



Ombudsman strengthens investigators' mediation skills



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As part of the Office of the Ombudsman for the City of Johannesburg's ongoing commitment to improving service delivery and dispute resolution, several Senior Investigators from our office recently completed a specialised five-day mediation training workshop presented by Conflict Dynamics.

The training focused on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), which remains a central part of the Ombudsman's approach to resolving disputes and impasses between residents and the city. *ADR processes are aimed at encouraging constructive engagement and assisting parties to reach practical and mutually beneficial outcomes without unnecessary escalation.*

Given that mediation and conciliation form an important part of our daily operations, the programme equipped our investigators with enhanced tools and techniques to approach these processes in a more structured and coordinated manner. They received training in mediation, negotiation and facilitation skills that are regularly applied when engaging complainants and City departments, and entities to resolve disputes.

The workshop also provided broader exposure to professional mediation practices, including court-annexed and commercial mediation, enabling them to deepen their understanding of dispute-resolution mechanisms beyond the municipal environment. Particular emphasis was placed on managing difficult conversations, facilitating constructive dialogue and guiding parties towards meaningful and sustainable resolutions.

"By investing in these skills, our investigators are better equipped to resolve matters more efficiently, reduce conflict and strengthen public trust in the city. This programme further reinforces our commitment to accessible, people-centred service delivery and to handling every complaint with fairness, professionalism and a clear focus on achieving positive outcomes for all parties involved." – Advocate S'du Gumede.

Beyond the workplace, the training also reinforced the importance of effective communication, empathy and problem-solving skills in everyday interactions (values that remain central to the work of an Ombudsman office).

Ombudsman intervention secures R8.9 million credit for Johannesburg business

Our office has successfully resolved a major electricity billing dispute involving QK Meats Group (Pty) Ltd and City Power.

The Johannesburg-based company lodged a complaint after identifying significant discrepancies on its electricity account following the introduction of Time of Use (TOU) tariffs in September 2024. According to the complaint, incorrect decimal placement on peak electricity charges resulted in inflated consumption figures and excessive billing.

QK Meats Group also relied on its online metering system, which independently records electricity usage, including solar generation data. The system reflected substantially lower electricity consumption than the amounts billed by the entity. Despite reporting the issue to the City's revenue department and City Power, the matter remained unresolved until it was escalated to our office.

In terms of Section 102(2) of the Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, municipalities may not implement debt collection or credit control measures on amounts that are formally disputed by an account holder. The Ombudsman accordingly instructed that the account be flagged and protected while the matter was under investigation.

The matter has now been resolved, with City Power crediting approximately R8.9 million to the customer's account.

This case highlights the importance of consumers and businesses carefully monitoring municipal accounts, particularly following tariff structure changes or meter system transitions. It also demonstrates the critical role played by institutions such as the Office of the Ombudsman in promoting the resolution of billing disputes within municipal services.

Navigation						
Receivables Down payments Totals Payment list Chronology						
Due date	Text	Cur	Debit	Credit memo	Current balance	Down payments
19.03.2026	Reset Cleared Items	ZAR	1,667,433.81		66,251,286.04	
19.03.2026	Reset Cleared Items	ZAR	1,170,589.59		65,080,696.45	
19.03.2026	Reset Cleared Items	ZAR	1,122,984.89		63,957,711.56	
20.03.2026	IS-U Invoicing	ZAR	1,103,152.00		62,854,559.56	
20.03.2026	IS-U inv. reversal	ZAR		1,103,152.00	63,957,711.56	
23.03.2026	Payment Lot	ZAR		1,103,152.00	65,060,863.56	
08.04.2026	IS-U Invoicing	ZAR	55,500,697.70		9,560,165.86	
17.04.2026	IS-U Invoicing	ZAR	754,093.08		8,806,072.78	
*		ZAR	266,145,051.04	274,951,123.82	8,806,072.78	180,393.41

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Residents and businesses are encouraged to keep accurate records of consumption, regularly compare invoices with independent meter readings where possible and report discrepancies promptly to the relevant departments and/or CoJ-owned entities.





What do human rights mean in the digital age?

Human rights are often framed as broad constitutional ideals - *freedom, equality and justice* - but in practice they are better understood (and lived) through everyday protections, including the preservation of personal information.

In a digital environment where essential services increasingly require individuals to share personal data through online platforms, these rights extend beyond physical spaces into every stage of data collection, use and storage.



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For institutions such as the Office of the Ombudsman for the City of Johannesburg, this responsibility is central to our mandate because individuals frequently approach us in situations of distress or vulnerability, often disclosing sensitive personal and familial information. Its careful handling is therefore not only procedural but a legal and ethical obligation rooted in respect for human dignity.

South Africa's legislative framework provides clear guidance through the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), which sets conditions for the lawful processing of personal data. It requires that information be collected for legitimate purposes, processed lawfully and transparently, securely protected against loss or unauthorised access and retained only as long as necessary. These defences are designed to mitigate risks such as identity theft, fraud and the misuse of personal information.

As an office, maintaining public trust requires a careful balance between confidentiality and transparency. Individuals must have confidence that their personal information will be handled securely and with due care, while we ourselves remain accountable in the execution of our functions as an office.

As reliance on digital systems increases, so do associated risks, including data breaches and unauthorised disclosures. We as institutions within the government space must therefore implement robust information security measures, ensure continuous staff training and promote a culture of integrity and accountability in the handling of sensitive information.

Reminder: How to lodge a complaint

Before lodging a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman, please ensure that you have submitted a query with the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) either through its Call Centre **0860 JOBURG (562874)**, eServices website, or regional customer service centres.

Once you have lodged your complaint with CoJ, allow them a reasonable opportunity to resolve the complaint. If your complaint is not resolved (even to your satisfaction), only then may you escalate it to the Office of the Ombudsman.

Should you wish to escalate your complaint, ensure you have received a reference number from CoJ and keep it safe as it will be required by our office when opening your case.



When lodging a complaint with the Office of the Ombudsman, please ensure that you have the following documents on hand:

- A fully completed copy of the prescribed complaint form;
- A copy of the complainant's ID. *If acting on behalf of another person, then Power of Attorney will be required;*
- A reference number from the City of Johannesburg;
- Proof of residence (if available) and
- All prior correspondence i.e., emails, SMSes etc. related to the complaint.

Remember to take the time to read through the form and gather the necessary information before completing it. Please outline the nature of the complaint, chronological order of complaint, the ground upon which there has been an act or omission, facts known to the complainant or relevant information, and any redress sought.

You may contact the Office of the Ombudsman 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.

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