



A voice for change: Ombudsman wraps up seven-week Citizen Information Clinic programme around the city

In February and March 2025, we hosted a series of citizen information clinics under the theme, "Here to Hear You," which aimed to give Johannesburg residents a platform where they could voice their frustrations relating to service delivery. Over the past seven weeks, we have travelled across the city's seven regions, witnessing severe injustices faced by thousands of people living in deplorable conditions - situations that our Constitution seeks to eradicate through its foundational principles for safeguarding human rights.



The Joburg Ombudsman, Advocate Siduduzo Gumede addressing residents during an information clinic

Throughout the various oversight visits conducted by the Ombudsman, Advocate Siduduzo Gumede, we witnessed numerous cases where the availability, or absence, of essential services violated residents' fundamental rights, including their rights to health, water, sanitation, and social security, among others – an almost unreal experience, as if moving through time. This programme was a true eye-opener, prompting deep reflection on our shared humanity and an urgent need for effective officials who are more empathetic and responsive to the needs of communities.



An illegal dump site in Diepsloot, Region A

Yet, despite an increase in active citizenry, residents continue to suffer the degradation of being unable to live and support their families with even a shred of dignity. From rodent infesta-

tions and illegal dumping to persistently blocked sewers and unreliable electricity and water supply, it is nearly impossible to expect an improvement in anyone's quality of life without a deeper understanding and inclusive approach to tackling spatial inequality.

"So, how can we as the Office of the Ombudsman, bridge the gap between citizens' needs and local government responsibilities while fostering a symbiotic relationship?"

As an independent office, we do not only advocate for residents' fundamental rights to receive equitable services, but we also provide an impartial complaints resolution process that is freely accessible to all ratepayers. Through our clinics programme, we have facilitated communication between the city's administration and residents, helping to (1) bring back trust in the city's administration, (2) identify key issues, and (3) escalate concerns to the respective departmental heads.

To improve collaborative efforts with key stakeholders, we received support from the Public Protector South Africa (PPSA), South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), Citizen Relationship and Urban Management (CRUM), and several councillors and ward committee members, all of whom directly engaged and consulted with residents, encouraging them to not only utilise the official complaint channels available in the city, but to also give the relevant departments and entities adequate time to resolve those issues as opposed to resorting to service delivery protests, vandalism, theft and destruction of infrastructure.



Left to right: Q&A sessions with Bongiwe Gumede from SAHRC and Titus Sebesu from PPSA

We are deeply grateful to all the residents who contributed to the success of these sessions by sharing their concerns and lived experiences. We wish to assure everyone that their complaints have been escalated and are being attended to. Furthermore, we plead with the same residents, to be patient with us as we try to tackle these issues, together.

Stay up to date with the latest news and events hosted by the "Joburg Ombudsman" by following us on X (@jhbombudsman) and Facebook (Joburg Ombudsman) or visit our website at www.joburgombudsman.org.za to access our Outreach calendar.





Pensioner counts on Ombudsman to access municipal services after reclaiming his hijacked building

In a significant win for property owners in Johannesburg, our office helped reverse a municipal services debt of R1 795 599 from an original debt of R2 298 285, which our client, Mr. Uche Okwonkwo had accrued over a period of twelve years, after the hijacking of his building in Hillbrow.



Image source: Reuter News Agency

The City of Johannesburg is currently grappling with the issue of hijacked buildings, where crime syndicates illegally occupy and rent out neglected or abandoned properties, turning them into dilapidated centres of drugs, crime and exploitation of vulnerable individuals. These operations are typically carried out by well-organised groups who forge ownership documents, making it difficult for legitimate property owners to reclaim their properties.

As a result, not only has Mr. Okwonkwo lost millions during that period (as he could neither lease nor access his property) but also, the people living in the building were living in horrible conditions after notifying the City's Revenue Department of the illegal occupation and requesting for the disconnection of water, refuse and electricity services, including the removal of the meters, in 2014.

However, earlier this year in a shocking turn of events, he discovered that the services were never suspended after receiving a crippling bill of R2 298 285, resulting from an accumulating municipal service debt. This led to him lodging a complaint with our office and because he was able to provide proof of the hijacking together with eviction orders, we were able to swiftly assist with the successful reversal of the one million plus, in February 2025.

Yet, despite this considerable triumph, Mr Onkwonkwo is now faced with the challenge of covering the outstanding balance of R500 212, resulting from unpaid rates and taxes accumulated from availability charges for infrastructure during the disconnection period in question (which the city is well within their right to demand as prescribed within the Property Rates Policy and the Property Rates By-Law). Unfortunately, in this case, our office can only recommend that he enter into a payment arrangement with the city, to

reconnect all services and allow him to start generating an income from leasing his commercial property.

"We wish to implore residents that whether they are connected or not, by virtue of being the legal property owner, you remain liable for the rates and taxes, irrespective of occupancy."

Property hijackings can lead to significant financial and legal consequences for owners, and residents are encouraged to immediately report incidents of this nature to the city's anti-fraud and corruption department, Group Forensics and Investigation Services (GFIS) to help mitigate certain losses.

* Not his real name

**WE ARE
HIRING!**

JOIN OUR TEAM

SENIOR MANAGER: COMPLAINTS & INVESTIGATIONS

Department:

Office of the Ombudsman

Branch:

Complaints & Investigations

Designation:

Senior Manager: Complaints & Investigations

Remuneration:

R60 978.62 pm (basic salary, excluding benefits)

Location:

48 Ameshoff Street, Braamfontein

Minimum Requirements:

- Grade 12 plus a Bachelors degree in Law (NQF level 7) plus a postgraduate qualification in Law (LLB). A Masters degree or higher qualification can be advantageous;
- Relevant certificate in conflict resolution, mediation or investigations can be beneficial;
- 7 – 9 years of proven experience in a complaints resolution environment and 5 years of which should be at a managerial or leadership position within a complaints handling or investigate environment;
- Demonstrated ability to lead, mentor and manage team effectively;
- Substantial experience managing complex and high profile cases, including own instance complaints and public complaints;
- Proven track record of handling sensitive issues with discretions and professionalism;
- Experience in strategic planning and execution including the development of strategic initiatives to improve unit operations which align with organisational goals;
- Hands-on experience in overseeing the daily operations of a complaints or investigations unit which should include management resources, prioritising tasks and ensuring compliance with policing and regulations;
- Demonstrate experience in engaging with various stakeholder, including complainants, respondents and external entities;
- Experience in contributing to the creation, revision and implementation of policies and procedures with knowledge of how to align policies with legal standards and best practices;
- Experience in analysing data to guide strategic decisions and improve operational effectiveness;
- Extensive experience in managing a complaints resolution processes, including investigative methodologies, case management and adherence to legal and ethical standards; and
- Experience in providing guidance and professional development opportunities to team members ensuring high standards of practices and performance.

Primary Function:

Oversee the management and resolution of complaints, including high profile cases. This position requires a combination of strategic vision, operational oversight and hands-on management to ensure that all complaints are handled with fairness, efficiency and integrity. The Senior Manager will supervise a team of investigators, drive strategic initiatives, manage high profile complaints and collaborate with the Executive Manager to align unit operations with organisational goals.

VACANCY CIRCULAR

031/2025

City of Johannesburg

Publication Date:

Monday, 24 March 2025

Closing Date:

Friday, 04 April 2025

This Vacancy is open to Employees of the City of Johannesburg and External Candidates

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