



**JOHANNESBURG
MATTERS** FIXING
SOUTH AFRICA'S
GROWTH ENGINE

3

Kickstarting Delivery –

Joburg's Mission Critical Jobs



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About CDE

The Centre for Development and Enterprise (CDE) is an independent policy research and advocacy organisation. It is South Africa's leading development think tank, focusing on critical development issues and their relationship to economic growth and democratic consolidation. Through examining South African realities and international experience, coupled with high-level forums, workshops and roundtables, CDE formulates practical policy proposals outlining ways in which South Africa can tackle major social and economic challenges. CDE has a special focus on the role of business and markets in development.

Johannesburg Matters: Fixing South Africa's Growth Engine

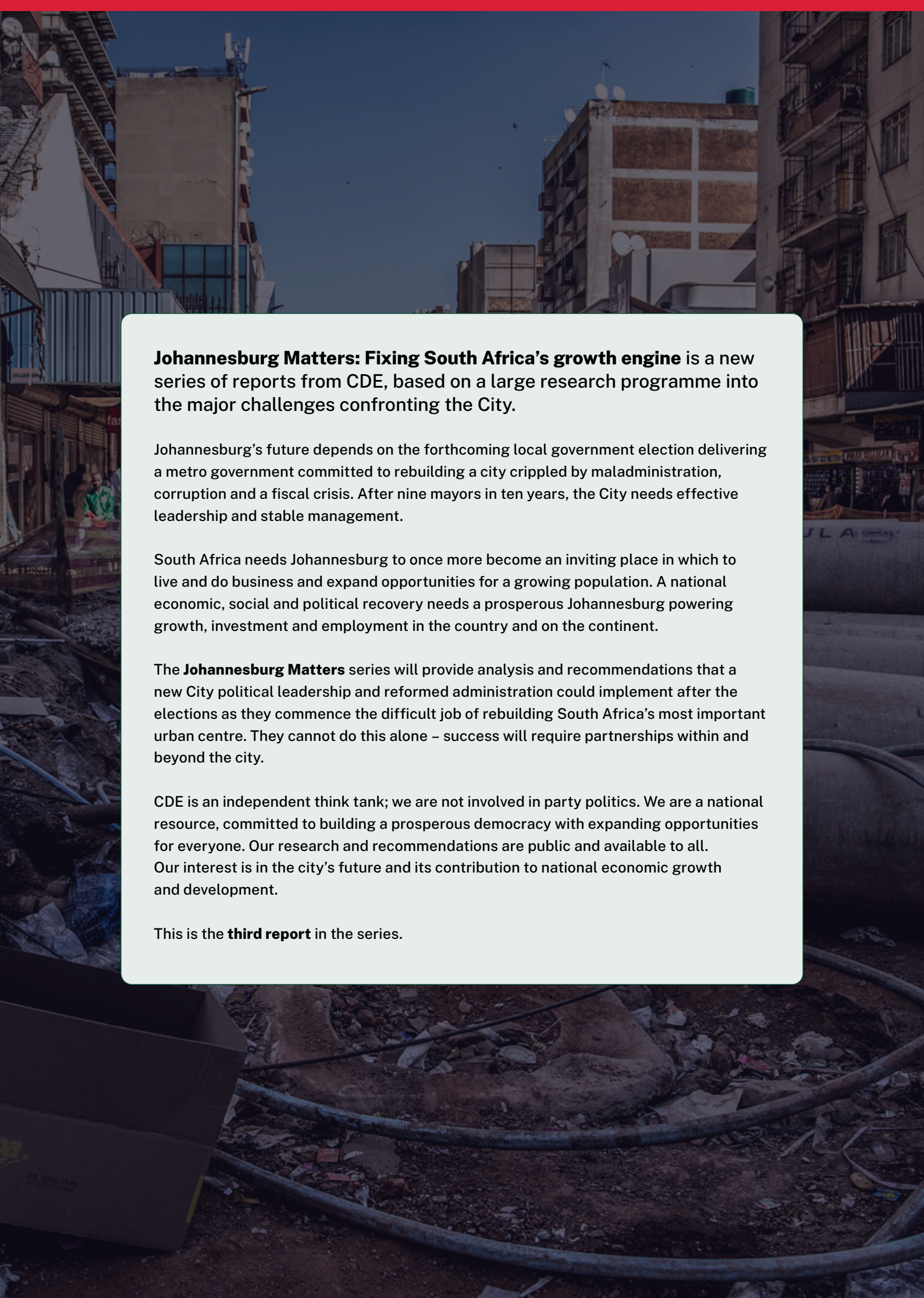
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Reports in the **Johannesburg Matters** series are based on commissioned research, intensive internal research and wide-ranging consultations with experts and stakeholders. This document and the other reports in the series are available from CDE and can be downloaded from www.cde.org.za.

