also equally important that one keeps up with the payment of their account as per usual, because the city is legally permitted to take action on any other payments that are in arrears.

#residentsrightsmatter

**The Office of the Ombudsman kicks off the third leg of its "Engaged Citizenry" series.**

On Tuesday, 19 March 2024, the Ombudsman for the City of Johannesburg, Advocate Siduduzo Gumede, led a civic engagement clinic in Region A (Ward 80), to mark the third leg of the "An Engaged Citizenry" series which is currently being rolled out across the seven regions of the city.



Images (left to right): Ombudsman, S'du Gumede addressing the Rabie Ridge residents

We were joined by the Public Protector's Office as well as the Acting Regional Director, Ms. Hlobohang Gamede, who urged residents to not destroy infrastructure but use the appropriate channels available in the city to lodge their complaints and have their concerns heard in the right way.

Even though the social behaviour of the residents towards infrastructure needs to change, especially relating to dumping objects into drains that cause blockages, many residents raised service delivery issues such as high levels of crime, lack of housing, illegal electricity connections, incorrect billing and encroachment that the city also needed to urgently attend to.

This is what this programme seeks to improve; issues of governance and safeguarding the residents' basic rights to equitable and efficient service delivery. As an office of last instance, we provide an independent, impartial and efficient dispute resolution process that is free to all the residents of the city. Contact us for a visit in your area!





# STAY INFORMED

## City Power clamps down on smart meter tampering

To curb illegal connections and address recurring outages caused by network overload, City Power rolled out the establishment of infrastructure and installation of smart meters across all Service Delivery Centres (SDC), particularly in communities such as Alexandra, Mayibuye, Naturena, which have previously depended on illegal connections for their electricity supply.

After embarking on the project which set to replace obsolete, faulty and bypassed meters at no cost to the residents, the entity noted a disturbing pattern of meter tampering and bypassing of the newly installed electric devices.

“Smart meters are a user-friendly way of measuring electricity consumption and having more control and choice over energy usage, enabling residents to submit their meter readings in near real-time on the eJoburg platform.”

In response to this growing trend, the entity launched an investigation into the involvement of contractors, internal staff and consumers in this criminality.

As part of its ongoing efforts in rooting out meter bypassing and other forms of theft, City Power disconnected 88 newly metered customers in Mayibuye and criminal complaints were subsequently registered with the South African Police Services (SAPS) on 26 March 2024.

From the city's records, following the first month of the installation of smart meters, the utility collected over two million in revenue but a month later the figure dropped and is currently sitting just under a million. When City Power noticed this blatant discrepancy, an audit was undertaken and over 700 households were found to have tampered with the meters and disconnection commenced last month, with several contractors and employees since arrested.

Remember, it is a criminal offence to tamper with an electrical connection and can lead to a fine or imprisonment when found guilty.

In such cases, the Office of the Ombudsman will not accept any complaint relating to disconnections and subsequent penalties imposed by the city and the respective departments and entities, as a result.

For complaints and queries, contact City Power on 086 056 2874, SMS 44074 or e-mail [estimations@citypower.co.za](mailto:estimations@citypower.co.za).

## The Office of the Ombudsman is #AtYourReach

Human Settlement employee, \*Mr. Kagiso Modise, described a storm in December 2023 that caused damage and strewn the street with branches.

As a concerned resident, he reported the incident to JRA with the hope that the matter would be quickly attended to, but it was not the case. Umbiko sat down with him to learn more about his experience as an official on the receiving end of our services.

### 1. Prior to lodging a complaint, had you known about the Office of the Ombudsman?

Yes, I first learnt of your office through a CoJ internal message and shortly thereafter, I went to visit one of your Outreach activations, where I was advised how your office could help address my concern.

### 2. What steps did you take before lodging your complaint?

I first lodged a complaint with JRA and after a year passed since speaking to its officials, the road remained unfixed indicating that a team was never dispatched as promised. After countless follow ups, I resorted to escalating the matter to the Ombudsman.

### 3. As an official, how did you find our services?

Your team has been quite helpful. In fact, I would encourage residents to contact your office not only with issues affecting them alone but collective concerns worrying the community.

### 4. How was your experience with your interaction with the office?

From Outreach to lodging my complaint, the office has been responsive and courteous throughout.

## NEW APPOINTMENTS

We are pleased to welcome Ms. Nombulelo Nikiwe and Mr. Pandelis Gregoriou to our office as the newly appointed Executive Managers of the Management Support and Complaints and Investigations Units, respectively.

Ms. Nikiwe holds two MAs in Public Administration and Business Administration, boasting over 12 years of experience in secretarial and strategic management support at both national and local levels of government.

Mr. Gregoriou holds a BA and LLB degree from Wits University and is a qualified Attorney of the High Court of South Africa.

\* Not their real name

