

Updated June 2023



Adoption Contact Service

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General

- 1.1 When the agency is authorised to place a child for adoption, there is no general presumption for or against contact. Contact arrangements should be determined solely by the needs of the child as the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.
- 1.2 Contact arrangements may need to be reviewed as the child's relationships and needs for contact change over time.
- 1.3 Contact may be direct (visits, email exchange, meetings) indirect (letters, cards, photographs if appropriate and background information) or virtual (face time, microsoft teams, zoom)
- 1.4 Where siblings cannot be placed together within the same adoptive family, contact between siblings must be given careful attention and plans put in place to maintain contact when it is in the best interests of the child.

2. Summary of Contact Arrangements Provisions

- 2.1 The child's **Permanence Report** should include:
 - The child's wishes and feelings regarding contact with a parent, guardian, relative or any other significant person should be ascertained during the assessment of whether the child should be placed for adoption.
 - The wishes and feelings of the parent, guardian, relative or any other significant person should be ascertained during the assessment of whether the child should be placed for adoption.
 - The proposed contact arrangements and the agency's views on them.
- 2.2 When a child is matched with prospective adopters, the views of the prospective adopters about the proposed contact arrangements should be ascertained. The **Adoption Placement Report** should include the proposed contact arrangements.
- 2.3 The Panel will consider the contact arrangements when considering whether the child should be placed for adoption and, when the matching decision is considered and the Adoption Placement Report is presented, may give advice to the agency about the proposed arrangements.
- 2.4 The **Adoption Placement Plan** should include all contact arrangements.

2.5 The following people should be informed of contact arrangements:

- The child if of sufficient age and understanding
- The parent or guardian
- Any person who had a contact order under the 1989 Children Act
- Any other relevant person

2.6 All reviews should consider the existing contact arrangements and whether they should be continued or altered.

3. Direct Contact

3.1 Direct contact may continue once a child has been adopted if it has been assessed as being an established relationship between the child and birth relative and it is in the best interests of the child.

3.2 The support required for any direct contact arrangements should be considered as part of the Adoption Support Plan. This may involve:

- Financial support through the adoption allowance or one off payments
- The agency acting as an intermediary between the parties in setting up the arrangement
- Transportation of involved parties
- Provision of facility for the contact to take place
- Supervision of the contact

3.3 The responsibility of supporting and reviewing direct contact plans remains the responsibility of the child's placing Local Authority.

4. Indirect Contact

4.1 In the past the making of an Adoption Order was considered to be final and all contact between children and their family of origin was severed. The contemporary view is all children placed for adoption have indirect contact known as Letterbox arrangements.

4.2 Indirect contact within Together for Adoption is managed through the Letterbox Service.

4.3 The Letterbox Service is managed by the Adoption Support Team and provides a service by which letters, cards, information, and photographs may be exchanged between parties as agreed on either a voluntary basis or as ordered by the Court. The exchange of information is offered until the adopted child reaches 18 years of age. Consideration will be given to requests by an adoptive child/adult to extend the arrangements. A review of any extension will then be undertaken at age 21 and 25.

4.4 Designated Letterbox Co-ordinators administer and oversee the Letterbox arrangements for the 5 local authorities within the regional adoption agency.

4.5 For an **adopted child** an exchange of information can help the child to:

- Keep up links with a significant birth relative
- Understand more about his/her background
- Keep up to date with changes and events in his/her birth family
- Accept what has happened and deal with fantasies or myths about the birth family
- Prepare for possible future contact as an adult

4.6 For **adoptive parents** an exchange of information can help them to:

- Find out information not available at the time of the adoption e.g. medical information
- Provide answers to questions from the child using more up to date information about the birth family
- Assist the child to develop a positive sense of identity
- Enable the child to develop new attachments by acknowledging the old ones.

4.7 For a **birth parent or relative** an exchange of information can help them to:

- Find out how their birth child is developing, progressing at school etc.
- Inform the child about changes in their own lives
- Deal with their loss by being reassured that the child is safe, well and loved
- Maintain links with the child
- Remember the child is growing and developing rather than being stuck at the age they last saw each other
- Prepare for the possibility of contact when the child reaches adulthood

4.8 Indirect contact may exist between the child and:

- A birth parent
- A sibling
- A significant birth relative/other

4.9 The exchange of information is normally between the adopters and the birth family although with older children may involve some exchange of information with the child.

4.10 As part of the placement planning, consideration should be given to:

- What form the indirect contact will take i.e. letters, cards, information, videos/tapes/CDs and sharing/viewing of photographs. No items should be exchanged which identify details about the adopters, their location or the child's school.
- How frequent the indirect contact will be

- Whether the birth family write to the child or to the adoptive parents
- What form of address should be used for the birth family e.g. mummy/daddy or Christian names.
- What updating information will be provided
- Under what circumstances the contact will cease e.g. wishes of child.