Report Three: Kickstarting Delivery – Joburg's Mission Critical Jobs has been written by a CDE team under the leadership of executive director, Ann Bernstein, and research director, Stefan Schirmer. CDE acknowledges with gratitude the assistance and support of a wide range of experts and business leaders who commented on versions of this report.

This report draws on a specially commissioned report, **The Crisis of Johannesburg: An agenda for reform**, (September 2026), by Ivor Chipkin, co-founder and director of the New South Institute. It also draws on CDE's report, **Agenda 2024: Appoint the right people in mission critical public sector jobs** (June 2024).



The background image shows a city street scene, likely in Johannesburg, South Africa. It features multi-story buildings, some with balconies and satellite dishes. In the foreground, there is a large pile of debris, including cardboard boxes and rubble, suggesting a state of disrepair or ongoing construction/demolition. The sky is clear and blue.

Johannesburg Matters: Fixing South Africa's growth engine is a new series of reports from CDE, based on a large research programme into the major challenges confronting the City.

Johannesburg's future depends on the forthcoming local government election delivering a metro government committed to rebuilding a city crippled by maladministration, corruption and a fiscal crisis. After nine mayors in ten years, the City needs effective leadership and stable management.

South Africa needs Johannesburg to once more become an inviting place in which to live and do business and expand opportunities for a growing population. A national economic, social and political recovery needs a prosperous Johannesburg powering growth, investment and employment in the country and on the continent.

The **Johannesburg Matters** series will provide analysis and recommendations that a new City political leadership and reformed administration could implement after the elections as they commence the difficult job of rebuilding South Africa's most important urban centre. They cannot do this alone – success will require partnerships within and beyond the city.

CDE is an independent think tank; we are not involved in party politics. We are a national resource, committed to building a prosperous democracy with expanding opportunities for everyone. Our research and recommendations are public and available to all. Our interest is in the city's future and its contribution to national economic growth and development.

This is the **third report** in the series.

Kickstarting Delivery – Joburg’s Mission Critical Jobs

Introduction

Governance in Johannesburg has, in many respects, collapsed.

This crisis has multiple dimensions, including pervasive political interference in appointments, the partial breakdown of management structures, extensive vacancies and, therefore, acting appointees in critical administrative areas.

Tackling this is both vitally important and extremely challenging. As prominent cities expert Professor Ed Glaeser argues, while city governments tend to focus on designing perfect policies, in practice “capacity always eats policy”.¹ What really matters, Glaeser argues, “is the number of people a leader can actually direct to take effective action”.² If the bureaucratic machinery is broken, unmotivated, or uncoordinated, even great policies would have little impact.³

It may be an unfashionable thing to say but unless the right people are in charge of key functions it is not possible to get better results. This means that, in Johannesburg, getting senior appointments right is critical to the pace and quality of reform. It is also why these changes can be expected to face opposition from vested interests.

What is required to achieve real progress is a fair but speedy process that starts with the top of the City administration. Executives and managers with turnaround expertise will be required and they will need to know how to identify the competent, committed people they want to keep. The City needs to focus on excellence and the appointment of senior people that have the experience and expertise required to kickstart delivery. A new administration will have to identify and elevate the best people in the administration, while also using every possible available mechanism to get unsuitable people out of vitally important positions.

Unless the right people are in charge of key functions it is not possible to get better results. Getting senior appointments right is critical to the pace and quality of reform. It is also why these changes can be expected to face opposition from vested interests.

We use the term ‘mission critical’ to describe jobs that will determine the success or failure of turning Johannesburg around. If the City is to become much more effective, the best possible people for these jobs need to be appointed.

In this third report of its **Johannesburg Matters series**, CDE is focusing on how a new City leadership could kickstart service delivery and ultimately restore the governance structures of the city. It draws on a paper commissioned for this project, multiple consultations with prominent experts, as well as our previous work on public sector reform.⁴

Johannesburg's governance challenge

A key factor underpinning Johannesburg's governance crisis is the extraordinary political instability the city has experienced for more than a decade. Since 2016, when the city last saw a single party have a majority in Council, the city has had nine mayors and eight coalition administrations. Each has brought their own priorities for the city, disrupting long-term planning. No mayor has completed a full five-year term.⁵

Within this instability, political allegiance has frequently taken precedence over whether candidates have the skills and experience required for the jobs for which they are appointed. None of the members of the Johannesburg Water board, for example, is a professionally qualified engineer, even as the utility faces an infrastructure renewal backlog of more than R26.6 billion.⁶

Speed and urgency in fixing the bureaucracy are required, but wholesale or overly hasty changes would risk repeating one of the mistakes of the past – when changes in political leadership were followed by repeated changes in senior appointments, weakening continuity and institutional memory.

