

1.1. Introduction

Adopt North East's Post Box Service manages written contact between birth families and adoptive families.

There are many benefits of Post Box contact including:

- The child knows that their birth family has not forgotten about them and that they still care about their welfare and the progress they are making;
- The link with the birth family is maintained;
- Adopters receive regular information from birth families including any major changes in their lives or circumstances which the child should know about;
- Birth families receive regular information from adopters about any changes in the child's circumstances;
- Birth families are reassured that the child is safe and well.

The Adopt North East Post Box Service ensures that family members can't be identified and that letters remain confidential. It also ensures that no inappropriate content is shared.

The Service offers practical support such as letter writing skills and provides advice on the type of information that can and can't be shared. Adopters are usually asked to send letters to the birth family, on an annual basis. The letters will typically include milestones a child has achieved during the year, their physical health and progress at school. Adopt North East also encourages birth families to reply to adopters to keep them informed of birth family news.

1.2. Procedure

Following an Adoption Order being granted for a child, the Adopters' Social worker (or Family Finding Social Worker if the adopters are from another Agency) must complete a referral to the Post Box Service on LCS.

The information about the child's birth family will have been collated by the child's Local Authority Social Worker and should have been provided to the adopter's Social Worker using the Post Box Agreement Form. This information supports the completion of the referral for birth family, adopters and any other parties to the agreement. The referral should clearly specify whom the contact is between, what is to be exchanged, for example, photographs, birthday cards, Childrens drawings and how often (usually once or twice per year) and when (avoiding birthdays, Easter and Christmas times).

Once the referral is received and accepted by the Post Box Service, a formal agreement will then be put in place with all parties (within 8 weeks). Each party should be given the relevant Post Box Contact leaflet, which explains the process

along with the written advice on letter writing. Sample letters are available which provide a model on which letters can be based. In addition, birth families should be given written information about the services available through the voluntary adoption service provider contracted by Adopt North East, currently PAC UK.

All parties should be asked to inform the Agency if there any changes of address or circumstances.

Each arrangement will be set up on the child's LCS case record. This enables monitoring of post box exchanges and the service will send a reminder letter one month prior to a letter being due to support a timely outcome.

When written information is received, it will be reviewed to ensure the content is suitable to be passed onto the other party. Where there are concerns about the content, contact will be made with the author and they will be advised about the concerns and given the opportunity to amend their content. They will be advised that any no unsuitable content (or content outside of the Post Box Agreement) will be passed on.

Prior to letters being sent out, a final check of the contents, names and addresses will be undertaken by the Service to ensure as far as possible no errors are made in distribution. All letters sent by the Agency are by recorded delivery or cryptshare (if sent electronically).

If information is sent which requires translation or conversion to Braille, this will be facilitated by Adopt North East.

Adopt North East will maintain a copy of any Post Box correspondence.

If any urgent information e.g. serious illness or death needs to be exchanged outside of the Post Box Agreement frequency, the Adoption Support Team Manager will make a judgement about the necessity of transferring the information.

The Post Box Service exchanging information ends when the child is 18 years old. The whole of the Post Box file will transfer to the child's adoption file record which is then kept for 100 years from the date of the Adoption Order.