

# Letterbox information for birth families

## What is Letterbox?

Letterbox is a system that helps birth relatives and adopters to stay in contact in a confidential way. It is managed by Together for Adoption (TFA). Letters are sent to the Letterbox Co-ordinator, who will check them, keep a copy on file, then pass it on to the birth or adoptive parents.

## How can Letterbox contact help my child?

- Letterbox can help children gain a positive sense of their adoptive and birth identity.
- Adopters can ask questions and receive answers from birth family which will help them to respond to some of their child's questions.
- Exchanging information allows an adopted child to know about any changes or important events from within their birth family.
- Letters can reassure children about the wellbeing of their birth relatives and can offer some comfort to birth families.
- Exchanging letters shows a child that their adoptive family acknowledges the importance of their birth family and that they accept and value everything about them.
- Letterbox can also help to prepare a child for their future as an adopted adult.
- Each child will have an individual letterbox agreement which will be agreed with you one month after the child is placed for adoption, when you will be contacted by your Letterbox Co-ordinator.

## How will the Letterbox system work?

Letterbox agreements will be set up between adopters, birth relatives and TFA. The agreement will include the details of what information is to be exchanged, with whom, how often and when. Everyone involved in the exchange will receive a copy.

Letterbox is an "adult to adult" arrangement. When a letter is received, the Co-ordinator will check it and send it on. If there are aspects of a letter that we think may be difficult for you, we will phone you to discuss. A copy will also be saved on the child's electronic file.

The Letterbox Scheme cannot be used to send presents or money. Adopters are encouraged to send anonymized photos and birth family are welcome to send photos of themselves. Anything received via the letterbox scheme must not be shared on social media and doing so could put the agreement at risk.

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### **When will the exchange start?**

The Letterbox coordinator will contact adopters 4 weeks after the child moves in and the agreement will be confirmed. You will then be contacted and the agreement sent out to everybody. Adopters will send their letter first, then birth family members can reply. In addition, adopters will send a settling in letter which should be given to you about 6 weeks after placement, coordinated by the child's social worker.

### **Are there any practical points that I need to remember?**

- Please tell us if you change your home address, email address or phone number.
- Include your child's birth name, placing authority and date of birth in a note to the coordinator.
- Use first names when signing your letter.

### **What information should I put in a letter?**

It's normal to worry about what to include or leave out of a letter. Adopters can feel anxious about telling a birth relative that the child is happy, as they are concerned this might upset them. Birth relatives sometimes feel that they cannot give good news about their own lives or are too overwhelmed by their sadness and feelings of loss. Your letterbox coordinator is available to help you with your letter – by email, over the phone or in person. Please contact them if you would like some support.

Here are some suggestions of things to include:

- Reassurance that you are well.
- News about what is happening in your life and how you are spending your time, including favourite food, TV programmes and films.
- Updates about the people who were significant in the child's life, such as grandparents, cousins etc.
- Confirmation that birth relatives are pleased that the child is happy and doing well.
- News about major events in the birth family, such as births, marriages or deaths.
- Refer to news in their letter eg "I hope the swimming is going well" or "I'm so proud you got a certificate for dancing".
- Ask questions e.g. How tall they are, their shoe size, favourite sport/music/TV

There may be information which you would like to be available to the child in the future, but not at this time. Please contact your Letterbox Coordinator to discuss this so a plan can be agreed together. If you think there is news to be sent urgently (such as illness or death) please contact the Letterbox Co-ordinator.

### **Writing letters to siblings**

Siblings are a really important connection and we encourage adults to support children with their letters. This is a good chance to ask any questions children have about their siblings and to seek reassurance that they are ok. As well as photos, you could include a picture the child has drawn or a card they have made.

### **What if a Birth Relative Does Not Wish to be involved in Letterbox?**

At the time of adoption, some birth relatives may feel that it is too difficult to write letters but in the future they may begin to feel differently. For this reason we let everyone know that we will keep any letters for them in case they wish to read them in the future. We ask adopters to keep sending their letters for the same reasons. Even if you haven't sent or received a letter for many years, we would love to hear from you.

### **What if I don't get a letter?**

We know that this will be disappointing and we will be able to discuss this with you. We ask you to continue to send your news as agreed and it may be in the future the other person will start sending their news again too. If your letter does not arrive during the month agreed, please contact the Letterbox Co-ordinator who will send out a reminder.

### **How long will the Service continue?**

Letterbox exchanges will usually continue until the child reaches 18. Once a child turns 17 we will begin conversations about what they want to happen next. Your letterbox coordinator will then discuss this with you. The Letterbox Contact file will become part of your child's adoption records which are kept for 100 years from the date of their Adoption Order.

### **Contact details**

Please ensure that you record the name of the **local authority, birth name** and **date of birth** of your child.

**Email:** [TfALetterbox@wigan.gov.uk](mailto:TfALetterbox@wigan.gov.uk)

### **Current Letterbox coordinators:**

Wigan & St Helens: Liz Sherriff

CWAC & Halton: Sue Prince

Warrington: Sarah Harris

**Post:** Letterbox Co-ordinator

Together for Adoption

Letterbox Service

Warrington Town Hall

Sankey Street

Warrington

WA1 1UH

**Telephone:** 01942 487272

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## Sample letter from birth parents

Dear Catie and Zara,

Thank you for your lovely letter. It made me feel very proud of Catie and it was a very interesting letter.

It sounds like you've been very busy. How exciting to go to Italy on a plane! Catie has lovely neat handwriting; there is so much detail in her drawings. The firework painting is lovely.

The new bedroom sounds like it will be beautiful when it is done.

It sounds like Catie is doing well at school, especially her timetables and maths! Maths wasn't my best subject at school! It's lovely to hear the teachers enjoy having her in their class. It's good to know Catie is doing more activities; she's a very busy girl! I didn't think she would like football so that's great to know.

Nell is now 19 months old – I hope you like the pictures. She enjoys watching Paw Patrol and Peppa Pig. She likes books and playing outside too. We go to nursery three times a week and Nell is making little friends at playgroup. Catie is getting into a better sleep routine. She likes eating chicken nuggets from McDonald's! She also likes a roast dinner on Sunday especially vegetables. Catie's favourite word is NO!

I'm feeling well – I have lost weight too! I think it's because I'm always on my feet and busy! I've started driving lessons and I'm doing well. I meet up with other mums at the nursery. We still have our dog Poppy. She's 3 now and is really good with Nell.

I look forward to your next letter. I miss and love Catie and getting the letters 'takes me back' but I'm glad that she's happy and doing well.

Lots of love,  
Jackie xxxxx