



Coffee with the Colonel: Brewing trust in communities

On 18 June 2026, the Johannesburg Property Company (JPC) hosted a "Coffee with the Colonel" engagement session that brought together the South African Police Service, City stakeholders including the Joburg Ombudsman and community representatives. Held under the theme "Bravery and Justice", the meeting created an open space for dialogue on safety and the everyday lived realities of residents in Johannesburg.

As the morning unfolded, residents began to speak candidly about what safety truly feels like for them, one community member shared what many residents quietly experience, "You don't always feel safe, even in places you know well. It's the small things that build up", while another raised a recurring concern about what happens after reporting an issue and whether complaints are acted on or followed up at all.



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SAPS offered its perspective, highlighting the operational pressures officers face while responding to incidents across a dense, fast-changing urban environment. City partners added that safety systems do exist and are actively maintained but are often stretched between increasing demand and limited capacity, resulting in outcomes that can be effective in some instances and less consistent in others.

Within the broader context, our office plays a critical accountability role in the City's governance ecosystem by investigating service delivery failures and maladministration that can contribute to unsafe environments. Through complaints handling and holding departments to account, we work to strengthen the underlying conditions that shape residents' daily sense of safety - often in ways that are more felt than immediately visible. Because safety in Johannesburg is a streetlight that does not work on a dark walk home and waste left in places where children still play.

See it. Report it. Help fix it. Every report, whether it relates to crime, poor service delivery or municipal maladministration, contributes to a safer, better-functioning city. By working together and holding one another accountable, we can build a Johannesburg where every resident feels safe, heard and empowered.

Ombudsman resolves billing dispute

The Joburg Ombudsman's successfully assisted Riverglades Estate Body Corporate in resolving a long-running municipal billing dispute after an investigation found that the estate's account had been incorrectly billed.



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The dispute began when significant billing discrepancies appeared on the municipal account, resulting in an inflated balance and the accumulation of interest. Although the Body Corporate continued paying its current municipal charges, it faced repeated electricity disconnection threats while trying to resolve the matter directly with the City.

After the complaint was referred to our office, an investigation was launched in collaboration with the relevant City of Johannesburg departments, which confirmed that the account contained billing errors, prompting a comprehensive reconciliation of historical charges, meter readings and account transactions. To safeguard residents while the matter was under review, we also secured confirmation that the account would not be disconnected pending the outcome of the investigation.

The investigation ultimately led to the correction of the municipal account and the reversal of interest that had accrued because of the incorrect billing, providing significant financial relief to the Body Corporate and bringing a long-running dispute to a close.

This case highlights the important role of the Joburg Ombudsman in resolving complaints of maladministration by facilitating cooperation between municipal departments, ensuring administrative fairness and helping residents and businesses obtain appropriate redress where municipal errors have occurred.

We encourage residents to review their municipal accounts regularly and report any billing discrepancies within the prescribed timeframes. Residents are also encouraged to continue paying the undisputed portion of their municipal accounts while any disputed charges are being investigated.





Youth Month engagement highlights the value of administrative justice

In many communities across Johannesburg, the question is not whether rights exist but whether they are felt in daily life. In places such as Alexandra, residents continue to live with the realities of electricity interruptions, delayed responses to service requests and unresolved municipal complaints that affect homes, businesses and dignity.

The Joburg Ombudsman exists within this reality. As an independent custodian of administrative justice, our office is mandated to ensure that residents are treated fairly and that municipal decisions and service delivery processes are lawful, reasonable and procedurally fair.

During a recent Youth Month outreach at Alexandra High School in Region E, Ward 91, this mandate was brought into direct conversation with the community where learners and educators engaged with us on what it means to escalate a complaint, what happens when City processes fail to resolve an issue and where residents can turn when they feel unheard.



© Alexandra High School

The engagement reflected lived experience i.e., power outages, complaints that go unanswered and the frustration of following process without seeing resolution. A total of 105 service-related matters were recorded, reflecting both the scale of need and the willingness of young people to engage with accountability systems when given the opportunity.

What emerged clearly is that many residents are not disengaged - they are often simply unaware of the pathways available to them when service delivery fails. That gap between experience and recourse is where accountability must become stronger and more visible.

The Joburg Ombudsman plays a critical role in this space, providing an independent avenue for review once internal City complaint channels have been exhausted. In doing so, we help to ensure that frustration does not become silence, and that unresolved complaints are not left without scrutiny.

Equally important, engagements such as the one in Alexandra remind us that administrative justice is not only about processes and procedures - it is about whether residents feel seen, heard and taken seriously when they raise concerns about services that affect their everyday lives.

Residents are reminded that service delivery issues should first be reported through the City of Johannesburg's official customer service channels, with a reference number obtained. Where matters remain unresolved after these processes have been exhausted, the Joburg Ombudsman provides an independent mechanism for review and investigation of possible maladministration.



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However, should these mechanisms fail to yield fruit, particularly where there are allegations of maladministration, unreasonable delays, unfair treatment or procedural irregularities, residents may contact the Office through the following channels:

- Telephone: 010 288 2800 (currently out of service)
- WhatsApp: 081 365 0225
- Email: complaints@joburgombudsman.org.za
- Walk-ins: Sappi Building, 48 Ameshoff Street, Braamfontein.
- Website: www.joburgombudsman.org.za

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