
Newsletter from the Office of the City Ombudsman, Cape Town • Issue 7 • June 2009

As winter begins in earnest, we're ending an extremely busy financial year in the City of Cape Town and making plans for the next twelve months in anticipation of new challenges and promises. The Office has said a sad farewell to our Manager for Internal Ombudsing, Lorika Elliott, who has taken up a new position elsewhere. We wish her well in her new career. We have also hosted several information clinics in various communities across Cape Town and have improved on the time we take in resolving cases.

If you have any comments or suggestions about what you'd like to read in the next issue, please feel free to contact us on 021 400 5487.

Till next time - stay warm and take care.

Natasha Paulse

Office of the City Ombudsman

In this issue:

- [Ombudsman Training](#)
First of its kind Ombudsman training course for Local Government!
- [City Ombudsman investigations](#)
We turn our focus to investigations
- [Advocacy and awareness](#)
Information clinics hosted at local libraries
- [Zambian High Commissioner visit](#)
- [Statistics](#)



First of its kind Ombudsman training course for Local Government!

In March, staff from the Office of the City Ombudsman attended a Customised ADR Training Course presented by Advocate Neville Melville, the Ombudsman for Banking (2000 – 2007) under the auspices of the University of Kwazulu Natal. The training covered mediation, negotiation, report writing and investigation, and has enabled staff to provide a better quality service to our customers.



Advocate Neville Melville and Lorika Elliott

Advocate Melville began his work in alternative dispute resolution in the early 1990s, when he left his legal practice to become a Police Reporting Officer in the National Peace Accord. He has a Master's Degree in Law (cum laude) from the University of Natal. As South Africa's longest serving Ombudsman, he is a highly sought after international speaker and has mentored various fledgling ombudsmen, including the corporate Ombudsman of Edcon and the Banking Ombudsman of Botswana. Melville was a founding member and the first chairperson of the Ombudsman Association of South Africa (OASA). He was responsible for developing the Association's standards of practise.



Back from left: David Phiri, Malcolm Fritz, Mandlenkosi Mgogoshe, Michael Harris and Helene Coutinho.
Front from left: Natasha Paulse, Lorika Elliott, Advocate Neville Melville, Clarissa Williams and Carla Fredericks



Focus on investigations

The Office of the City Ombudsman is an independent and neutral investigative authority within the City of Cape Town. Although it handles complaints from aggrieved persons and has the power to investigate and recommend corrective action, it should only be used as a last resort (when efforts to resolve a complaint via the City's Call Centre or line departments have failed).



The external investigations team: From left: David Phiri (Assistant Investigation Officer), Mandlenkosi Mgogoshe (Compliance Officer), Malcolm Fritz (Investigation Officer), Helene Coutinho (Manager: External Ombudsing and Investigations) and Michael Harris (Investigation Officer)

What common types of investigations are undertaken by the Office?

The most common types of investigations are into a lack of response from City of Cape Town officials. When feedback is received, the Investigation Officer needs to verify the answer given to the complainant and ensure that all questions raised have been sufficiently answered.

Are all complaints investigated?

All complaints are first assessed to ascertain whether the matter falls within our jurisdiction and whether it warrants investigation. If it falls outside our jurisdiction, we inform the complainant and redirect the matter to the correct department for resolution.

What does an investigation entail?

An investigation entails the collecting of background information and evidence from the complainant and the relevant department. The Latin Phrase “audi alteram partem”, which means ‘hear the other side,’ forms the basis of all investigations at our Office. After all the relevant information has been received, the Investigating Officer objectively analyses it and makes a recommendation to the department to settle matters by way of consultation and mediation, if required.

What is the role of an Investigation Officer?

The role of an Investigation Officer is to investigate allegations of maladministration or injustices lodged by members of the public against any service, practise, policy or action of the City of Cape Town.

What special skills are required for this position?

The Investigation Officer needs to be objective at all times and should under no circumstances become ‘emotionally’ involved with the complaint/complainant. This is necessary to avoid jeopardising the outcome of the investigation. Asking relevant questions is a very important skill, as is having the ability to avoid distractions.



Information clinics hosted at local libraries

In the first half of 2009, we hosted a number of service information clinics in areas that are located too far away from our Office to make use of our services. The Library Information Services Directorate provided us with the use of their libraries as venues, for which we extend our gratitude. The sessions were held in the Strand Library (17 March 2009); Ocean View Library (2 April 2009) and Mfuleni Library (12 May 2009). As there is a definite need for information and an outlet for service delivery problems in these areas, the sessions were welcomed by the communities in these areas.



Ombudsman staff , Clarissa Williams, Malcolm Fritz and Natasha Pause pictured with Elfreda Du Toit, Senior Librarian in charge at Strand Library.



