

## Introduction

At the end of 2009, Rotterdam Police started an experiment that is now changing how it polices the city of Rotterdam. The police district team in Rotterdam's Nieuwe Westen district began trying out a new approach aimed at involving the local residents and regaining their trust in the local government. Locals had the opportunity to help determine the problems the police officers and police community support officers (PCSOs) needed to focus on. To be more precise, residents now had a say in how the Police and the PCSO Department spent part of their working hours. Under the name **Neighbourhood Takes Charge**, the project kicked off in December 2009 in a part of the Nieuwe Westen district called Pupillenbuurt.



From the outset, the results have been particularly encouraging. Residents are particularly pleased to see that their concerns are being addressed and are also gaining better insight into the work carried out by the Police and PCSO Department. People also have growing confidence in the police and authorities in general. The neighbourhood police officer and PCSO are no longer anonymous officials and have become much more approachable figures. Conversely, both the Police and the PCSO Department are showing great enthusiasm. By regularly talking to the locals in a structured setting, the officers can hear first-hand which issues the residents find most important. These are not always necessarily the ones the officers themselves have written down on their do-to lists. So the new approach is something the professionals have to get used to. Now they have to consult residents whose main concerns may be quite different.

In 2010, the project received a tremendous boost and began to attract growing wider attention. A growing number of partners signed up for the project, including the City-District Government, the City Marines (Crime & Anti-Social Behaviour Tsars), community-development organisations and social-housing associations. The project is now expanding to include a growing number of neighbourhoods in the Nieuwe Westen district.

# Factsheet

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## Neighbourhood Takes Charge project

The excellent results achieved by Neighbourhood Takes Charge have not gone unnoticed. In fact, in early 2011, Rotterdam Mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb expressed his ambition to roll out the project in the whole of Rotterdam. It is not only an effective tool to get residents involved in their own neighbourhood and obtain valuable input from them for policing and other government activities, but also helps to restore trust in the government and improve the sense of safety and wellbeing. Neighbourhood Takes Charge brings together sceptical residents who believe that government is not nearly doing enough and is conspicuously absent in their neighbourhood streets and professionals who feel that they know best and are better informed about the local goings-on than the residents.



Here are the ten most important things to know about the Neighbourhood Takes Charge

### 1. What is Neighbourhood Takes Charge?

The Neighbourhood Takes Charge is a project in which residents and professionals collectively determine which problems in the neighbourhood should receive top priority. The residents indicate what their greatest



concerns are, while the professionals explain what they are going to do about it. The main focus is on matters affecting safety and a general sense of wellbeing. These problems include crime, violence, domestic abuse, dangerous driving, illegal parking, drug and alcohol abuse, loitering, intimidation, verbal abuse, noise pollution, vandalism, graffiti, litter and dog waste.

## 2. What is the objective of Neighbourhood Takes Charge?

The aim is to improve the safety, sense of safety and quality of life in the neighbourhood. It does so by actively bringing in the residents, who then help decide how the police and local government can best use their time and resources. The resultant greater sense of community is also very helpful by itself and increases the resilience of civic-minded locals.

## 3. Who is Neighbourhood Takes Charge aimed at?

The project is meant for local residents and professionals keen to work together to improve the safety and quality of life in a particular neighbourhood.

## 4. How is Neighbourhood Takes Charge structured?

The project takes shape in the form of a neighbourhood committee consisting of 10 to 15 residents who form a cross-section of the neighbourhood. They are complemented by professionals representing three government players, namely the Police, the PCSO Department and the City-District Government. If and when needed, other parties are brought in, such as the municipal Sanitation Department, the municipal Public-Works Department, community-development organisations and social-housing associations. Coordination rests with the City-District Government. On average, the neighbourhood committee plus the relevant professionals convene once a month. At the meeting, the locals indicate what the problems are and which ones need to be tackled first in their opinion. The professionals then consider how these can be best resolved; which municipal departments or other organisations need to get involved for which activities; as well as what the locals themselves can do. The police and municipal



departments announce their efforts to residents (“speeding checks this afternoon”) and keep the locals posted about the results (“forty speeding fines handed out”).

## 5. How does Neighbourhood Takes Charge work?

Residents and professionals jointly select the top three of most pressing problems. The top three for the Police may differ from the ones for the PCSO Department or City-District Government. To get off to a flying start, the professionals initially devote extra hours (so additional time on top of their regular hours) to sorting out the must-do list. After hopefully making a sizeable dent into the problems, the professionals then go back to using existing capacity for improving the neighbourhoods. In close consultation with each other, the professionals determine a clear division of duties and the manner in which residents will be kept informed. To find out whether Neighbourhood Takes Charge is getting good results, the professionals always begin with a survey among residents, the so-called baseline measurement. The survey is repeated after a few months.

## 6. Where can Neighbourhood Takes Charge be used effectively?

The project would work in all neighbourhoods where you can find residents and professionals willing to team up and jointly tackle the safety and quality-of-life issues. Since problems may vary from neighbourhood to neighbourhood and even from street to street, the geographic area covered by Neighbourhood Takes Charge needs to be fairly modest in size.

## 7. What are the principles underpinning Neighbourhood Takes Charge?

Before introducing Neighbourhood Takes Charge, you must make sure that residents and professionals agree on the project’s fundamentals.

The four basic principles are:

1. Residents know best what the most urgent problems are in the neighbourhood, while professionals know best how to address these issues.
2. Residents and professionals jointly determine what the top priorities are in the neighbourhood.





3. Residents and professionals seek to strengthen mutual confidence.
4. As much as possible, residents and professionals work together on the basis of having the same information at their disposal. Of course, certain exceptions are made to comply with the law or to protect witnesses/informants, police work, etc.

#### **8. What are the most important requirements for a neighbourhood committee?**

To turn Neighbourhood Takes Charge into a success, the following six points are essential:

1. The lines of communication are brief, and results are quickly communicated to the residents.
2. Both residents and professionals are held accountable for their actions.
3. In an early stage, the search is on for sufficient participating residents who also need to be representative for the neighbourhood.
4. The neighbourhood falling under a particular Neighbour Takes Charge project should not be too large. The idea is to provide tailor-made solutions.
5. Residents and professionals treat each other with respect.
6. Particularly the professionals involved show flexibility, tenacity and a practical mind-set. They do their utmost to help residents and try to cut through the red tape to get things done.

#### **9. And what are the pitfalls to be avoided?**

Effective cooperation with the neighbourhood committee and its effectiveness depend on the effort put in by the residents and various professional players. Four obstacles can impede close collaboration and thus progress:

1. The residents sitting on the neighbourhood committee do not fully represent the composition of the population in the neighbourhood. Consequently, the issues brought to the attention of the authorities are not those generally felt to be the major problems in this neighbourhood.
2. The professionals involved lack decision-making power within their own organisations and need to get a green light for even small matters.

3. The professionals display a daddy-knows-best attitude towards residents, who are merely meant to serve as group of yes-men.
4. The geographic area in question is too large or has boundaries that make no sense, the result being that progress is hampered.

#### **10. Which steps need to be taken before you hold your first Neighbourhood Takes Charge meeting in the neighbourhood?**

The introduction of the project occurs in various steps. To that end, the City of Rotterdam's Safety & Security Department has drawn up a multi-step plan. It is essential to go through all the steps in this plan, so that you have the greatest chance of success and can effectively measure its results. This plan is available from Mr. Peter Groeneveld at tel. +31 (0)10-2673994 or [p.groeneveld@bsd.rotterdam.nl](mailto:p.groeneveld@bsd.rotterdam.nl). He will also gladly answer any queries you may have.