



Joburg Ombudsman strengthens dialogue on service delivery at 3rd Annual Hybrid Webinar

Ensuring fairness, dignity and effective public services in a city as vast and diverse as Johannesburg is no small feat. For the Office of the Ombudsman, meeting this challenge lies at the very core of our mission.

In October, we hosted our 3rd Annual Joburg Ombudsman Webinar in celebration of International Ombudsman Day, under the theme *"Evaluating the Effectiveness of Complaint Handling Processes"*. The event provided a platform to review complaint-handling systems, share practical insights and emphasise the importance of collaboration in driving better service delivery.

The hybrid session brought together government officials, academics, media representatives and consumer protection leaders to explore ways to make city services fairer, accessible and more responsive.

Advocate Siduduzo Gumede, the Ombudsman for the City of Johannesburg, described the Office as a vital bridge between residents and City departments; a space where complaints are transformed into opportunities for meaningful solutions. He highlighted ongoing challenges in communities such as Soweto, including illegal landfills, water disruptions and delayed road repairs, stressing that close cooperation with departmental heads enables quicker, more effective interventions.



Advocate Siduduzo Gumede, Ombudsman for the City of Johannesburg

Advocate Gumede emphasised that the independence of the Office was central to its credibility. With more than 200 cases per investigator each month, the office has digitised its complaint process to improve accessibility and continues to expand capacity. Collaboration between ombuds institutions was highlighted as key for sharing best practices, educating consumers and protecting against fraud and misinformation.

That call for partnership resonated throughout the event. Lee Soobrathi, the Consumer Goods and Services Ombudsman, spoke about the shared burden carried by ombuds offices across sectors. His team handles roughly 250 cases per month, pointing out the high demand for independent oversight.

Fiona Mohlori from the University of Johannesburg's Community Engagement Department, highlighted the power of education and community engagement in transforming complaint systems. She described how UJ's outreach initiatives, such as Community Engagement Imbizos, bring residents, students and service providers into one room to find shared solutions.

Representing the National Consumer Commission, Mr. Jabulani Mbeje underlined the need for accountability when Ombudsman recommendations are not implemented, stating that if recommendations are ignored, an explanation must be provided because implementation is vital to building public trust.

Veteran journalist Ms. Anna Cox called for greater media visibility of the Ombudsman's work. "The Ombudsman's office is vital but often invisible," she said. "Visibility through the media helps residents see that their concerns are being heard". She encouraged regular briefings and public updates to strengthen transparency.



(Left to right): Adv Sdu Gumede, Fiona Mahlori, Lee Soobrathi, Jabulani Mbeje and Anna Cox



Student participants from the University of Johannesburg's Soweto Campus

The conversation also looked ahead, focusing on how to engage the next generation. Panellists suggested integrating ombudising into university curricula and using creative outreach to make the Ombudsman's work more relatable and accessible. As the webinar drew to a close, Advocate Gumede emphasised the collective responsibility of ensuring residents' voices are not just heard but acted upon.





OMBUDSMAN
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November 2025

In Focus: Joburg Ombudsman #AtYourReach Campaign

October was a month of connection, community and impact as the Office of the Ombudsman's Ambassador Team actively engaged Johannesburg's neighborhoods across all seven regions. Under the banner of #JhbOmbudsmanAtYourReach, the team empowered residents to raise concerns and contributed to tangible improvements in municipal service delivery. Activities included regional outreaches, Ombud's Day celebrations, collaborative events, Transport Week workshops, councillor meetings and community-based planning sessions.

Ombudsman Day 2025 – Mamelodi, Soweto

Celebrating the profession of the Ombudsman, the team collaborated with the Motor Industry Ombudsman, National Financial Ombudsman, Consumer Goods and Services Ombudsman and the National Credit Regulator. Over 150 residents raised concerns about municipal service failures such as potholes. Multilingual ambassadors highlighted Johannesburg's diversity, while collaboration with sister organisations strengthened professional networks despite challenges like extreme heat and safety concerns.

Transport Week – City of Johannesburg

Over 200 high school learners participated in workshops hosted in collaboration with Sci-Bono, the Department of Transport, Pikitup, Joburg Water and City Power. The sessions sparked interest in careers at the Office of the Ombudsman and within the legal and human rights sectors. Engagement challenges with teenagers were met with interactive discussions and Q&A sessions.

Councillor Meeting – Pimville, Soweto

At the Pimville Skills Centre, the Ombudsman and Ambassador Team met with councillors and SAPS representatives to address persistent crime, illegal mining and service delivery issues in the community. Plans for an independent investigation by the Office of the Ombudsman were discussed, reflecting growing collaboration with the City Council.

Community-Based Planning – Finetown

Through the City's Community-Based Planning Programme, the Office engaged residents on service delivery priorities for the next financial year. Seventeen residents provided input, helping improve relations and inform municipal reforms despite ongoing service gaps.

This month saw hundreds of complaints resolved, growing referral rates, and community feedback that will guide city-wide reforms. The Office of the Ombudsman enters November with renewed momentum, planning expanded regional activations, Open Days and collaborative outreach programmes to ensure fairer, faster and more resident-centric services.



Every year on 19 November, communities around the globe unite to recognise World Toilet Day - a reminder that safe ablution facilities are not a privilege but a right that supports dignity, health and equality. This year's theme, "We'll Always Need the Toilet," highlights that while our world continues to evolve through climate change, rapid urban growth, and ageing infrastructure, one truth remains unchanged: the toilet is essential to every household and every community.

Globally, progress is being made, yet the need is still great. The United Nations reports that about 3.5 billion people lack access to safe ablution facilities, with hundreds of millions still practicing open air defaecation. Here in South Africa, access continues to improve. According to Statistics South Africa's 2024 General Household Survey, more than 83 percent of households now have access to improved sanitation (up from just 62 percent two decades ago).

In Johannesburg, that progress is visible through ongoing municipal investment and the City's efforts to expand access to safe sanitation across all regions. Yet as the city grows, the need for maintenance, upgrades and inclusive planning grows too. In some informal areas, including parts of Region G, Orange Farm, Finetown, Freedom Park, Lawley and Kya Sands, many residents still depend on shared or temporary facilities. These realities remind us that achieving sustainable sanitation is a shared responsibility between the City, communities and partners working hand-in-hand.

Sanitation is about more than just toilets. It is about dignity, equality and safety. Without clean, private facilities, residents face health risks and learners (particularly girls) may miss valuable school days due to inadequate hygiene conditions. By protecting and expanding sanitation services, we not only prevent disease but also promote well-being, education and environmental care.

As the City of Johannesburg continues to build a sustainable and inclusive future, the Office of the Ombudsman remains committed to amplifying residents' voices on issues that affect daily life, including sanitation, water supply and service delivery. Together, through dialogue, accountability and partnership, we can ensure that every household enjoys access to safe and dignified facilities.



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