

## **Joburg finally admits billing mess**

Lazy, greedy, incompetent bullies. That's how fed-up Joburg residents have described City of Joburg officials on social media following months of battling with billing issues.

But yesterday, after repeatedly denying to The Star that there were problems with the city's billing system, the revenue department finally admitted it.

It issued apology text messages to its clients relating to unwarranted termination notices, continuously changing payment dates, billing periods that varied from four days to two months, and incorrect meter readings.

"COJ regrets causing any inconvenience as a result of some customers receiving incorrect pre-termination notices due to a change to their due dates during the past two months," the text message read.

This after standing adamant that its billing dates were correct and giving long explanations about grace periods, which made no sense.

Residents had been receiving shorter payment periods, meaning that if they were on a budget and could not settle their bills before payday, they received pre-termination notices.

This caused untold grief to many who were on a fixed income, especially pensioners who received these notices and lived in fear of having their services cut off.

Many residents wrote to The Star's MetroWatch while others took to Twitter to voice their grievances.

"#CoJBilling Pre-termination notice received but no response to emails for months #bullies #greed #noservice #callous #lazy #youdeclaredwar," tweeted @NadineTavener.

Equally frustrated was @BrizaPistol7, whose tweet "More of a WORST class african City than WORLD class african city. @CityofJoburgZA @jhbwater #COJBilling" got a terse: "We are sorry to hear that your experience with our #CoJBilling has not been that of a world class..." from the city.

COJ spokesman Stan Maphologela said pre-termination issues were due to the implementation of the new credit control policy amended recently.

"The city realises this change should have been communicated better beforehand and regret any inconvenience experienced by customers," he said.

All charges relating to the issuing of illegal pre-termination notices will be reversed, he said.

"From now on, customers are encouraged to pay their municipal bills as per their normal due dates. Also note that customer due dates will be restored to their normal due dates and our team has arranged to work around the clock to ensure this happens as soon as possible," he said.

The city also announced it would be launching the regionalisation of its billing. This means customers will be billed on their municipal statement, per region, as from December 1. The impact of this exercise is expected to be noticed only in January's statements.

## **The Changes**

Current customers' billing, meter reading and due dates will change.

Customers won't be able to change their meter reading or billing dates as it is set per region.

Some customers might receive two bills during the first month of implementation. The first bill will be for a shorter period and a smaller amount and the second bill will be for a full calendar month. Affected customers will be advised through SMSes and in writing beforehand – and this will be a one-off occurrence.

Customers who have debit orders should remember to amend their debit order dates with their banks to reflect the new deduction date. All this information will be communicated before the launch of billing regionalisation.

### **The Benefits**

The biggest benefit is that they will be able to choose their own due date between the 15th and the last day of the month.

Customers will know the dates bills are issued and their meters read, both water and electricity, up front.

There will be dedicated meter readers per region.

A list of suburbs per region will be made available on the city's website [www.joburg.org.za](http://www.joburg.org.za) from November 1 for ease of reference should customers not know which region they live in.

Furthermore, a list of meter reading dates per region will be placed on the website, as well as being printed on customers' statements.

For more information, call 0860 562 874.

The Star

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