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Newsletter from the Office of the City Ombudsman, Cape Town - Issue 20 - Dec 2015

Welcome to the latest issue of the Ombudsman writes. This issue marks the end of the calendar year and the midpoint of the financial year. We have made significant progress in meeting our goal of taking our services further and closer to our residents. The City Council approved the City of Cape Town Ombudsman By-law on 29 May 2015. This was promulgated on 3 July 2015. I am extremely excited about these changes as it means that we are moving forward and constantly evolving. I am also proud to announce that the IOI Board of Directors granted us membership to the International Ombudsman Institute at its annual general meeting in September. We are the first South African local government Ombudsman to be granted this honour.



Our office also presented our operating model and unique structure at a conference for municipal administrators.

In this issue we feature an insert on our new by-law and introduce our newest staff member, Sivenathi Mhlaba as well as a profile on Natasha Paulse, the Project Officer in the Office and an overview on some of our awareness programmes and projects.

As we enter the festive season, let's be safe on the roads and remember to spare a thought for those less fortunate by donating to a cause or shelter.

Until next time.

Happy reading!
M.M Baba

City Ombudsman



Staff focus

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Awareness

The emergence of ombudsing at local government level

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Interest article

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Staff focus

New addition to the admin team

Sivenathi Mhlaba is the latest addition to our office. This young lady joined us in May 2014 as a contractor via the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). When an administrative position became available she applied and was appointed on 1 July 2015.



Sivenathi completed her studies in Marketing at Walter Sisulu University in 2011. She believes this course of study equipped her with the tools to deal with people and on occasion, irate residents.

Her responsibilities include administrative tasks and reception duties. She also sends out correspondence and interacts with line departments and residents. She enjoys solving residents' problems by listening and interacting with them and allowing them to vent any frustrations they might have.

Sivenathi's personal interests include spending time with family and friends, meeting new people and enjoying the outdoors. She would love to eventually travel abroad. As a Christian her faith is very important to her. She seeks answers through prayer and her relationship with God.

Sivenathi is the youngest of four children in a very close-knit family. Growing up, her parents instilled in her the importance of an education.

"My parents have instilled in me good values and the ability to set goals for myself. I feel proud that I am now able to give back to my family as they made so many sacrifices for me" says Sivenathi.

Sivenathi is a valued member of our team and feels she is learning much from her colleagues. We wish her the very best for her career with us.

Improving efficiency

Natasha Pause has been employed as our Project Officer since October 2007 and is responsible for coordinating any new and internal projects that contribute to our overall efficiency and effectiveness. She is also responsible for the department's performance management and communication functions.



Natasha has been instrumental in developing a new Complaints system and establishing our Service Learning project with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Natasha has been employed at the City of Cape Town for 16 years and has over 10 years of project management experience. She started her employment as an administrative assistant in the now defunct Development Facilitation Unit (the Social Development and Early Childhood Development Directorate) after completing her in-service training at the Health Directorate, later moving to the support service to the Executive Director for Community Development. Before joining us, she was the Administrative Officer for Communications, Performance Management and General Administration at the Sport and Recreation Department.

"All the exposure from the various departments I have worked at and the experience gained from working with my peers helped me think outside of the box and see things from a different perspective," she says.

Natasha is currently completing her Bachelor of Administration Honours degree at the University of the

Natasha is currently completing her Bachelor of Administration Honours degree at the University of the Western Cape. She has been married for almost 11 years, is an avid reader, loves comedy shows and spending time with family and friends.

"The Office has given me the opportunity to develop projects to improve its efficiency and positively affect residents' lives. This makes me glad to be able to make a difference," she concludes.

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Awareness

The emergence of ombudsing at local government level

Helene Coutinho, Manager: External Ombudsing, gave a presentation at the Institute for Municipal Administrators in South Africa (IMASA) annual national conference at the Protea Hotel Techno Park in Stellenbosch.

Her presentation introduced the concept of ombudsing and typical ombudsing approaches – classical, organisational and the internationally recognised hybrid approach developed by the Office for a municipal environment.



Although not a completely new concept, the practice of 'ombudsing' within local government does not have a consistent theoretical foundation, particularly in relation to the required structure or processes, institutional support systems, or legal frameworks for the effective or optimal operation of an institution of this nature. Ombudsing offices are needed to resolve the conflict that routinely occurs between the organisation and its customers about the level and quality of service delivery and it also allows top management to be informed about community problems (new and changing trends), the impact of policy changes to residents and assists with risk assessment for the organisation.

The presentation was well received, although delegates from the various municipalities foresaw some challenges in implementing a similar Office. The concept itself was felt to be a good one but the operationalising of such an office is where the challenge lies. There are challenges in terms of implementing such an office. Further engagement will occur once representatives from the various municipalities have discussed the concept of such an office with their administrative and political management.

Getting our message to residents

As part of our continuing advocacy programme we visited the Athlone and Plumstead walk-in centres to create awareness and educate residents about our role.

