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CITY OF CAPE TOWN

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MEDIA RELEASE

City puts neighbourhood watches in the express lane with crime dispatch system

A new system, comprising base radios and applications like WhatsApp, Telegram and Link, allows over 76 neighbourhood watches across Cape Town to relay incidents, post warnings or request emergency assistance and has already helped prevent the sexual assault of a young woman. A demonstration of the communication tool was held in Goodwood earlier today. Read more below:



Hundreds of members from 79 neighbourhood watch organisations around the city now have quicker access to professional assistance and are able to relay incidents and request emergency assistance much faster, thanks to an application which allows for an easier flow of information between members and the City of Cape Town's control centre.

It is anticipated that as the system is refined and the interaction between the uniformed services and neighbourhood watch organisations improves, many more neighbourhood watches will be brought on board so that none of the estimated 50 000 neighbourhood watch members are left out of the loop.

Over the last decade, the City has invested millions of rands in developing neighbourhood watch organisations through training of thousands of patrollers, recruiting neighbourhood watch patrollers into the Law Enforcement Auxiliary Service (the City's own police reservist force), partnering with neighbourhood watches to install and share information between CCTV camera networks, and providing equipment like jackets, torches and bicycles, hand radios and radio base stations for their watch rooms.

The City's Mayoral Committee Member for Safety and Security; and Social Services, Alderman JP Smith, demonstrated the dispatch system earlier today. The system comprises two elements: base radios and, more recently, various applications such as WhatsApp, Link and Telegram.

'We are currently using the City's Tetra radio network to communicate with 14 cluster radio base sets across the city. The cluster base sets are strategically placed and surrounding neighbourhood watches have contact with the base set control centre. The centre is able to evaluate an incident reported and can call upon the Safety and Security Radio Communications Centre to assist with the emergency services needed, such as Metro Police, Traffic or Law Enforcement. Even the Metro EMS service is located there and now readily available to the neighbourhood watches,' said Alderman Smith.

The Tetra radio system base radios were installed early in 2016 and have been operational since September 2016.

Neighbourhood watch organisations that have access to the system include those based in Gugulethu, Bellville, Atlantis, Durbanville, Bergvliet, Strand/Somerset West, Blue Downs, Mitchells Plain, Hout Bay, the Cape Town CBD, Parklands and Melkbosstrand.

The Telegram application was introduced in May this year and is also used for information flow to or from 79 neighbourhood watches to the radio control centre. The radio control centre also monitors existing neighbourhood watch operational chat groups on WhatsApp and Link.

'The Wesbank Neighbourhood Watch stopped a young woman from being raped just days after they started using the app. While they were helping her, the members themselves came under attack. They were able to contact the control room directly and quickly, which meant help arrived timeously for all involved.

'Our neighbourhood watches are our eyes and ears and they ensure a visible presence and security in the communities they serve. These members are patrolling their neighbourhoods and keep the Safety and Security Radio Communications Centre up to date with any activity occurring in their area. The advantage of the new system is that neighbourhood watch members are not alone when they are patrolling the streets and they know there is backup and professional help should anything occur that is beyond their capacity,' said Alderman Smith.

The neighbourhood watch radio system is monitored 24 hours.

'A key priority of the City's Organisational Development and Transformation Plan is the use of technology to optimise service delivery. We want to ensure that our neighbourhood watches have access to technology that will make their jobs easier, which in turn helps to ensure the safety of their communities.

'Through this intervention, the neighbourhood watches become extensions of the City's policing services, expanding the eyes and ears of the police and emergency services and allowing us to be readily at hand to support them when they need help,' said Alderman Smith.

End

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