4.11 The Letterbox arrangements will commence when the child has been placed for adoption.

4.12 Unauthorised or unmediated indirect contact will present challenges for children, birth families, adoptive parents and social workers.

4.13 Social networking is for many adults and children a preferred and common method of communication. It is important that the implications of disclosing personal information and the harm unauthorised or unmediated contact can bring are discussed.

4.14 Prospective adopters will be given advice during the preparation and assessment process. Support will be available to all parties should unauthorised or unmediated contact be made.

5. Letterbox Procedure

5.1 Letterbox Referral Forms (appendix E) must be completed and submitted as part of the Matching Panel paperwork by the child/ren's social worker. The agreement should clearly specify whom the agreement is between and what is covered by the agreement.

5.2 Each party should be given the relevant Letterbox Contact Booklet (Appendix B) which explains the process. In addition, the child's social worker should make sure birth families are given written information about the services available through the voluntary adoption service provider contracted by Together for Adoption on behalf of the 5 local authorities within the regional adoption agency.

5.3 Letterbox Co-ordinators will be responsible for managing the indirect exchange where siblings of an adopted child remain in care placed with Foster Carers. Up to date contact details for these siblings must be made available from the child's social worker.

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

5.5 Each party to the Agreement should be given support about what to include in their letters. Sample letters will be provided to all parties within which provide a model that letters can be based.

5.6 The Letterbox Co-ordinator will set up a separate electronic case file for each

arrangement that will be securely stored.

- 5.7 The Letterbox Co-ordinator will maintain a record of all Letterbox Agreements detailing when the indirect contact will occur, the parties to the indirect contact and what will be exchanged.
- 5.8 When the exchange of information is received by the Letterbox Co-ordinator, it will be opened and the contents read to ensure the contents are suitable to be passed on to the other party. Where there are concerns about the contents, the Letterbox Co-ordinator will contact the birth relative or adoptive family and advise them about the concerns to give the opportunity for an alternative letter to be provided or to counsel the recipient about what may be distressing information and how it should be handled. Any unsuitable contents or contents outside of the Letterbox Agreement will not be passed on. The Letterbox Administration procedure (Appendix A) should be followed.
- 5.9 If a letter is emailed to the Letterbox Co-ordinator either as an attachment or is recorded within the body of the email, the letter must be copied and pasted into a new word document and saved onto the child's file. This new word document will then be attached to a new email and sent securely to the relevant recipient.
- 5.10 All letters sent must comply with TFA's Post Procedure (appendix C)
- 5.11 If information is sent which requires translation or conversion to Braille, this service will be provided by Together for Adoption.
- 5.12 If there are no concerns about the contents or the concerns have been addressed, any letters will be electronically uploaded and the original forwarded to the recipient. Items which are exchanged should be recorded on the Letterbox case record.
- 5.13 If no exchange of information is received during the agreed month of exchange, the Letterbox Co-ordinator will send a reminder letter. The Letterbox Co-ordinator will inform the other party that no information has been received but will advise that the other party continue to send information as contact may be resumed at a later stage. Such information will be retained on the file and will be available to the adopted child if they choose to access their adoption file on reaching 18 years of age.
- 5.14 All correspondence received that is to be forwarded on to families should be sent adhering to GDPR regulations - either by recorded delivery and have a return label/stamp on the back of the envelope or secure email.
- 5.15 If any forwarded information is returned to the agency as not known the Letterbox Co-ordinator will be informed and will attempt to discover the reason for this e.g. failure to notify of a change of address.

- 5.16 If any urgent information e.g. serious illness or death needs to be exchanged outside of the Letterbox Agreement frequency, the Letterbox Co-ordinator should be contacted by the concerned party and will make a judgement about the transfer of the information.
- 5.17 If there has been no exchange between both parties for 3 years then the adoptive and birth family will be sent a letter advising of the closure of the service unless they indicate otherwise.
- 5.18 The Letterbox exchange of information ends when the child is 18 years old unless a request to extend has been received. The whole of the Letterbox file will transfer to the child's adoption file, which is then kept for 100 years from the date of the Adoption Order.

