

Community self-policing causes disagreements over fees

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In the early evening of 22 June 2022, the residents of Extension 28, Phase 1, Portion 25 in Vosloorus held the first meeting with all the section's residents. The meeting was called by self-appointed patrollers from the different parts of Portion 25. The patrollers asked each household in the area to pay R50 per month to assist the local street committee to assist with their needs and supplies for firewood and food during the nightwatch. The patrol panel was formed by unemployed youth and middle-aged men from the area, although there are women in its structures from the street committee. The new cost to households has been a source of disagreement in the meetings that have taken place on this issue.

In the meeting on Wednesday, a resident identifying himself only as Nkosana asked: "I would like to know if the patrollers are a volunteer service or hired? They seem to be after the R50. If payments do not reach the agreed target, would the night watch continue?"

A respondent, also a patroller, replied: "The intention is not to make money but to put an end to the crime in the area. But we need the money as we are unemployed."

Nkosana said that the meeting needs to take into account that the spending power of the different families in the area is not the same. The chairperson of the meeting agreed with Nkosana saying that even when there are bereavements, some are unable to make the R20 contributions as the family has no income.

At this point people began saying that there would be no compromise on the amount of R50, at which point Nkosana left the meeting.

A woman who did not identify herself said that families had to find means to pay the monthly R50, even if they took it from the child support grant or any other social welfare that they received, this position was met with exclamations of shock and surprise.

One of the street committee members, 'Mama Portia' told the meeting that families which struggle to pay the amount should approach her with their problems. She also poured shame on the men who sleep while the nightwatch works and argued that each household should pay more than the meagre monthly R50.

Mama Portia informed the meeting that the patrollers would have their fingerprints taken at the Vosloorus Police Station where police officers are prepared to financially sponsor the nightwatch monthly. She said that the local police would provide a van to help patrol the area as criminals are likely to be armed.

The patrollers began the night watch in May 2022 and continued in June despite no agreement with the community in meeting after meeting. The adjacent areas in Phase 1, Extension 28, namely Portion 49 and Portion 48, also have patrol units.

Extension 28 and Vosloorus in general, has recently seen a spike in crimes such as housebreaks, robberies of migrant-owned shops, muggings and even rape. Targets include workers who leave home early in the morning for work and those arriving late from work and crossing the open veld between Extensions 28 and 8. One source of crime has been drug users who steal recyclable materials to sell at the local scrap yards.

Two months since first reported, there has been a number of changes that have taken place in the community and in the ranks of the patrollers, originally numbering 26 men and women.

Disagreements overpayment of fees to patrollers have reportedly come to a head although theft for scrap-selling, house-breaks, and robberies have decreased. People now move more freely in the late evening and early morning hours.

At the same time, members of the nightwatch have been accused of taking household fees, satisfying their own personal needs, and disappearing from the community.

As a compromise, the patrollers are now accepting R20 from each household as many refuse to make any payments and their main daily consumption is firewood and food for the nightwatch.

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