

What will you put in your neighbourhood newsletter?

Ideas about what to include in your newsletter (and what to avoid)

What will make people read your newsletter?

People will read your newsletter if it's easy to follow, interesting, and the articles have some relevance to them. Ask your group members and local people for ideas – the more people you have thinking about it, the more you'll get.

Collecting information takes time and organisation – make sure you ask people well in advance, and be clear about what date you need the information by. You will need to chase people up and remind them – just accept this as part of the job. For more tips, see our information sheet *Planning a community newsletter*.

It's not always easy for people to get their thoughts down on paper. You might want to talk to them and then write up an article based on that conversation. Be sure to check it with them before it goes in the newsletter.

It's important to make your articles short, clear and readable. For more help with this, see our information sheet *How to write clearly in your neighbourhood newsletter*.

You can get inspiration from other community newsletters. The Resource Centre has lots that you can look through – just drop in. You could also ask other groups to send you a copy of their newsletter, and you could return the favour.

Ideas for things to include

Here are some ideas for content that you could include in your newsletter, and some of the people you might ask to contribute.

About your group

- ♦ Advertise events and meetings and encourage people to get involved.
- ♦ Tell people what your group has been doing – don't assume everyone knows. It can be useful to talk this through with someone else before you write anything.

Or you could ask the Chair for a report – but make sure they keep it short and lively.

- ♦ Tell people about your future plans and ambitions for the group.
- ♦ Introduce committee members: maybe a short piece in each newsletter from a different committee member saying a bit about themselves, how long they've lived in the area, what they do and why they became involved.
- ♦ Don't forget to include contact details so readers know how to get involved.
- ♦ Appeal for people to help with your next newsletter. Let them know how they could be involved, e.g. writing an article or helping with distribution.

Community activity and other local groups

- ♦ Ask other groups active in your area to write something about what they do.
- ♦ Advertise local events and activities, including activities for families and children.
- ♦ If someone has been very involved in organising a particular event ask them to write something about how it went.

Local news

- ♦ Seek out very local news and information – people are interested in what is happening immediately around them.
- ♦ Keep an eye on local newspapers for local and city-wide news of interest to your readers.
- ♦ Ask your local Councillors to write articles about current local issues – maybe there's a building or piece of land to be developed, or a problem with parking or rubbish and it would be interesting to hear their views.
- ♦ Publish an open letter from your group to a Councillor in one edition of your newsletter and then publish their reply in the next.
- ♦ Ask your housing officer, community police officer, estate warden or scheme manager to write something about what's happening locally.

Information and advice

- ♦ Information articles on changes to the law – for example new housing benefit regulations or changes affecting social housing.
- ♦ Useful phone numbers and websites for local services, such as refuse collection, welfare rights advice or local police.

Information for children and young people

- ♦ Ask a local youth group if they would like to have a page in each issue.
- ♦ Have a page aimed at children. You could include word games, pictures to colour in, things to do, things to make etc.
- ♦ Include information on what activities and opportunities there are for young people locally.

Interesting bits and bobs

- ♦ Ask someone with an interesting hobby or job to write an article about it.
- ♦ Ask a good cook to write out a recipe and instructions. When you print it, ask others to send in their favourite recipes.

- ♦ Ask local people for memories and their stories about the area, as well as old photographs.
- ♦ A keen gardener might offer some seasonal gardening tips such as 'how to plant a window box' or 'growing vegetables in containers'.
- ♦ Ask people to write book, film, music or computer game reviews.
- ♦ Invite poems by local people.
- ♦ Make up a quiz using local knowledge and history.
- ♦ Create crosswords and word games.

Pictures

Include photos of local events, places and people. Make sure they will reproduce well – see our information sheet *How to make your neighbourhood newsletter look good* for more help with this.

Ads and notices

- ♦ Start a small ads column for people to advertise items for sale.
- ♦ Start a "local help" section where people can offer and request help to others, such as lifts to the supermarket, use of tools, computer lessons or dog walking.
- ♦ Sell advertising space to local businesses, or ask them to sponsor your activities.
- ♦ Include birth announcements, wedding anniversaries, birthdays and obituaries of local people.

Things to leave out

Personal information without permission

Don't include people's personal contact information, or other personal information about individuals, without permission. For example, don't publish your committee's phone numbers without checking with them that this is okay. See our information sheet *Data protection for community groups* for more help with this.

Photos without permission

Don't include photos of people without their knowledge. When you take photos at events, make sure people know they are being photographed and why. See our information sheet *Taking photos at community events* for more help with this.

Other people's work without permission

If you take an article or photograph from the internet or another publication, you should ask permission from the author/photographer. Many people are happy for their work to be reproduced by voluntary groups, but you should ask first, because it is technically their property. Reproducing things without permission could be a breach of copyright.

When you reproduce something (with permission), give credit to the author. Never copy something and pretend you wrote it yourself.

Anything untrue or hard to prove

Writing something negative about someone in your newsletter could be very upsetting for them. If what you say is not 100% true and accurate, it could also be illegal. Writing untrue negative things about people is called libel. Follow these guidelines to make sure you don't do it.

- ♦ Don't 'name and shame' anyone.
- ♦ Don't make allegations against an identifiable person unless these can be solidly proven.
- ♦ Don't repeat rumours, unverified remarks or comments made by other people.
- ♦ Don't jump to conclusions before you've thoroughly investigated the evidence.
- ♦ Don't write about personal fall-outs or disputes, or your personal opinion about someone.

More information

For more help with producing neighbourhood newsletters, see:

- ♦ *Planning and producing a neighbourhood newsletter*
- ♦ *How to make your neighbourhood newsletter look good*
- ♦ *How to write clearly in your neighbourhood newsletter*