



OMBUDSMAN
City of Johannesburg

UMBIKO
October 2025

Joburg Ombudsman complaints portal: What the data tells us about service delivery, technology and the human experience

Since the launch of the Joburg Ombudsman's online complaints platform in mid-August 2025, over 200 complaints have been submitted, steering in a new era of accessibility, transparency and citizen empowerment.

Accessible through our website, this digital platform is more than a tech upgrade but a mirror reflecting the very real frustrations, persistence and expectations of Johannesburg residents. The volume and nature of complaints tell a compelling story and that is, communities are no longer asking for better service delivery but demanding accountability, fairness and basic human dignity.

A staggering 60% of complaints related to water billing and access issues including excessive or unexplained charges, inaccurate or estimated meter readings, billing disputes dating back months or even years and households without water for extended periods

These figures reveal far more than administrative oversights, they point to chronic breakdowns in service delivery, with direct consequences for health, hygiene and quality of life.

"Water, one of our most fundamental human rights, lies at the centre of residents' frustration. For many, this isn't just about billing but survival in the face of broken systems."

While water-related issues dominate, the data reflects a broader picture of widespread, systemic failures including electricity overbilling, disconnections and tariff errors, blocked sewers and stormwater drainage issues, delayed refunds, misallocated payments, unprocessed account closures, infrastructure decay including potholes, collapsed roads, burst water pipes and incorrect account data of names, meter numbers and billing addresses.

These issues are not isolated incidents but are recurring and often unresolved, in some cases for many years. The result is a growing sense of frustration and fatigue, as residents struggle to navigate slow and unresponsive systems.

For the Ombudsman, the portal provides real-time insights that help (1) Identify systemic service delivery failures, (2) focus on non-performing departments (3) track recurring issues that require targeted interventions and (4) drive more accountable, data-led governance.

Through our CRM system, the city has a unique opportunity to rebuild trust, restore credibility and reaffirm its commitment to dignity in service delivery.

Do you have a complaint? Visit our website at www.joburgombudsman.org.za to submit or track it.

Driven by justice: How a trainee investigator helped fix an old problem in Bramfischerville

For years, residents of Abbess Drive in Bramfischerville Phase 4, Soweto, faced serious challenges with a road that was severely damaged by rain, riddled with potholes and frequently impassable. Despite repeated concerns, the issue went unaddressed, affecting residents' access and safety.

Rather than to wait for a formal complaint, we exercised our mandate to proactively investigate where clear public harm was evident. What sets this case apart is that it was led by a trainee investigator, carefully mentored as part of our commitment to developing skilled and empathetic professionals.

On 26 February 2025, the trainee conducted a thorough inspection, confirming the severity of the problem and the impact on the community. This investigation went beyond infrastructure but more importantly about upholding residents' rights to basic services and dignity.

Supported by a senior investigator, the trainee engaged the Johannesburg Roads Agency (JRA), resulting in a formal response and a commitment to repair the road. Within two months, the repairs were completed and a follow-up inspection in May confirmed that safe access had been restored.



For the trainee, this case provided invaluable practical experience, combining technical skills with an understanding of the human consequences of service failures. For the community, it was a significant improvement after years of neglect. And for the Office, it demonstrated how mentored, hands-on training strengthens our capacity to serve the public effectively.

It is worth noting that much of this success was driven by the War Room Committee, chaired by the City's COO. By fostering cross-departmental collaboration, the Committee has helped fast-track resolutions. In the last quarter alone, 86% of our recommendations were implemented. A strong testament to the power of coordinated action.

Looking ahead, the Unit will focus on enhancing capacity through upgraded technology, expanded training in mediation and data analysis as well as continued collaboration, all aimed at delivering timely, fair service to the residents of the city.



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Joburg resident's battle highlights need for transparency in zoning

For nearly two decades, *Dr. James van der Merwe dreamed of building a lasting legacy through his property in Eikenhof, one that would support his family's future and contribute to the city's economy. But that dream turned into a frustrating battle, as administrative inconsistencies, delayed responses and confusing zoning decisions left him without answers.



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Despite years of engagement with the City of Johannesburg, his property's zoning and municipal billing remained unresolved. Though his land was notatorially tied, it was billed in fragmented portions and repeatedly reclassified, shifting between agricultural, residential, business and even vacant land, without any clear communication or transparent process. This led to unpredictable spikes in his monthly rates, causing significant financial and emotional strain.

From as early as 2008, Dr. van der Merwe submitted multiple appeals but received no feedback or resolution. It wasn't until 2024, when he turned to our office, that the cycle of silence began to break.

A thorough investigation uncovered prolonged maladministration and internal delays that had stalled his appeals, with inconsistent zoning practices causing long-term confusion and unfair financial burdens. We then facilitated a conciliation process, securing a long-overdue opportunity for him to present his case before the Valuation Appeals Board. While the final decision is still pending, this marked a crucial turning point, opening a space for transparency, accountability and hope after years of being ignored.

His story is more than one man's fight but a powerful reminder that fairness starts with being heard. While zoning and billing errors may seem technical, their consequences are deeply personal, impacting livelihoods, family stability and one's financial security.

As an office, we believe no resident should feel invisible before bureaucracy. Hence, we are committed to ensuring every voice is valued and every complaint receives the attention it deserves.

Evaluating the impact of Ombudsman Processes: What to expect from the 3rd Annual Joburg Ombudsman Webinar

On 16 October 2025, the Office of the Ombudsman for the City of Johannesburg, in collaboration with the University of Johannesburg's Community Engagement Division, will host its 3rd Annual Hybrid Webinar under the theme "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Ombudsman Processes."

Held in commemoration of International Ombudsman Day, the event will take place both virtually and in person at UJ Soweto Campus, bringing together academics, civil society, postgraduate students, media and members of the public for a meaningful dialogue on accountability, transparency and access to justice in local governance.

Structured as a hybrid panel discussion, the event will feature a lineup of thought leaders drawn from academia, government, community-based organisations and the Ombudsman's own ranks.

Discussions will explore the impact and effectiveness of the Ombudsman in advancing fairness, examine ongoing barriers to public access and awareness, and highlight the critical role of community engagement in strengthening accountability. The webinar will also look at opportunities for institutional reform and innovation within Ombudsman practices, reinforcing its relevance as a tool for administrative justice and public redress.



3rd Annual Joburg Ombudsman Webinar



Join us, in collaboration with the University of Johannesburg Community Engagement department, under the theme "Evaluating the Effectiveness of Ombudsman Processes", as we explore key insights with Adv. S'duduzo Gumede, the Ombudsman for the City of Johannesburg, alongside key speakers such as COJ Chair of Chairs Cllr. Marema, Speaker of COJ Council Cllr. Arnolds, Acting Commissioner of the National Consumer Commission, Mr. Ratshisusu, Ombudsman of the Consumer Goods and Services Ombudsman Office, Mr. Lee (Liaquat) Soobrathee, Senior Manager: UJ Community Engagement, Ms. Fiona Manhlori and seasoned journalist, Anna Cox.

DATE	TIME
Thursday, 16 October 2025	10h00 - 13h00

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

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