Coalition instability is not the whole story, and Johannesburg's governance problems predate the onset of coalition politics. The practice of what has been called cadre deployment is deeply entrenched in Johannesburg's entities and administration.

In addition, there is a deeper weakness in the institutional arrangements of local government – it leaves too much room for political influence over what should be a professional administration. Political fragmentation and government-by-coalition did not create this weakness, but it increased the City's vulnerability to it.

The legal architecture of local government (the Constitution; the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 (the MSA); the Municipal Structures Act 117 of 1998) fails to delineate clearly the roles of mayor, council and executives in cities' administration. Reforming this system to achieve a genuine separation of the legislative and executive functions should be a long-term goal, but a new Johannesburg administration should act as if this separation already exists and initiate a determined and realistic process to appoint and support competent people in the City's most critical jobs.

Johannesburg is a large and complex bureaucracy with around 35 000 employees. A new administration will need to work out where leadership has failed and new appointments are needed, but also where capable people already inside the City should be retained and supported.

There is a serious shortage of technical and professional skills in the City. Its own annual reports point to persistent vacancies among engineers, finance professionals, ICT specialists, project managers and supply-chain experts. In addition, many senior positions are taken up by people in acting positions. Of the City's 24 senior management positions, at least seven, or 29 per cent, are currently occupied on an acting basis. One senior manager is also carrying two senior portfolios at the same time.⁷

Filling these vacant and acting posts with appropriately skilled people will be challenging. The shortage of such people in South Africa is one part of the challenge; the unattractiveness of employment in the increasingly dysfunctional, and sometimes dangerous, Johannesburg bureaucracy is the other. There may also be significant budget challenges, as not all vacant posts are necessarily funded. A new and exciting story of reform and renewal will need to be communicated widely to attract quality candidates.

Speed and urgency in fixing the bureaucracy are required, but without a considered process, wholesale or overly hasty changes at the top would risk repeating one of the mistakes of the past – when changes in political leadership were followed by repeated changes in senior appointments, weakening continuity and institutional memory.

Making appointments to senior positions through robust, fair and transparent processes will be key. If capable and credible people are appointed to positions such as utility boards and CEO and CFO roles on that basis, it would be that much harder for political leaders to remove them without good reason. Any decision to replace them should then have to be justified against their performance, qualifications and conduct, rather than simply the preferences of a new administration.

Given these challenges and the time it will take to overcome them effectively, it could be necessary to explore ways of bringing in interim private sector capacity (see below).

Inevitably, a new administration will have to deal with opposition from vested interests, particularly if it is seeking to replace incumbents. Countering this will be hard and will have to involve a concerted effort to persuade all stakeholders, even those who might be opposed to the envisaged changes, that these are in the interests of the City and its residents (including residents who happen to be employees of the City). Investing resources in and deploying senior people into this process and its many dimensions will be essential.

Finally, it should be noted that the recommendations set out below have been formulated prior to the results of the November 2026 local government elections. In this context of uncertainty, they have been designed primarily for a coalition scenario led by a party and mayor committed to better governance and to kickstarting service delivery. We are aware that in almost any version of this coalition the risks to administrative integrity will be great and the temptation to distribute appointments as political spoils acute. However, our recommendations apply with equal force, and will in most respects be easier to implement, under a majority city government.

CDE recommendations

A new administration should start by getting the most important appointments right: the city manager, the leadership of the major utilities, and senior officials in critical positions across the administration. This means making appointments through transparent, merit-based processes, retaining and supporting capable people already in the City, and dealing speedily, fairly but firmly with people who do not have the skills, experience or capacity their jobs require.

Commit to key governance principles before the elections

As a starting point, every political party and their candidate for mayor should

- Commit publicly to establishing and protecting the professional independence of Johannesburg's administration and of the managers of municipal entities.
- Publicly declare their support for transparent and competitive appointments, with candidates independently assessed against clear standards of competence, experience and integrity.⁸

The hollowing out of the City's senior management is one of the most damaging consequences of years of political interference in appointments.

In the case of a coalition government, all participating parties in the ruling coalition should sign a written and public document on their plan of action for the City. It should include

an undertaking not to influence or instruct departmental officials on procurement and appointment decisions or operational matters. We need to move away from each political party establishing distinct fiefdoms in City departments or utilities. Setting out leaders' and their parties' commitment to a different approach after the elections is an important, though largely symbolic, starting point and something voters should ask about before casting their vote. The real work will only begin once a new mayor and political arrangement are in place.

