

April 2016

Organising a local event/dinner

Organising an event or dinner in your local area can be a good way of bringing together politicians (both local and national) and/or stakeholders to discuss and debate the challenges for community pharmacy in a more informal setting. Such events can provide an opportunity to explain and improve understanding of the value of community pharmacy, and to ask local stakeholders to respond to the consultation on changes to community pharmacy.

Some LPCs have already held successful events like this, and this guide explains how others could arrange similar events and sets out two case studies and a checklist for LPCs.

Who should attend?

For ideas on local relevant stakeholders LPCs can refer to the [template LPC stakeholder map](#) published by PSNC in February. Key attendees to a local event may include:

- **Local Members of Parliament**
- **Local Councillors:** think about relevant councillors who will have a role on their council e.g. Chairs of Health & Wellbeing Boards, Cabinet members for Health (unitary and county authorities).
- **Charities and patient representatives:** patient support is vital for the campaign. Representatives can be invited to attend and to write to the Department if they have concerns.
- **Other relevant local stakeholders:** you may like to include representatives of other healthcare providers such as care homes, or people of standing in the local community.
- **Local health professionals:** where contractors or LPCs have good relations with local health professionals who recognise the value that pharmacy offers, it would be good to seek their support with the campaign.
- **Pharmacists:** make sure that there is at least one contractor present. Other pharmacy attendees can include LPC officers and members of the pharmacy team.

Tips for organising a successful event

We have included a checklist below which LPCs can work through to help them to organise an event. Here are some tips to consider when working through this:

- **Maximise attendance:** MPs will be in Westminster the first half of the week so go for a Thursday evening to avoid clashes with parliamentary business.
- **Give as much notice as possible:** Politicians will need as much notice of the event as possible.
- **Pick an easily accessible venue:** Try and pick a venue which is easily accessible by public transport and has good parking.
- **Chairing the event:** Someone will need to host the event and chair the discussion.
- **Tailor the invitations:** Ensure that any communication about the event, particularly the invitation, are tailored to the local context – the more constituency and council specific the communications, the more likely the politicians are to attend. The invitation should also come from the host of the event to make it more personalised.

Event format

- Think about your audience when picking a format. A roundtable meeting suggests a more formal agenda, focused on discussing the issues. A dinner gives you a captive audience in a less formal setting, but is a greater commitment for attendees. Consider hosting a dinner if you already know your political targets, and have other guests such as local charities.
- Make sure that all your guests know the format in advance, and know how they will be expected to contribute. Will you ask for opening remarks from all participants, or will the chair introduce subjects for discussion? For any event, participants should be supplied with three or four bullet points summarising the issues for debate.

Contacting MPs and councillors

- Each MP will have a different way of managing their invites but the safest way to ensure your invitation gets through is by sending it to their parliamentary email address – usually the best way of inviting them is through their Westminster office. You can find all the MPs' contact details [here](#).
- Every council's website will have a 'councillor information' page which will have their individual contact details including email, postal address and telephone number. It is usually better to contact them through their email and home postal addresses rather than sending them to the Town Hall.

A template invitation for your event is available below.

Planning for on the day

- Think about the agenda for the discussion – if it is going to be over dinner try and keep it focused around a single topic to ensure there is a good discussion and some conclusions can be drawn.
- Put together a seating plan and make sure that the chair has a copy to ensure that they involve everyone in the discussion and know who is expert in which areas.
- The chair/host of the event should ensure that everyone can be involved in the discussion and at the end should make some concluding remarks.
- Make sure someone is there to make a note of the discussion and capture any agreed follow up actions.

Actions following the event

The event shouldn't be a one-off but the start of a longer term relationship and dialogue. There are a number of things you can do to make sure this happens:

- Send a thank you email following on from the event – but use it to reiterate some of the key issues raised and highlight any actions that were agreed.
- Offer a follow up meeting to discuss any issues in more detail.

Costs

Costs should be modest. Indeed, local councillors in particular may have reservations about accepting lavish hospitality.

Costs could include:

- Venue
- Catering
- Any printing (briefings, name badges)

Examples of working with others

1. Hampshire and Isle of Wight LPC and their local MPs

On Monday 14th March, Hampshire and Isle of Wight LPC held a dinner meeting at Westminster with six of their local MPs. They had hoped for more attendees, but Parliamentary business taking place elsewhere in the House on the same evening kept the numbers down.