A member of the public receiving advice on municipal issues at Strand Library.



Interacting with residents at Mfuleni Library



Reaching out - making an impact at Mfuleni Library



Zambian High Commissioner Visit



From left: Mbulelo Baba (City Ombudsman), Lorika Elliott (Ex-Manager: Internal Ombudsing). Leslie Mbula (Zambian High Commissioner)

The Zambian High Commissioner, Leslie Mbula, accompanied by the First Secretary for Politics, Lawrence Chabangumana, paid a visit to the Ombudsman's office in February. The High Commissioner was in South Africa to attend the opening of Parliament and gain an understanding of how our Office operates, given that there are possible plans to open a similar office in Zambia. The visit was initiated by David Phiri, one of our staff members. Phiri is also a Zambian citizen and Chairperson of the Zambian Association in Cape Town.



Chairperson of the Zambian Association in Cape Town, David Phiri and the Zambian High Commissioner, Leslie Mbula



Statistics

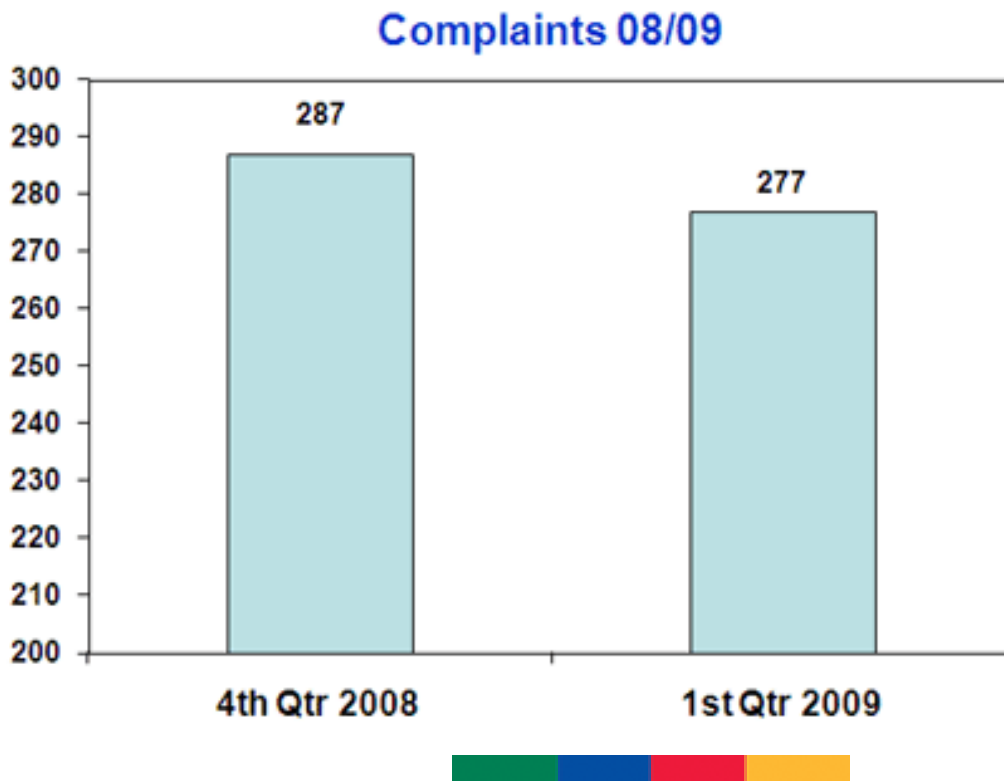
The Office of the Ombudsman dealt with a total number of 277 complaints between 1 January and 31 March 2009. This figure is equivalent to the number of complaints resolved in the previous quarter, which amounted to 287.

Overall departmental responsiveness has improved significantly since the inception of the Ombudsman's Office and remains an important factor in determining the turnaround time for finalising complaints. On average, a final report was given within 67 days from the date of receipt of a complaint, which is considerably better than the current benchmark of 90 days or three months.

Through continued efforts this Office has also managed to reach and maintain the target for ensuring an effective alternative dispute resolution service and 71% of the cases lodged have thus far been resolved in this quarter. This is consistent with the previous quarter's achievement of 70%.

As the Office of the Ombudsman cannot make binding decisions and functions on an informal basis to resolve complaints amicably, the level of acceptance of its

recommendations to line departments is important. The third quarter saw **82% of recommendations accepted**, which is well above the targeted 60%.



Contact us

You can contact the Office of the City Ombudsman on 021 400 5487 or visit our website www.capetown.gov.za/en/CityOmbudsman/Pages/default.aspx

E-mail Complaints
ombudsdirect@capetown.gov.za

If you would prefer not to receive Ombudsman Writes, please reply to this e-mail with **Unsubscribe** in the subject line.