The City Manager

The City Manager is formally the head of the administration, responsible for forming and developing an effective, efficient and accountable administration.⁹ Their appointment is determined by the municipal council, with regulations (in terms of the MSA) outlining the process: an advertisement for the position is released nationally, the municipal council appoints a selection panel, consisting of the Mayor, a councillor, and between one and three people who are neither a councillor nor a municipal staff member but who have relevant expertise.¹⁰ The panel must draw up shortlists and conduct interviews of candidates. The council should use this flexibility to include on the panel an independent person with substantial experience of managing or turning around large and complex public or private organisations.

Ultimately though, the power to appoint the City Manager is in the hands of the municipal council, which must recognise that it is of vital importance that the City Manager must be someone committed to the Mayor's vision and have the skills needed to implement the difficult processes and interventions this will require if Joburg is to be rescued.

That means resolving the matter of the incumbent, Floyd Brink, who was first appointed permanently as City Manager in February 2023. That appointment was set aside by the High Court in November 2023 because the City had not followed a lawful appointment process. A subsequent attempt to appoint him was also set aside by the High Court, and he was finally reappointed by Council on 30 October 2025, with effect from 1 November.¹¹ A number of political parties and civil society organisations have questioned whether Brink is the right person to lead the administration at a time when Johannesburg faces such a serious governance and service delivery crisis.¹²

A new administration will need to make that assessment fairly but speedily, against the experience, skills, integrity and leadership required to turn the City around. Brink was appointed on a non-renewable, fixed-term contract that may run until one year after the election of the next council. If a new administration concludes that different leadership is required, it may therefore need to find the resources to end his contract early.¹³

A new administration, seeking to appoint a new city manager in compliance with existing legislation, should set out as far as possible to:

- Define the requirements for the city manager position clearly and in advance. Over and above the legislated requirements, the city manager of Johannesburg from 2027 needs: demonstrated capacity to lead the rebuilding process and to manage turn-around processes; strong financial management capability; technical familiarity with large infrastructure organisations; willingness and capacity to modernise the administration; and the credibility and personal standing to resist inappropriate political interference.
- Select the city manager through a merit-based process. This will require publicly stated employment criteria. The appointment must also be demonstrably independent of coalition deal-making. Shortlisted candidates' names and CVs should be made public; members of the selection committee and their qualifications should be publicly disclosed; and candidates

and committee members should be required to declare conflicts of interest. The candidate must agree to submit to a lifestyle audit and the city should commission a review of the candidates' qualifications and any indications of integrity-related failings in past roles.

- Require the mayor to provide a written, public explanation if the preferred candidate is not the one recommended by the selection committee.
- Speedily formalise a comprehensive delegation of administrative powers to the city manager, including the authority to appoint, promote and dismiss staff, and to take operational decisions without requiring mayoral committee approval.
- Commit – in a binding coalition agreement or public commitment by the ruling party – that the executive mayor and members of mayoral committees (MMCs) will not instruct departmental officials on operational matters, including staffing and procurement.

Fix the boards of the most important utilities: City Power, Joburg Water and Pikitup

Johannesburg operates 13 municipal entities, which perform functions ranging from electricity, water and waste collection to roads, property management and public transport. Governance problems extend across many of them. At least ten have histories of alleged serious tender fraud,¹⁴ while political appointments to boards and senior positions have often weakened the skills and independence needed to oversee these organisations properly.

A new administration will ultimately need to improve governance across all 13 entities. But its immediate priority should be the three entities responsible for some of the city's most important basic services: City Power, Johannesburg Water and Pikitup. Restoring electricity, water and waste collection is central to getting Johannesburg working again, and getting the leadership of these entities right is therefore particularly urgent. (See forthcoming CDE report.)

The utilities have become primary sites for political patronage extended by the different parties in various governing coalitions. Board positions have been awarded to coalition partners and executives rotated with almost every political transition. The entities have stopped functioning primarily as service delivery organisations. They have become fiefdoms, each controlled by a different political faction and managed accordingly.

The entities have stopped functioning primarily as service delivery organisations. They have become fiefdoms, each controlled by a different political faction and managed accordingly.

