



Misallocated meter: Ombudsman helps balance the books

When Johannesburg resident *Mr. Thabiso Modise approached the Joburg Ombudsman in October 2025, he was at his wits' end, overwhelmed by puzzling and excessive municipal charges that threatened his financial stability. What began as a simple billing query soon uncovered a deeper issue: his electricity meter number had been mistakenly assigned to his neighbour's account. This error, left unnoticed for months, led to repeated inaccurate billing and left him liable for significant and unjustified charges totalling R43 900, 41 in outstanding fees.

Once he lodged his complaint formally, our Complaints and Investigations Unit assigned an investigator who immediately acted. The investigator meticulously reviewed both accounts, traced billing and meter histories, verified readings and scrutinised every relevant record, including meter audits, billing logs, account statements and consumption reports. No detail was left unchecked, ensuring the correction would be both lawful and fair.



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Resolving the matter required close collaboration with various City departments, including Billing and Customer Services. Even when faced with information gaps and bureaucratic delays, our office persisted, tracking every detail to ensure a timely and just outcome for the complainant.

Weeks of careful investigation finally brought clarity. Our office confirmed the full scope of the mistake and his account was adjusted with a credit of R 59 850, wiping away the unwarranted charges that had weighed so heavily on him. But the resolution was more than a financial correction - it brought him relief and renewed his confidence and trust in the City's systems, showing that even when errors occur, fairness and accountability can prevail.

Mr. Modise's experience highlights the critical role of the Joburg Ombudsman in protecting residents' rights and holding municipal administration accountable. With its independent mandate to investigate maladministration, rectify injustices and recommend corrective actions, the Office ensures that every

complaint (big or small) is handled with integrity and fairness.

When the City falls short, residents do not have to suffer in silence. The Ombudsman By-Law 2023 empowers the Ombudsman to investigate any act or omission that amounts to maladministration, unfair or improper conduct or causes undue prejudice to the public and to recommend corrective or remedial action. This ensures that when municipal systems fail, there is a clear path to accountability and justice. The Ombudsman stands as a safeguard for anyone whose municipal rights have been compromised, helping ensure that the City remains answerable to the people it serves.

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** Not the complainant's real name*

2025 Highlights

In 2025, the Joburg Ombudsman significantly strengthened its role as a bridge between Johannesburg's residents and the City of Johannesburg - not simply by handling complaints but by actively reaching into communities, embracing technology and deepening its commitment to transparency and accountability.

The year began with a bold initiative under the banner "Here to Hear You" - a seven-week citywide programme of **Citizen Information Clinics**. These clinics, held across all seven regions of the city from mid-February through March, brought our office directly into communities. Citizens were invited to share concerns about municipal service delivery - from water, electricity, sanitation and waste management to infrastructure neglect. The clinics also offered free legal consultations through partnerships with organisations such as the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) and the Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa (SERI), helping residents understand their rights and the role of the Ombudsman as a recourse.

These outreach efforts did more than just raise awareness but surfaced patterns of deep-rooted municipal problems i.e., long-standing sewage and sanitation issues, uncollected waste, erratic water and electricity supply, illegal dumping, blocked sewers and other infrastructure failures. These are not isolated complaints but systemic issues affecting residents' quality of life.

Recognising that traditional, in-person complaint mechanisms can be cumbersome and inaccessible for many, we launched a **new online complaints portal** in August - a user-friendly, 24/7 digital platform that enables residents to lodge municipal-service complaints, track their status in real time and receive direct support. This move was part of a broader push to harness technology to make municipal accountability more





accessible. Through **partnerships with various City departments**, we promoted residents' awareness of their rights under the Ombudsman By-Law 2023, highlighting in a public lecture at the University of Johannesburg the Ombudsman's vital role in ensuring administrative justice, procedural fairness, and the protection of human rights in municipal service delivery.



Intake and Registry Unit Team lodging complaints at a recent Region F Open Day

What emerges from 2025 is a picture of an office recasting itself - not as a passive repository for complaints but as an active, engaged and accessible institution. Through clinics, outreach, digital tools and public engagement, we sought to bring accountability to the municipal level, while empowering residents to claim their rights. In a city as vast and complex as Johannesburg, that kind of bridge - between governance and people - is indispensable.

Why these programmes matter

Johannesburg remains a dynamic and sprawling city but with growth come persistent challenges: inadequate service delivery, bureaucratic delays, overcrowded settlements and disconnection between city departments and residents. The 2025 initiatives of the Joburg Ombudsman reflect a clear recognition that oversight cannot be passive or reactive - it must be proactive, accessible and rooted in the lived reality of communities.

By adopting digital tools, expanding its regional outreach, enhancing investigative capacity, and engaging widely with residents, the Ombudsman is strengthening a crucial bridge between the City and its people. For residents whose rights have been compromised, these developments reaffirm the existence of a real, functioning path to accountability, resolution and ideally, transformation.

Stay connected with us! Follow our Facebook page (@Joburg Ombudsman) and X page (@jhbombudsman) for the latest news, updates and insights straight from the Ombudsman's office.

International Anti-Corruption Day: What it means for you

Each year on 9 December, the world observes International Anti-Corruption Day - a call for transparency, integrity and good governance. For Joburg residents, corruption and maladministration aren't abstract issues but disrupt water supply, hinder waste removal, delay infrastructure repairs, compromise safety and undermine the daily dignity of residents.

Corruption undermines service delivery and when municipal funds or resources are mismanaged or diverted, residents face delays, disruptions or poor-quality services, often hitting vulnerable communities the hardest. Accountability starts at the local level and in a city as large and complex as Joburg, good governance is essential. Our office provides a mechanism for residents to hold the City's entities and departments accountable when service delivery or administrative fairness fails.

Under the Ombudsman By-Law 2023, the Joburg Ombudsman investigates maladministration, procedural unfairness and service-delivery failures (joburgombudsman.org.za). **The office, however, does not investigate corruption, fraud or bribery.** Residents who suspect such misconduct should report it to the City's dedicated anti-fraud unit, the Group Forensic and Investigation Services (GFIS) by calling 0800 002 587 or emailing whistle@joburg.org.za.

On this Anti-Corruption Day, let this be a civic recommitment to responsibly speak up, demand transparency and help build a city where services work for everyone, residents' rights are upheld and Johannesburg grows stronger for all.



Holiday Office Hours

The holidays are here and our office will be running on skeleton staff but your concerns remain important to us. We encourage you to use our digital channels to lodge complaints - we'll be keeping a close eye and responding as best we can.

- **Helpdesk:** 010 288 2800
- **WhatsApp:** 081 365 0225
- **Email:** complaints@joburgombudsman.org.za

Walk-ins are still welcome during our standard hours: **08:00 – 16:00, weekdays**, except on **16, 25, 26 December 2025 and 1 January 2026**, which are public holidays.

Wishing you a joyful holiday season and a happy New Year!

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