LPC Chief Officer Paul Bennett commented that those who did attend were very engaged and the LPC were successfully able to get across the key campaign messages to feed back to the Government. The meeting also led to MP for Meon Valley George Hollingbery offering to host an additional dinner at a later date at his own expense; the LPC are currently pursuing this opportunity.

Overall, Paul reported that the Committee were extremely pleased with the outcomes and believe that it is something that may be useful to do again in the future.

2. North Staffordshire and Stoke LPC and their local council

Stoke-on-Trent City Council wrote to North Staffordshire and Stoke LPC, as well as other stakeholders, inviting them to attend a council meeting in which they would be discussing the consultation on the future of community pharmacy. The council said they were keen to consider the impact of the document and how it will affect local health priorities.

Raj Morjaria, LPC member and PSNC Regional Representative for the West Midlands, attended the meeting and arranged for local pharmacy contractor John Ledger and Stoke-on-Trent South MP Rob Ffello to join him. Raj reported that the meeting was very productive, leading to Rob Ffello MP agreeing to submit Parliamentary Questions to the Government and propose an Early Day Motion (a motion for a Parliamentary debate which other MPs can sign up to in order to draw attention to a cause).

It was recognised that there was a lack of awareness of the issues among the general public and if they were more informed community pharmacy would have much more support. Rob Ffello MP suggested that a card warning that the pharmacy could close be placed in the bags of all medicines dispensed, with a note encouraging the patient to forward the card to their MP.

The MP was also interested in further information about the national coordinated campaign and said he was particularly concerned about whether the Government had considered the costs of patients with no local pharmacy turning to GP practices and A&E for support.

Raj commented that the learnings he took from this are that the LPC need to get local contractors to continue to engage with both the public and other stakeholders (i.e. MP and councillors) and that the LPC itself needs to reach out to other MPs in the area.

Checklist for organising a local stakeholder event

Where to start:

Discuss with neighbouring LPCs to see if you can work jointly on the event if possible – this spreads the workload and gives an event with greater impact.

Date and location:

- Once you have the green light for an event, agree a date – this needs to be prior to the consultation ending on 24th May.
- Decide who will steer and coordinate the project.
- Book a venue – think how many people you envisage attending on the day and the room layout.
- Depending on the venue costs (and refreshments?), prepare a draft budget – see ‘Costs’ section above.

Setting the agenda:

- Use the [key campaign messages](#) as your starting point.
- Think about how you will get the messages across – will you use leaflets, patient representative speakers, contractors talking about what they do? Could you use PowerPoints to show case studies on screen? Resources available from PSNC can be found at: psnc.org.uk/lpccampaignhub
- Approach local pharmacists, patient groups and other stakeholders to speak.
- Agree a draft agenda – see ‘Event format’ and ‘Planning for the day’ sections above.

Inviting guests:

- Agree your target audience – see ‘Who should attend?’ section above.
- Send an invitation to your guests – a template version is copied below.

Admin to carry out before the day:

- Prepare material for the day event including name badges, PowerPoints and leaflets.
- Think about staffing on the day.
- Confirm arrangements with the venue.
- Discuss with LPC members to plan who will look after particular guests that you would like to influence and the messages you want to convey.

After the event:

- Create a follow up plan and confirm any agreed actions with attendees. A report can also be written.
- Consider publicity – write a press release to send to local media, perhaps including photos and linking to a video of the event?

LPCs can contact PSNC or public affairs agency Luther Pendragon for additional support.

Template invitation to a local stakeholder event

Dear [invitee]

I hope you will be able to join me for a [roundtable meeting, informal dinner] to discuss the healthcare challenges facing [local area] and how community pharmacies are part of the solution.

The meeting will bring together local health professionals, patient representatives and decision makers in an informal setting. We hope that the event will help attendees to understand each other's skills and capabilities as well as thinking innovatively about how to improve healthcare in [local area].

Topics for discussion will include:

- [eg, community pharmacies and primary care; relieving the pressure on GPs and A&E; smoking, obesity and public health; minor ailments etc.]

[Include event details including format time and place]

[RSVP details]. I look forward to seeing you there.

Kind Regards etc.

If you have queries on this PSNC Briefing or you require more information, please contact [Zoe Smeaton, Head of Communications and Public Affairs](#).