Political allegiance has prevailed in far too many cases over technical competence. The current chairs of City Power, Johannesburg Water, Pikitup and the Johannesburg Development Agency are all active or former members of political party structures. The current utility boards are, in many cases, poorly qualified for the technical and financial demands of the organisations they govern. It is hard to see these boards as independent or capable of seeing through the bold reforms that are required to turn these institutions around.¹⁵

As it currently stands, the City appoints the boards for one year at a time, on annually renewable contracts. This was changed in 2016 from five-year contracts. While this does give the City greater discretion to remove poorly performing board members, it has also made boards more vulnerable to political interference and weakened continuity. This can be seen at City Power, where the entire board was replaced in March 2020, February 2021 and again in February 2022.¹⁶

An important appointment a new Johannesburg administration will have to make is the board chairperson of each entity. The chairperson sets the governance culture of the board, should play a leading role in recruiting other directors, and is the primary interface between the board and the shareholder.¹⁷ Once the chairperson is in place the rest of the board can be built around that appointment, although it may take time to reconstitute all the boards, and getting in a few more highly competent members could in many cases be an adequate first step.

A new Joburg administration should:

- Identify, recruit and appoint qualified, independent and experienced chairpersons for City Power, Johannesburg Water and Pikitup as a first priority. This may take some time, but it is an important place to start.
- Involve the incoming board chairpersons in defining the skills profile for remaining board members and in the recruitment process for those positions.
- Use the current, annual renewable contract process to remove existing board members who lack the requisite skills, who are or have been implicated in corruption, or whose performance has been inadequate.
- Define and make public the skills profiles required for each utility board. City Power requires strong engineering and energy sector expertise, financial management and resource allocation skills, ICT capability and regulatory experience. Johannesburg Water and Pikitup have their own distinct technical requirements. The existing composition of each board – and the specific gaps in expertise – should inform but not limit the recruitment criteria for each board.
- Appoint members on three year contracts to restore some institutional stability that annual renewals have undermined. In time, stagger appointments so that at least one-third of each board carries over at any given time, preserving institutional memory and continuity.
- Make it a council policy that all substantive engagements between boards and the council must be committed to writing, and that a failure to do so vitiates decisions made in these engagements. This provides a built-in response by board members to any improper directive from the City or vice versa.
- Require board members to make themselves available to law enforcement if allegations of corruption are made with respect to any officer of the entity, and to provide evidence in court if necessary.

Initiating the process of appointing the right people to the boards of these entities offers the City a way to bring in the expertise, experience and diverse skills that these highly technical institutions need to run and deliver services. None of the above recommendations, it must be said, should be interpreted as meaning that current rules, such as may be set out in each entity's Memorandum of Incorporation, must be ignored or supplanted, and the new administration will have to ensure that any new requirements are in accordance with those rules, unless such rules are amended or modified.

Stronger boards, under better leadership, can help assess if the current CEO is the appropriate person to run the entity and can hold the CEO accountable for implementing reforms needed to restore the utility's commercial and operational performance. If a new CEO needs to be appointed the process should not be rushed. The priority must be finding the right person, not filling the position as quickly as possible (see forthcoming CDE report on Joburg's entities).¹⁸

The CEOs and boards will also need to confront the corruption that has taken hold in parts of the entities, including where boards and procurement processes have been captured. (See forthcoming CDE report on corruption in Joburg.)

Get the right people into mission critical positions

The hollowing out of the City's senior management is one of the most damaging consequences of years of political interference in appointments. This took place under successive ANC administrations where cadre deployment and patronage shaped many but not all appointments in the City. After the ANC lost its outright majority in the City in 2016, the advent of successive, unstable coalition governments brought their own forms of political patronage, with numerous other parties exercising influence over appointments and parts of the administration. As a result, important posts have been filled by people who lack the experience, skills or competence needed to run a large and complex administration.¹⁹ Indeed, in some instances, people were brought in specifically to facilitate looting.

The new administration will inherit serious challenges. Management structures have broken down or been bypassed in parts of the City. One example followed the 2016 election, when the EFF used its influence to push for the insourcing of workers previously employed through contractors. By 2019, around 1 879 cleaners and more than 1 600 security guards had been brought onto the municipal payroll under a DA mayor, at higher salaries. Their former managers and supervisors were not brought in with them, leaving many of these workers with little supervision and considerable discretion over when, how and whether they worked.²⁰

These challenges are widely distributed and deeply embedded. A former deputy director estimated that only a third of employees were hardworking, with clock-watchers and political appointees comprising much of the rest. A councillor has claimed that of the roughly 35 000 employees, only 900 were actively doing their jobs.²¹ These are estimates from individuals rather than measures of staff performance, but both point to the difficulty the City faces in getting value from a large and expensive workforce.

A new administration should start by identifying the senior jobs that are mission critical to getting the City working.

