



# Neighbourhood WATCH

## Toolkit

### Module 8: Writing a good newsletter

**This module looks at how to design and write effective newsletters for your scheme.**

By the end of this module you will be able to:

- identify good examples of layout and style in newsletters; and
- design sample layouts for your scheme's newsletter.

#### Introduction

A successful Neighbourhood Watch scheme has members who are kept informed and aware that the scheme is still active. Newsletters are a very good way to circulate information. When a newsletter is attractive and interesting to read, and members look forward to receiving it, it can inject life and motivation into a scheme.

Three things determine whether your newsletter is a good read:

- **how often** it appears
- the **content**
- the **layout**.

#### How often should it appear?

How often you publish your newsletter depends on your individual scheme. When deciding on the frequency, you need to consider the following:

- If there is too long between newsletters, readers will lose interest and will regard it as just a piece of paper that turns up now and then. You may also find that you are reporting old news that everyone knows already.
- If you publish too frequently you may struggle to find enough items of interest, and so use dull and boring items just to fill the pages.



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- Preparing and sending out each newsletter needs money and time; too many issues can take up too much of both.

If there is a serious incident or crime, you could always publish a 'special edition' - especially if there was an appeal for information or witnesses. This would add credibility to your newsletter, particularly if you could interview the officer in charge of the investigation.

### **Making the content a 'good read'**

#### **The title**

Choose a good title that relates the newsletter to your area. You might want to be a little more adventurous than 'Neighbourhood Watch Bulletin' or 'The Newsletter'.

#### **The editorial team**

It is a good idea to have a small editorial team, maybe two or three people, who decide what to include in the newsletter, write the articles and arrange the production, printing and distribution.

#### **The content**

Always ensure that you have a good mix of 'serious' items, information and 'good news' stories, and try to make good use of success stories.

If you include an information story, about a recent crime for example, always make sure that the information you report is accurate. Try to get a quote from the officer dealing with the case in order to give the story a personal touch. It is important to include details of who members of your scheme can contact if they have any information.

To add interest, invite others to contribute articles - for example the local headteacher or the divisional commander, or any member of the Neighbourhood Watch group who could contribute an interesting or amusing story.



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### Writing style

When you write, use everyday language – as if you were talking to your readers. Write in plain English – the Plain English Campaign booklet 'How to write in plain English'

([www.plainenglish.co.uk/howto.pdf](http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/howto.pdf)) has some useful tips. Remember that every profession has its own 'lingo', some of which is impossible to understand for those outside the profession. Try to explain things in terms that everyone can understand.

Most newspaper articles start with a summary of the full story. This stirs the reader's interest and they will want to know more. It's a good style to follow.

### Getting the layout right

No matter how interesting or well-written your articles are, if they are badly laid out they will be more difficult to read. Neighbourhood Watch is all about using the talents and resources of scheme members. With luck, you will be able to find someone with a computer and experience of laying out text. Many word-processing programmes have facilities for laying out newsletters professionally.

Prioritise your articles. Put the important news on the front page and use minor items as a fillers.

If you compare a broadsheet newspaper with a tabloid you will probably find the tabloid easier to read. This is partly because the sentences are shorter, but it is also due to design and layout – the text is larger, articles are broken up into short paragraphs and there are lots of headings. Since some of your readers might have failing eyesight and will find it difficult to read small text, make sure that your print is fairly large.



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### Case study: Reaching the widest audience



Harborough District Neighbourhood Watch prints 5,000 newsletters as well as posting the newsletter on the internet, an approach that has proved very successful. This is part-funded by county police funds and advertisers.

The newsletter's editors reproduce it in black and white using the facilities at a local school. The same format is used to produce a 'countywide' newsletter and more than 10,000 copies have been circulated.

In addition, the Leicestershire & Rutland County Neighbourhood Watch Association website ([www.leicestershirenhw.com](http://www.leicestershirenhw.com)) hosts the newsletter free of charge. The links are used to disseminate information to each of the smaller villages on the site individually or to the whole county. This has proved invaluable because it passed on police messages and crime alert warnings to residents who are outside the Neighbourhood Watch community messaging network.

### Who pays for it?

Producing a newsletter means that there will be costs, such as printing and paper. You could help to meet these costs by suggesting to local businesses or shops that they sponsor an issue (or a number of issues) in return for free advertising.

If you (or a member of your group) are online, you can reduce costs by e-mailing the newsletter in Portable Document Format (PDF) to members who have an e-mail address.





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### Practical activity 8: Writing a good newsletter

The aim of this activity is to look at newsletters produced by other Neighbourhood Watch groups and decide how you are going to produce your publication.

#### Stage 1: Gather the evidence

Get hold of as many Neighbourhood Watch newsletters as you can. They are easy to find on the internet – lots of schemes now upload them onto their websites.

If you don't have access to the internet, a member of your Neighbourhood Watch association or the police's Watch Liaison Officer will be able to supply you with copies.

#### Stage 2: Looking for clues

Look carefully at the different newsletters. For each one, ask yourself the following questions:

- How long is the newsletter?
- What's the title? Is it straightforward or humorous? Does it include the words Neighbourhood Watch?
- How are headings used? Are they short or long? Do they use colour? Do they draw you into each story?
- How is the newsletter laid out? Is it the same on every page or does it vary? Is it easy to read each story from beginning to end?
- How big is the text? Is it easy for someone with poor eyesight to read?
- What's the language like? Is it easy to read? Are the sentences long or short? Did you spot any spelling mistakes?
- Are there any pictures? What do they add to the overall impression?
- What proportion of the content is general, and what is specific to the local area? How much is news and how much is



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advice? Are there advertisements?

- Finally, is it interesting? Did you enjoy reading it? (Don't forget that it's always more interesting to read about your own neighbourhood than somebody else's.)

If you can, ask another person to look at the newsletters independently and give their answers to the same questions.

### Stage 3: Finding the answer

What do you think is the ideal newsletter? Give thought to the following:

- title
- layout and text size
- content and balance of the articles and the overall length
- language and pictures.

If other people have worked through the same exercise, discuss your views together. This will help you to decide how you are going to proceed - and perhaps which pitfalls to avoid.

Remember that there is no 'right' way to produce a newsletter - it has to express the character of **your** neighbourhood and appeal to the members of **your** scheme.