

## Justice in the Community (Justitie in de buurt)

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After a preliminary study in the policy document entitled 'Justitie in de buurt', een startnotitie over een nieuwe justitiële functie (1996) ('Justice in the Community (JIB)', a first memorandum on a new judicial function) JIB offices aimed at contributing to the overall safety and security in certain communities with serious security problems have been opened in various cities in the Netherlands since 1997. With this JIB project, the Ministry of Justice intended, to implement a swift and visible approach to the problems in these neighbourhoods, together with other organisations. The JIB policy is consistent with the Government's 'Towards a Safer Society' Security Programme that is focused on improving safety and security in Dutch society over the next few years. The programme tackles combating crime and public nuisance.

In a JIB office, Public Prosecution Service staff – such as a Public Prosecutor or a secretary from the Public Prosecutor's Office – work together with staff from other (judicial) organisations in tackling problems such as juvenile crime. The physical presence of these officers in the community means that they are more easily accessible to staff from other organisations, but also to members of the public. As a result of the short lines of communication these officers have a better understanding of the problems arising in the community and are consequently able to respond swiftly and effectively.

In order to avoid lengthy procedures, criminal cases are settled out of court, wherever possible. As a conscious decision was made to specify neither the tasks nor the working methods that should be employed in all JIB offices, practices can vary from office to office. One office may be open all week, while another may consider the various cases once a week and summon suspects for an interview in a local community centre. There is also variation in the degree of public visibility of the various offices as well as in the choice of partners with which the JIB collaborates. There were, however, certain preconditions: all JIB offices were to be comprehensive judicial facilities employing a problem-orientated approach. More than twenty-five JIB offices were opened over the past few years, both at community and urban levels.

### Background

In recent years, the government has been paying much attention to the increasing concentration of security and other social problems in the major cities, and particularly in certain areas within these cities. The government intends to use its policy on major cities (Grotsteddenbeleid) to improve the quality of living and working in 25 major cities in the Netherlands. The major cities policy focuses in particular on local responsibility for tackling issues related to safety and security. The JIB policy enables the judicial authorities to fulfil their role as a local-level responsibility partner. Although the 'Justice in the community' project was originally part of the policy on major cities, it also focuses on deprived areas in smaller cities in the Netherlands.

Crime levels vary for each city and the crime levels can also vary per district or community within a city. In particular, the so called inner-city areas and districts with a relatively poor socioeconomic position – due to high unemployment and high social benefit dependency – are characterised as relatively unsafe. The youth in these areas are often guilty of

anti-social behaviour such as nuisance, loitering in a threatening manner and delinquent behaviour. By approaching these issues at the problem and community level, the judicial authorities want to tackle the more persistent forms of nuisance, the less serious forms of crime and the problems regarding the quality of life in close cooperation with their partners – the police and the municipal services. The emphasis is mainly on so called 'nuisance crime' for which a more active, problem-oriented approach by the judicial authorities works best.

### **New-style JIB**

At the end of 2003 JIB policy changed making it no longer necessary that JIB initiatives are carried out from a JIB office. The policy change provided relevant organisations with more possibilities for their own specific interpretation of JIB. The new-style JIB represents a community-focused and/or problem-oriented approach to security and crime problems, which is carried out by a broad 'security partnership' that expressly involves the participation and contribution of the judicial authorities. Such a partnership can be used for a specific (problem) area. However, as problems and the persons causing these problems are not restricted to one particular area this does not necessarily have to be the case. Furthermore, the cooperation can also be used for tackling specific problems such as (juvenile) habitual offenders or domestic violence.

The primary objective of the new-style JIB is tackling local problems; but more particular attention will also be given to the involvement of non-judicial partners in the partnership. As the new-style JIB level is determined by the local partners the scale may vary from small (community level) to large (area or city level). Both the partnerships in the current JIB (city) offices/Veiligheidshuizen (security houses) and the partnerships that are not permanently bound to one place are able to interpret how they will implement the new-style JIB policy. The new policy also stipulates that the broad 'security partnerships' are not only to be financed by judicial authorities but also by the other participating organisations. The judicial authorities will provide a financial contribution for a maximum period of three years. When the intended approach takes longer than three years, the organisations involved will have to provide the finance for the remaining period. The first initiatives with the new-style JIB can take place as of 2005.

One of the reasons for the policy change is that the existing construction with smaller JIB community offices was vulnerable. On the one hand this was because of the relatively high office costs that were largely paid by the Public Prosecution Service. Furthermore, it became apparent that these offices developed into small institutional facilities. On the other hand this was due to the limited, defined JIB operational scope, which was sometimes experienced as a problem.

When considered from this point of view, the old -style JIB in the form of a physical judicial community office was a relatively expensive way of having judicial organisations contribute to combating crime and addressing safety and security related issues at local level. The scarcity of resources available to the Public Prosecutor Service necessitate a more selective and flexible deployment of those resources

### **Consequences for the existing JIB community offices**

In order to provide the existing offices with the opportunity to consider their future, the following choices were put to the Chief Public Prosecutors of the districts that currently have a JIB office:

- the current JIB office is to be transformed into a permanent office – if both the public prosecutor’s office and the municipality are in favour of doing so. In such a case departmental funding of this office will be phased out to allow parties to find and introduce other forms of structural financing; or
- the current JIB office is phased out and a project-orientated approach is taken up (under conditions, such as a minimum physical presence). This project-orientated approach can receive a financial contribution from the ministry within the context of the new-style JIB policy. The project-orientated approach will require co-financing. A transitional arrangement will apply to existing JIB offices in both situations (permanent office or transition to project-orientated approach).

### **Transitional arrangement**

Existing JIB offices with the relevant Public Prosecutor Service staff will be funded until January 2007. Each office will receive an annual contribution, the amount of which does not cover the entire costs for each office. To facilitate the transition to a new policy the following transitional arrangement will apply: As existing JIB offices have been allocated a period of four years, a number of offices will reach the end of this four-year period each year during the next couple of years. These offices will be required to consider whether or not to continue. The offices for which the financing term ends in 2004, 2005 or 2006 may apply for a temporary, phased out continuation of funding until the end of 2006. Applications must include an indication of future plans. These offices will be required to meet all costs independently after 2006. Central funding of the existing offices will end in 2007 at the latest.

If you would like more information, please contact:

- [www.justitieindebuurt.nl](http://www.justitieindebuurt.nl)  
On this site you can also consult: The Dutch national assessment report entitled ‘Met recht lokaal’, evaluatie van Justitie in de buurt. (University of Twente, IPIT, 2002)
- [www.veiligheidsprogramma.nl](http://www.veiligheidsprogramma.nl)
- [www.justitie.nl](http://www.justitie.nl)