Organised labour will make some of this harder. The unions wield considerable power in Johannesburg, and their influence extends beyond wages and working conditions. In the report commissioned for this project, Chipkin points to the Pikitup strikes of 2015 and 2016, when South African Municipal Workers' Union members repeatedly acted outside the formal labour relations framework, including striking without declaring a dispute and in defiance of Labour Court interdicts. He argues that disputes have too often been "settled politically rather than through the industrial relations framework" and warns that this kind of unionism "will be a sobering constraint on any new administration, however talented or popular".²²

A new administration will have to work with organised labour in a firm but fair manner, avoiding outright conflict where possible but not at all costs. What needs to be completely avoided is the existing practice of resolving labour disputes through political deals. Decisions about staffing, performance, wages and discipline need to be dealt with through the City's management and labour relations processes.

A new administration cannot sort out the entire bureaucracy at once. It should start by identifying the senior jobs that are mission critical to getting the City working and ensure that capable people occupy them. These should include senior positions in finance and revenue, engineering and infrastructure, ICT, procurement and supply chain management. Where someone can reasonably acquire the skills they lack or can be given a clearly defined opportunity to prove that they can do the job, they should be given that chance.

To ensure the best people are put in mission critical positions an incoming administration should

- Undertake an audit of those positions before they take office, if at all possible.
- Then they should appoint a transition team immediately after the election and get them to document for every mission critical post critical facts: who is the incumbent, what was their appointment date, what is their contract type and when does it expire.
- It will also be essential to get a view of whether the appointment complied with the requirements of the MSA. If it didn't, the City can get rid of an unsuitable person without having to fire them since the initial appointment is itself unlawful.
- The team should also check whether performance agreements were signed, whether assessments were done, whether there is a disciplinary and grievance history, and any adverse findings from the Auditor General or Group Forensic and Investigation Service (GFIS).
- In relation to every senior contract that expires by around November 2027, the administration should decide early which posts will be re-advertised and run the recruitment process ahead of expiry so that successors can start the day contracts end.
- In addition, an incoming administration should publicly ask the outgoing administration to make no further senior appointments or contract renewals between now and the election, and certainly not after the election.

A new administration will have to run a focused recruitment campaign, starting with a clear ranking of the positions it most urgently needs to fill. It will also have to look at what it can afford to do to make those jobs attractive. The processes themselves need to be fair, but they also need to be speedy. Critical positions cannot be allowed to remain vacant for months while appointment processes drag on.

In some cases, particularly where fixed-term contracts are involved, paying out the remainder of a contract may be the quickest option, even though it needs to be by mutual consent. This could become costly, but that cost needs to be weighed against leaving the wrong person in a vital position. In other cases, the City will have to work through the requirements of existing labour law. Current protection against unfair dismissal does allow managers to be dismissed where they lack the capacity to do their jobs. The difficulty is often the process required to do so.²³ In addition, if the Labour Relations Amendment Bill, gazetted in February 2026, is signed into law it will make it easier to dismiss senior executives earning more than R1.8 million per year.²⁴

Broadly speaking, the City could also look to restructure its organogram, rather than dismiss. Though this is not a quick process, a redesign of the organogram might make some posts redundant rather than people, triggering a retrenchment process. Most likely, this kind of outcome would be litigated, so appropriate advice must be sought on how to do it well.

A critical priority will be to make performance management real and substantive from day one. By law, performance agreements must be signed each year and must be published. There are also supposed to be quarterly assessments. The main reason that South African municipalities struggle to dismiss underperformers for incapacity is that nobody documents their underperformance. Get this process right in a way that does not amount to constructive dismissal, and it may be possible to dismiss unsuitable people within twelve months.

It will be vital to establish a broad and deep culture of accountability. Part of that will be to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clear and that disciplinary processes, which, in all likelihood have broken down, are reactivated and strengthened. Senior civil servants need the

authority to take corrective action when things go wrong, in the knowledge that they too will be held accountable for performance. Regular, data-driven reporting should be institutionalised and there must be consequences for missed targets, performance failures and any wrongdoing.

A critical priority will be to make performance management real and substantive from day one.

One way to initiate the process is to set up a standing ‘disciplinary commission’ that fully (but aggressively) complies with the rules governing these processes.

Joburg is in crisis: Think out the box while finding the right people

Finding the right people for senior positions in the key utilities and the City administration is likely to take time. These processes should be opened to as wide a pool of qualified and experienced people as possible, and they should not be rushed simply to fill posts.

But the City cannot wait for every appointment to be made. Some problems will require urgent attention, particularly where infrastructure is at risk of further collapse or where the City needs to establish the true position on billing, expenditure and other parts of its finances. In these areas, a new administration may need to bring in independent technical and professional expertise for specific, time-limited assignments while permanent leadership is being put in place.

