

If you have something you want to write about but are finding it hard to get it down on paper, then the Resource Centre can help member groups to put an article together.



Brighton & Hove
City Council supported

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What will you put in your Community Newsletter?

This information sheet is designed to help your group produce a successful community newsletter. It's part of a series of four, which can be read together or separately.

The other three information sheets are:

- Planning and producing a community newsletter
- How to make your newsletter look good
- How to write clearly

What will make people read it?

People will read your newsletter if it's lively and interesting, and the articles have some relevance to them. Ask the committee and local people for ideas - the more people you have thinking about it, the more you'll get. You'll need to actively seek out information - you can't just sit back and expect it to come to you.

Remember that 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.

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

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.

It's important to make your articles short, clear and readable - there are some tips about this in the information sheet '*How to write clearly*'.

Ideas for content

Here are some ideas for pieces which could be included in a 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.

Ideas for newsletters

- 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.
- If someone has been very involved in organising a particular event ask them to write something about how it went.
- Ask your housing officer, estate warden or scheme manager to write something about their role.
- Ask your community police officer to write a piece about what's been happening in your area.
- Start a letters page.

Community activity and other local groups

- Include photographs of people and events. Make sure these are good quality and will reproduce well.
- Ask other groups active in your area to write something about what they do.
- Information on other local community groups, what they do, when they meet, contact details.
- Advertise local events and activities.

Local news

- Seek out very local news and information - people are interested in what is happening immediately around them. Listen to what people are talking about, and see if there is anything worth following up.
- Keep an eye on The Argus 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. Or you might publish an open letter from your group to a councillor in one edition of your newsletter and then publish their reply in the next.

Ideas for newsletters

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.

Children and young people

- Ask young people if they want to have their own page which they provide content for.
- 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.

Hobbies, crafts, history, cooking

- Ask people with unusual or interesting hobbies to write something.
- Ask people with interesting or unusual jobs to write something.
- Ask a good cook to write out a recipe and instructions and 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'.
- Book, film, music or computer games reviews.
- Poems by local people.
- Make up a quiz using local knowledge and history.
- Crosswords and word games.

Ads and notices

- Start a small ads column for people to advertise items for sale.
- An exchange column: people can offer to exchange skills or resources 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.
- Mark important events in residents' lives. Include birth announcements, wedding anniversaries, birthdays and obituaries.

A note on copyright and libel

If you take an article or photograph from the internet or another publication, you should ask permission from the author. Many organisations and authors are happy for their work to be reproduced by voluntary groups, but it is polite to ask first.

It's also polite to say in the newsletter where the article or picture originally came from. It's not very likely, but in the worst case scenario you could offend someone enough for them to take you to court.

Libel is when someone's reputation is unjustly attacked. You don't want to get embroiled in a court case, so it's best to err on the cautious side and follow these guidelines:

- 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.