

Planning a neighbourhood newsletter

Producing a newsletter for your neighbourhood can be a great way to share news and to build a sense of community. This information will help neighbourhood community groups to produce and print successful newsletters. It is useful for other types of community newsletters too, including electronic newsletters.

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Planning a regular newsletter

A regular newsletter is quite a big commitment. Even if you produce it just every few months, you will probably find that, no sooner have you finished one issue, you are starting to think about the next. It's too much work for one person, so the first step is to have a full discussion at a meeting of your group or committee. Make sure you allow enough time to talk everything through properly. It is useful to discuss:

Why do you want a newsletter?

Think about why a newsletter will be useful for your community. What do you aim to achieve by having one? It's useful to agree and write down a few points about this, to help keep you focused on your goal once you get started.

Do you want a printed newsletter or an electronic newsletter?

Printing your newsletter will allow you to put it through people's doors, but this is time consuming. If everyone who will receive the newsletter uses the internet, you

could produce your newsletter online. There are several free online mailing list tools¹ available, where you can put together a good-looking online newsletter and send it easily by email. The rest of this information sheet focuses on how to produce a printed newsletter, but much of it is relevant to online newsletters too.

Even if you produce a printed newsletter, you could also produce a PDF of it to send to some people by email. This reduces printing costs and delivery time, but means you still have a printed version for those who need it.

Who will decide what goes in the newsletter?

Who will decide what is included and what is not? This could be your whole group/committee, but if you have a large group you might prefer to set up a smaller editorial team to have overview of the newsletter. It's important that the views of one person don't dominate the content or the tone of the newsletter, and that it reflects your group as a whole.

Who will do the work?

There is a lot of work involved in producing each issue of a newsletter. You may want to appoint someone to coordinate the work, but it is too much to expect one person to do everything all on their own. The newsletter will also be more interesting if there is a range of people involved.

Who will design it?

There might be someone on your committee, or among your members, who has the skills to do the design work, or wants to learn. This doesn't have to be one of the editorial team or committee, but the designer does need to have time to commit and a good understanding of what your group wants the newsletter to be like. For tips about design and layout, see our information *sheet How to make your neighbourhood newsletter look good*.

The Resource Centre does design work for Brighton & Hove Tenants' and Residents' Associations and Resource Centre member groups.

How often will you produce it?

Think carefully about how often you want to produce the newsletter. How long will it take to produce each edition, and how much time do people have? See Producing each issue on page 4 for help with working this out.

Many groups find that a monthly newsletter is too much work, and that it is more realistic to produce one edition every three months.

What size will it be?

Printed newsletters are usually booklets, with the finished size being either A4 (the size of a normal sheet of typing paper) or A5 (half the size of A4). It is a good idea to have an agreed number of pages, so you know in advance how much space you are trying to fill, and how much the printing will cost.

¹ www.resourcecentre.org.uk/service/online-mailing-list-tools

How will you get it printed?

It is expensive to print in full colour, especially if you are doing lots of copies. It's cheaper to print in black ink on white or coloured paper. This can still look attractive if it's well designed.

If you are doing a very small number of newsletters – 20 or so – then these could be printed out on someone's personal printer. However, this is an expensive and slow way to print, and is not suitable for large numbers. If you are in Sussex, you can print at the Resource Centre². If not, look for a local print shop or online print service.

It is useful to talk to whoever is doing your printing before you design the newsletter, as they may have particular requirements or useful advice about how to get the best results. If you are printing at the Resource Centre, see our website for guidance on printing booklets and newsletters in the Resource Centre print room.³

How will you pay for it?

Work out how much it is going to cost you to produce each edition. Will you need to apply for grants or raise extra money to cover the costs? Our information on Raising Money has tips on writing grant applications and organising fundraising events.⁴

Some groups charge local businesses to advertise in their newsletters, which can help cover the printing costs. It does require quite a lot of administration though – you have to keep track of who has paid for what. It will also cost more to print if you have to make the newsletter bigger to make space for adverts.

If you are planning to print at the Resource Centre, contact us for a quote.

How will you distribute it?

Who will get the newsletter? Have a list to make sure everyone is included – in addition to your members and local residents you may want to send a copy to local Councillors, your MP, council housing officers, community centres, doctor's surgeries, hairdressers or other local groups. Will you need to post some copies? Are there some people you could email a copy to?