CDE will return to these issues in subsequent reports. For now, we want to flag a number of possible interventions that a new political leadership should consider as it takes over a City in crisis after the local government elections in November.

Some possible interventions could include:

- Requesting a bank or accounting firm to facilitate a team of fiscal experts to come into the city on an interim basis to immediately look at the city’s finances and come up with proposals on how best to stabilise the current fiscal position and put the city’s finances on a sustainable path going forward.
- While looking for the right candidates to become CEOs of the utilities, appoint an empowered, time-bound ‘crisis executive’ (a credible interim leader with distribution and a turnaround pedigree) and a small war-room.
- Identifying a senior (possibly retired or between jobs) private sector executive or manager who could come in to assist the city for a short period (say two to three years) to help turn around a large entity or department or function in the city. If necessary, this senior executive could be paid by a large company and seconded to the city.
- Contract with an NGO with expertise in tackling corruption to provide additional capacity or leadership to the GFIS, assess the City’s current approach to tackling corruption, and help design a new approach.
- Establishing a relationship with Business Against Crime to see how the city could benefit from their work on forensic investigations.
- Establish a ring-fenced technical task team of experienced electricity distribution engineers, artisans and project managers, including retired Eskom and municipal engineers, contracted for a fixed three to five year period to work alongside City Power staff.
- In a special arrangement with the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), establish an immediate emergency programme to stabilise Johannesburg’s water system. The City,

Johannesburg Water and DWS should identify the parts of the network most at risk and agree a specific programme of pipe replacement and other urgent infrastructure work to be completed within the first three to six months.

All these emergency-type interventions will need to be subject to timebound, agreed targets and transparency as to what is being agreed between the City and the individual, company or organisation. There should be nothing secret about the arrangements, the purpose of the intervention or how the contract will be managed, paid for, and the participating individuals or organisation must be held accountable.

Attention will need to be given to any conflicts of interest that might arise, and this will need to be clearly and transparently dealt with. Regular communication, including media conferences where questions can be asked will be an essential management and legitimacy tool.

Creating critical capacity

Johannesburg's governance crisis has many causes: cadre deployment over a long period; coalition instability which has made the city harder to govern; political patronage which has weakened the administration and municipal entities; and poor appointments which have left critical institutions without the leadership, technical skills and management capacity they need to function. Corruption has eaten away at city resources and the capacity to get things done.

Senior appointments and board positions cannot continue to be treated as political bargaining chips. Appointments should be made through clear, competitive and transparent processes, based on competence, experience and integrity.

Behind these failures lies a deeper institutional weakness. Johannesburg operates within a system of local government that does not draw a clear enough line between political leadership and professional administration. Reforming the underlying legal framework is important, but this requires a constitutional amendment which will take considerable time.

Fixing Johannesburg cannot wait. Much can be done within the existing system if there is the political will to do it.

- Get the city manager appointment right. Appoint a capable city manager through a transparent, merit-based process, with clear criteria specific to the challenges Johannesburg faces. Include in the selection panel private sector expertise in assessing competence in turning around large institutions with many complex challenges.
- Put capable, independent people in charge of the utilities. Start by appointing experienced independent chairpersons for City Power, Johannesburg Water and Pikitup. Build the rest of each board around the technical, financial and management skills the utility needs at board level. These boards (or the core of an emerging new board) should then make sure that the best possible CEOs are in place and then hold them accountable for restoring the utilities to function efficiently.
- Rebuild capacity in the City's administration through identifying and then ensuring that senior people with the right qualifications, levels of seniority and experience are in mission critical jobs. This needs to be a fair and speedy process.
- Identify and rank the positions where vacancies, acting appointments and skills shortages are doing the most damage. Launch a focused recruitment campaign for the skills the City

most urgently needs, including engineers, finance professionals, ICT specialists, project managers, and procurement and supply-chain professionals. At the same time, identify capable and committed officials already working in the City and find ways to retain, promote and support them.

- Carefully manage the issue of people who cannot or should not remain in vital, senior positions. Some officials can be supported to acquire the skills they need or asked to apply for positions better suited to their capacities or given an opportunity to improve their performance. Where people cannot or will not perform at the required level, or are implicated in misconduct, the City must deal with them fairly and speedily using the processes available under existing labour law.

It is vital that Johannesburg breaks the link between political change and administrative appointments. Senior appointments and board positions cannot continue to be treated as political bargaining chips. Appointments should be made through clear, competitive and transparent processes, based on competence, experience and integrity. Capable people who have been properly appointed and are performing well should not be removed simply because the Mayor or governing coalition changes.

The first test of the new Johannesburg government will be who it appoints, how those appointments are made, and whether the people placed in mission critical positions are given the authority to do their jobs and then held accountable for results.