We also distributed information brochures and engaged with residents and staff.



Clarissa Williams pictured with Marlene Rothquel now a retired staff member at the Plumstead office



Clarissa Williams engaging with residents about the role of the office

Older persons month

We were invited by the Social and Early Childhood Development Directorate to participate in their event

are now invited by the Social and Early Childhood Development Directorate to participate in their events for Older Persons as part of their Vulnerable Groups Programme. This was held in October, which is internationally celebrated to honour older people.

The purpose of the event was to allow residents to become familiar with the City's services, and we used the opportunity to discuss our role and functions. The audience was also given an opportunity to engage with us and ask any questions.

The initiative was welcomed, and we anticipate increased participation from this portion of the City's ratepayers.



SAPS Band providing entertainment at the Older Persons Day event

Clarissa Williams providing an overview on the role of the office

Service learning project

We have been an informal partner in the Cape Peninsula University of Technology's (CPUT) Service Learning Programme since 2008. The programme utilises students' theoretical knowledge and allows them to implement a project with a City department.

Earlier this year we asked the Service Learning Coordinator at CPUT to identify an academic discipline that could develop a staffing strategy and resource booklet for us. These projects had been identified as weaknesses during an Internal Audit control self-assessment conducted in December 2013. The project commenced in March 2015 and second year Human Resources students were selected to conduct the necessary research and present their findings to us. Natasha Paulse coordinated the project and Mandi Mavuso (the lecturer for the course) coordinated the academic component.

The students presented their final reports in October 2015 and we will now use their research as a basis for developing our staffing strategy in conjunction with the City's Human Resources Department. The resource booklet will also be developed with the aid of the City's Strategic Communication, Branding & Marketing Department and the Translations Unit.





Paulse coordinating the project for the office and Mandi Mavusa course facilitator at CPUT with students part of the Ombudsman Service Learning Project



CPUT students part of the Ombudsman Service Learning Project

Office strategic session

The Office held its strategic session on 30 October. The session is held annually to help us discuss our business plan and future targets , it not only includes staff in any strategic processes but gives direction in terms of goals set.

The session, which is usually held earlier in the financial year and was postponed due to workload commitments, was held at our offices in Cape Town. We focussed on specialised training requirements for the office , specific areas that should be included in the revised Standard Operating procedures Manual, the new Complaints system and the introduction of any enhancements as well as a quality management framework which is being developed for us.





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Statistics

We received 1698 complaints for the period 1 July 2014 – 30 June 2015. This is a slight decline compared to the previous financial year, specifically the final quarter. The drop may be attributed to the reduction in awareness campaigns to manage backlogs from previous quarters, which were themselves caused by staff capacity constraints. It may also be due to the success of the campaigns, with residents first contacting the relevant line department.

2014/ 2015				
NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS				
Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
441	391	516	350	1698
PERCENTAGE CASES RESOLVED				
72%	65%	65%	76%	

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New By-Law for the Office

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The City of Town has approved a by-law for the Office of the City Ombudsman. The Office of the City Ombudsman was the first South African ombudsing office to be founded at municipal level. This was because in 2002 Council recognised the need for an independent dispute resolution mechanism that could investigate and resolve residents' complaints about municipal services.

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The process to create an Ombudsman's by-law was started in 2006, and the Ombudsman Policy was approved in September 2014, paving the way for the approval of the by-law. Between these periods, the Office functioned by means of the City Council's Resolution and its system of delegations.

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The City Ombudsman by-law, which is based on best practice from Ontario, Montreal and Nova Scotia, was approved on 29 May and promulgated on 3 July 2015. Ombudsman is the Swedish word for "commissioner" or an independent "representative" of the people. The City Ombudsman can thus be described as Cape Town's "independent" representative, who will ensure that the rights of the City's residents are protected insofar as they pertain to municipal matters.

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Residents can use the Office to lodge complaints about the municipality's lack of responsiveness and poor service delivery. However, the office should only be used as a last resort as residents need to first contact the relevant department to address their complaints.

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"The by-law highlights issues such as the term of office for the next City Ombudsman. This is a new approach as the old system allowed for a permanent appointee in this role," explains City Ombudsman Mbulelo Baba.

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Under the new by-law the City Ombudsman will now be appointed for a period of five years and may only be re-appointed provided that he/she serves no more than two consecutive terms (a maximum of ten years).

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The by-law entrenches the Office's functions and powers in a more effective manner, meaning that they can no longer be ignored by affected parties. "With this by-law the City of Cape Town is strengthening democracy, and the goal of the Ombudsman's office is to be more accessible to residents who might not have been able to use the service without having to travel long distances at great cost" he says.

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Competition

Stand a chance to win a prize by answering the following question:

1. What awareness month was celebrated in October?
2. When was the Office's by-law approved?

E-mail your answer with "Ombudsmanwrites December Competition 2015" in the subject line to ombudsman.writes@capetown.gov.za

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