Have plenty of volunteers to help with the deliveries. It is useful to develop a network of people who will deliver to their block or street. This requires initial organisation but is a good way of involving people.

Ask your printer if they can bundle up your newsletters in batches, so that they are ready for distribution.

² www.resourcecentre.org.uk/printing/

³ www.resourcecentre.org.uk/print-category/booklets-and-newsletters/

⁴ www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information-category/raising-money/

Producing each issue

There are lots of different tasks to do, to get your newsletter from an idea to a distributed publication. Here is a list of steps you need to take to produce each issue. **It is important to set the dates that all these things will happen in advance**, so that everyone is working to the same schedule. There is a schedule template on page 6, which you could use to help you plan.

Plan the content

Decide what you will include in the newsletter, and who will write the articles or collect the information. For more help with this see *What will you put in your community newsletter?*

Work out how many words you can fit on each page of your newsletter, and give people a maximum word count for their article – articles that are too long will be hard to fit in. You could send people our tips on *How to write clearly in your neighbourhood newsletter* to help them to write their articles.

Receive articles

Agree a date by which articles must reach you. It's useful to advertise this in the previous newsletter. You may need to remind people a few days before the deadline. Be firm about not accepting articles after the deadline – if people don't believe it's a real deadline, they'll ignore it, which will create problems for you when it comes to design and printing.

Make final content decisions

After the article deadline, meet to discuss what you want to include and what will go where. You may want to establish a regular format, for example news is always on page 3, letters on page 6, etc.

You are not obliged to publish everything everyone gives you – it might not be appropriate for your newsletter, or you may not have enough space. If you want to include something but can't fit it in, you could contact the person who wrote it to tell them it will definitely go into the next issue.

You may also need to edit articles at this stage, to make sure they make sense and are easy to read. See *How to write clearly in your neighbourhood newsletter* for help with this.

Have everything ready for the designer

The designer will need to know in advance when all the content will be ready for them to start the design. Leave enough time for them to do the layout – it can take a while. It can be tricky to add or change content once the layout is done, so make sure you have all the articles finalised before sending them to the designer.

Proof-read the draft

Agree a date with the designer when they will finish the layout and provide the group with a draft copy of the newsletter. It is very important to check this over to make sure there aren't any mistakes – this is called 'proof-reading'. You will need to:

- ♦ Correct any spelling mistakes and typing errors.

- ♦ Correct grammar or punctuation mistakes.
- ♦ Check that dates, names and telephone numbers are correct.
- ♦ Check that nothing has been left out by mistake.
- ♦ Look at the design and see if you want any changes. You're looking for small tweaks rather than a major redesign at this point.

If possible, ask two or three people to look at it, including someone who hasn't had much involvement with the production of the newsletter. If you are very familiar with the content it is easy to miss mistakes.

Get the printing done

You should book the printing in advance. Agree with your printer the date when you will give them the completed newsletter design ('artwork'), and a date that the printed newsletters will be ready for collection.

Distribute the newsletters

Agree a date that you will deliver the newsletters to your volunteer distributors. Give them a deadline by which the newsletters should be distributed.

Discuss how it all went and start planning the next edition

Have a discussion in your group about how it all went, and anything you'd like to change for the next edition.

These are useful questions as a starting point:

- ♦ What have people said to you about the newsletter?
- ♦ What went well? What could have gone better?
- ♦ What did you like in the current newsletter?
- ♦ Do you want to make any changes in the next issue?
- ♦ Are people happy with the role they played in producing the newsletter?
- ♦ Who is going to do what next time round?

Newsletter production schedule

Agree all the dates and deadlines in advance. This will help everyone to plan their time and avoid a last-minute rush. You may want to print out the PDF version of this page, to use the schedule.

Task	Date	Done
Meeting to plan content		
Deadline for articles and other content		
Editorial meeting to decide what to include		
Deadline for final, edited content to be given to designer		
Deadline for designer to produce draft copy		
Deadline for proof-reading notes and amendments to be returned to designer		
Deadline for designer to produce final copy		
Deadline to give artwork to printer		
Deadline for printing to be finished and collected		
Deadline for copies to be delivered to distributors		
Deadline for distribution to be finished		
Meeting to discuss how it all went and plan next issue		

More information

For more help with producing community newsletters, see our information sheets:

- ♦ *What will you put in your neighbourhood newsletter?*
- ♦ *How to make your neighbourhood newsletter look good*
- ♦ *How to write clearly in your neighbourhood newsletter*