These reforms will not, on their own, fix Johannesburg. Appointing capable people will not repair a water pipe, restore an electricity substation or solve the City's financial problems overnight. But none of the wider reforms required to turn Johannesburg around will succeed if the institutions and departments responsible for implementing them remain weak, politicised and poorly led. People trump policy. Corruption and abuse of procurement and other problems will need to be dealt with as well. (See CDE forthcoming report.)

Johannesburg cannot be fixed overnight. Getting the right people in place in critical positions will take time. Some of the city's challenges need urgent action to prevent further deterioration or infrastructure collapse. In this context innovative speedy and unusual interventions might well be required.

The first test of the new Johannesburg government will therefore be who it appoints, how those appointments are made, and whether the people placed in mission critical positions (short and long term) are given the authority to do their jobs and then held accountable for their results.

The voters need to think hard and act wisely on 4 November 2026. Johannesburg is in a deep crisis on almost every front. The local government elections are a critical opportunity for voters to choose a stable, competent, honest government that can lead the City to once more fulfil its potential as a centre of growth, delivery and opportunity for everyone.

Endnotes

- 1 VoxDev, 'Ed Glaeser on the perfect city, the demons of density and what makes cities work', YouTube, (12 May 2026).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Oliver Hanney and Kurtis Lockhart, 'The perfect city?' (12 May 2026).
- 4 Ivor Chipkin, 'The crisis of Johannesburg: An agenda for reform', (forthcoming); CDE, 'Agenda 2024: Appoint the right people in mission critical public sector jobs', (June 2024).
- 5 CDE, 'Johannesburg Matters: Joburg in Jeopardy', (August 2026).
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Anna Cox, 'Seven of Johannesburg's top managers are failing', Daily Maverick, (9 April 2026).
- 8 Of course there will be political advisers who accompany a new government into office. These people have an important role to play, but their number and their roles must be very clearly defined.
- 9 Republic of South Africa, 'Local Government: Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000'.
- 10 Department of Cooperative Governance, 'Local Government: Regulations On Appointment And Conditions Of Employment Of Senior Managers', (17 January 2014).
- 11 Sisanda Mbolekwa, 'Floyd Brink returns to Johannesburg council as city manager', TimesLIVE, (30 October 2025).
- 12 Anna Cox and Ferial Haffajee, 'Joburg mayor delays Floyd Brink's comeback as city manager', Daily Maverick, (2 September 2025)
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Gi TOC, 'Hijacked City', (forthcoming).
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Chipkin, 'The crisis of Johannesburg: An agenda for reform', NSI (forthcoming).
- 17 King V recommends that the chairperson should be an independent non-executive director and should lead the board in the objective, ethical and effective discharge of its governance responsibilities. The chairperson also has an important role in building the rest of the board: King V recommends that the chairperson lead the committee responsible for nominations, which oversees the composition of the board, the nomination and appointment of directors and succession planning. Getting the chairperson right therefore creates an opportunity to build a board around the skills, experience and independence that each entity needs.
- 18 With thanks to Mick Davis for this recommendation.
- 19 Gi TOC, 'Hijacked City', (forthcoming).
- 20 Chipkin, 'The crisis of Johannesburg: An agenda for reform', NSI, (forthcoming).
- 21 Gi TOC, 'Hijacked City', (forthcoming).
- 22 Chipkin, 'The crisis of Johannesburg: An agenda for reform', NSI, (forthcoming).
- 23 CDE, Agenda 2024: Appointing the Right People in Mission Critical Public Sector Jobs, August 2024.
- 24 Department of Employment and Labour, 'Labour Relations Amendment Bill', (26 February 2026).

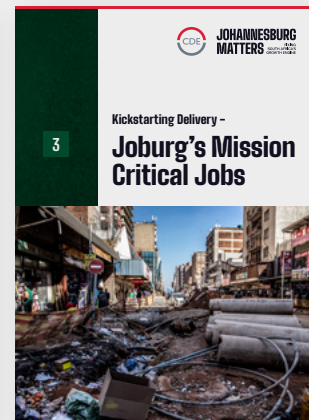
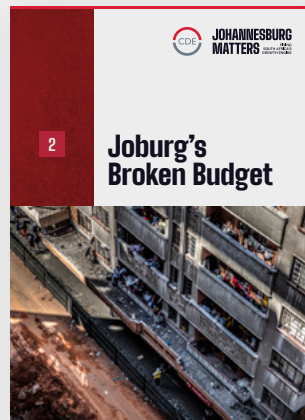
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- Johannesburg: Africa's World City: A challenge to action, 2002
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