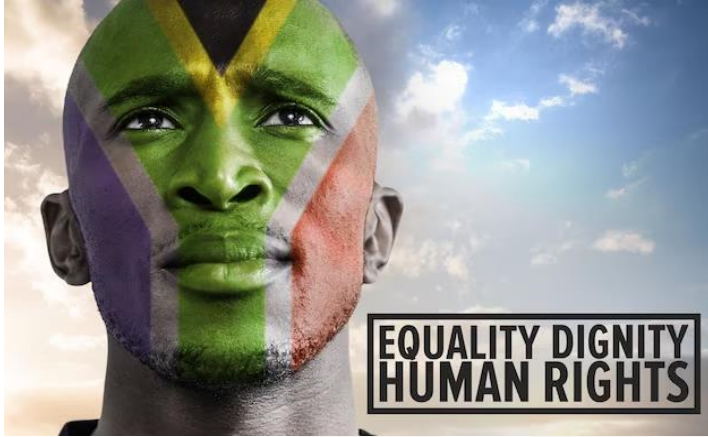




**Human Rights Month: The Role of the Ombudsman as a Human Rights Protection Mechanism**



This month we commemorate Human Rights Month to reinforce our commitment as an office to the Bill of Rights as enshrined in our Constitution.

In 2014, Johannesburg became the first municipality in Gauteng to launch an Office of the Ombudsman, following an influx of complaints received by the former Public Prosecutor, Advocate Thuli Madonsela, against the City of Johannesburg. The institution has since become an integral part of the City's model of good governance and continues to play an important role in promoting a culture of human rights by collectively contributing towards the acceleration of service delivery within the City.

“The right to complain, the right to be heard, the right to have corrective action taken if one has suffered harm from government, are all human rights.”

The establishment of the Office of the Ombudsman has several benefits to both the City of Johannesburg and its residents. Namely because it helps to:

- promote and protect individual human rights,
- provide access to a cost-effective, speedy, and flexible extra-judicial dispute resolution mechanism,
- bridge the gap between the City of Johannesburg and the residents, and
- promote cooperation instead of litigation (this is especially important given that legal recourse against administrative mistreatment is often effectively unavailable, either because of the high costs and prolonged duration of adjudication or because there is no legal remedy).

As an office of last instance, we strive to be a well-functioning Ombudsman office that cultivates a strong working relation-

ship with City departments and entities to ensure we uphold our mandate to serve impartially, fairly and inclusively.

**Ombudsman Oversight Visit: Riverlea Illegal Mining**

On Thursday, 22 February 2024, the Ombudsman for the City of Johannesburg, Advocate Siduduzo Gumede, conducted an oversight visit at some of the de-commissioned mines in Riverlea that have been a source of great interest and anguish in the past months because of activities of the so-called Zama-Zamas where issues of crime and environmental health concerns have been raised by community members.

This visit focused on assessing the progress made by the police and additional multi-stakeholders to curb illegal mining in the area and help restore the dignity of its residents.



**Image:** Joburg Council Speaker, Cllr Margaret Arnolds at one of the sites

The second leg of the visit, included a Citizen Information Clinic at the Riverlea Recreation Centre in southwestern Johannesburg, which marked the beginning of a series of clinics that will be held across the 7 regions of the city, in the hope that residents will gain a better understanding of the role of the Office of the Ombudsman in investigating maladministration and supporting efficient service delivery in the city.

Key stakeholders from industry thought leaders, chapter 9 institutions, and strategic partners i.e., the Public Protectors' Office, Tax Ombudsman and Consumer Goods and Services Ombudsman, Speaker's Office and Joburg Tourism participated in civic education and discussions aimed at improving governance and safeguarding human rights in the City of Johannesburg.

These informational sessions will not only educate residents but also encourage active engagement with all the respective departments and entities; ensuring that the collective responsibility to uphold the principles of transparency, accountability and social justice is realised.

**Watch for more:** <https://www.enca.com/videos/discussion-riverlea-residents-living-fear-zama-zamas>





# STAY INFORMED

## CoJ Entity News: Johannesburg Water and City Power Launch WhatsApp Channels

Johannesburg Water and City Power recently launched their respective WhatsApp channels aimed at fostering better communication and connection within our communities.

Residents are urged to join the platforms to stay updated on important announcements, events and initiatives happening in and around their areas.

- To follow the **Johannesburg Water WhatsApp channel** on WhatsApp, click on the following link below: <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029VaN8jUf1SWsw4kYZEF1X>
- To follow the **City Power WhatsApp channel** on WhatsApp, click on the following link below: <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029VaPkZZX84OmHTsM6gV2k>

## A Day in the life of an...Intake and Registry Manager

As the first point of contact when lodging a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman, Intake and Registry Manager, Ms. Bolelang Setou, took the time to chat with Umbiko about the day-to-day operations within the Intake and Registry unit.



Image: Ms. Bolelang Setou (Intake and Registry Manager)

## Why is good customer service so important in an organisation such the Office of the Ombudsman?

It is important because people come to our office as a last resort after having exhausted all avenues within the City of Johannesburg. In the hope that they will receive fair treatment, our office strives to assure them that their concerns can and will be heard and they will be assisted accordingly. As an office of last instance, we are here to serve and advocate for the basic rights of all Joburg residents.

Ultimately, good customer service enables us to give hope to thousands of despondent customers.

### What interests you about your job?

Customer service is my niche. I am a solution-orientated person who is passionate about consumer awareness and assisting customers to resolve their longstanding complaints. "Giving hope to the hopeless" truly gives me great joy.

### What does a typical day look like in your unit?

The Office receives service requests through email, whatsapp and those that call are attended to immediately on a daily basis. On a typical Monday we have to go through emails received over the weekends (yes, complainants submit their complaints even on a weekend), I then allocate received emails to the team to verify that the forms have been correctly completed with the relevant supporting documents attached, prior to accepting it for investigation.

If there is information missing, we will then contact the complainant so that they can make the correct submission. I don't know why, but sometimes complainants tend to take long to provide us with feedback and unfortunately we have to wait for full compliance before we can process a complaints as stipulated within the Ombudsman By-Law. Once complete, we will accept the complaint and send the complainant an acknowledgement letter to confirm receipt, and start the preliminary investigation process.

So our unit is always abuzz with calls and deliberations over the merits of every complaint received. Receiving complaints requires passion, openness, analytical skills, an open mind and a grasp of all internal processes.

### How do you handle the stress and pressure that comes with being a point of first contact?

Given a chance, everyone wants to lodge a complaint. Burst pipe? People want to complain (which is good, but we are an office of last instance). So we must always remain calm, listen and never argue with a complainant. Exercising patience and empathy while explaining to the complainant the importance of going to the department or entity before escalating to the Ombudsman is very important because some complainants come disgruntled.





**UPCOMING EVENTS**



**The City of Johannesburg Ombudsman  
Citizen Information Clinics (Region G)**

Step into the world of advocacy and empowerment with the Ombudsman of the City of Johannesburg. Join the Office in promoting a culture of human rights through citizen information clinics across City regions. Learn about our pivotal roles, responsibilities, and how we investigate cases of maladministration, ensure efficient service delivery for all residents.


Key stakeholders, including industries, Chapter 9 institutions, and partners, are invited to engage in enlightening discussions to enhance governance and uphold rights in Johannesburg.

-  **Wednesday, 07 March 2024**
-  **10H00 – 16H00**
-  **Don Mateman Recreation Centre, Ward 17**

Dress Code : Casual

**RSVP By Friday, 01 March 2024**

**Louisa Maphoto**

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