Appendix A: Letterbox Administration Procedure

1. All letterbox correspondence to be sent to Letterbox Co-ordinator via TfA Letterbox email account TFAletterbox@wigan.gov.uk or via Royal Mail and to be placed in the post locker.
2. The Letterbox Co-ordinator has responsibility for reading the information and making a judgement regarding the appropriateness of its content and to ensure there is no identifying information recorded such as:
 - Adopted name
 - Photographs
 - Address
 - Telephone numbers
 - Social networking account
 - Email address
 - Non-specific information that may distinguish a location
3. If a letter is received electronically either as an attachment or recorded within the body of an email, the letter must be copied and pasted into a new word document and saved onto the child's file. This new word document will then be attached to a new email and sent securely to the relevant recipient.
4. All letters sent must comply with TFA's Post Procedure (appendix C)
5. The Letterbox Co-ordinator to electronically upload a copy of all documentation received within the child's Letterbox case file.
6. All correspondence should be recorded electronically on CHARMS
7. When accepting a new letterbox referral, the Letterbox Co-ordinator will record on the Letterbox Referral Tracker spreadsheet details of the new agreement and the date when contact will be made with the children's social worker to establish if the child has been placed and it is appropriate to send out agreements. This should happen approx. 4 weeks after placement.
8. All letters that have a precious letter enclosed should be sent recorded delivery and have a return label/stamp on the back of the envelope.
9. Prior to any correspondence being sent to birth family or adopters contact must be made to confirm their current home or email address.

10. Letters to be sent directly to the Foster Carers of siblings in the care of the LA who have a letterbox contact arrangement with their adopted siblings. Confirmation of the current Foster Carer to be obtained from the allocated social worker prior to any correspondence being sent.
11. If no letters have been exchanged within a 3 year period from birth family and adopters, a letter will be sent to both parties advising of case closure.
12. Letterbox exchange will end after the adopted person reaches 18 years of age. Consideration will be given to requests by an adoptive child to extend the arrangements. A review of any extension will then be undertaken at age 21 and 25.

together for 
adoption

**Letterbox information for adopters
and birth families**



What is Letterbox?

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

How can the Letterbox help my child?

- Letterbox can help children gain a positive sense of their adoptive and birth identity.
- Adoptive parents 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 discussed with you one month after the child is placed for adoption.

How will the Letterbox system work?

Letterbox agreements will be set up between adopters, birth relatives and Together For Adoption. 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.

One letter can be written, copied and sent to each adult involved in the agreement, although it is good to personalise them if you can. Where news is to be sent between brothers and sisters placed in different adoptive families this can usually be done directly between both sets of adoptive parents. Where siblings are placed under Special Guardianship or remain in foster care, this will be included in your agreement.

Letterbox is "adult to adult" arrangement. When a letter is received, the Co-ordinator will check the information and send it to the relevant people with no identifying information. A copy will also be saved on the child's electronic file.

The Letterbox Scheme cannot be used to send presents or money and Christmas/birthday cards are not usually exchanged. It is **not usual** for full photographs of the child to be shared. Adopters are encouraged to consider anonymised photos and birth family are welcome to send photos of themselves. These photographs are **not to be shared on social media** and doing so could result in no further photographs being sent.

When will the exchange start?

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

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 and placing authority in a note to the coordinator.
- Remember not to include identifying information within your letter.
- Use **first names** when signing your letter.
- Please do your best to keep to the dates agreed in your Letterbox Agreement as missed letters cause anxiety and distress.

What information should I put in a letter?

It's normal to worry about what to include or leave out of a letter. Adoptive parents can feel anxious about telling a birth relative that the adopted 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 and so focus their letters on their sadness and feelings of loss. Here are some suggestions of things to include:

From adoptive parents to birth relatives

- The child's appearance, health and general development
- Experiences at nursery or school
- Activities and hobbies
- Likes/dislikes – Food, colours, sports, activities
- Events and trips
- Positive comments the child has made about adoption or the information included in their life story book about their birth family.
- Information about any changes in the adoptive family (eg siblings)
- Use birth family and the child's names
- Be descriptive and ask questions
- Be creative – include drawings, artwork, photographs etc

From birth relatives to adoptive parents

- Reassurance that you are well.
- News about what is happening in your life and how you are spending your time.
- 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.

There may be information which the birth family would like to be available to the child in the future, but not at this time. Please contact the Letterbox Coordinator to discuss this so a plan can be agreed together.

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.

What if the news I receive is distressing or difficult?

The Letterbox Co-ordinator can offer a supportive counselling service to help you or your child deal with difficult or upsetting information. They will contact you to discuss any difficult information before sending out your letter.

What if something urgent happens?

If you think there is a need for news to be sent urgently (such as illness or death) please either contact the Letterbox Co-ordinator by email or phone and they will advise 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 often 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 the age of 18. However, at the child's request and with the agreement of all parties this can be extended until the age of 21. The Letterbox Contact file will then 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** and **birth name** of your child.

Email: TfALetterbox@wigan.gov.uk

Post: Letterbox Co-ordinator
Together for Adoption
Letterbox Service
Warrington Town Hall
Sankey Street
Warrington
WA1 1UH

Telephone: 01942 487272

Current Letterbox coordinators: Wigan & St Helens: Liz Sherriff
CWAC & Halton: Sue Prince
Warrington: Sarah Harris

Photographs

If it has been agreed that photographs will be included in the exchange then the following guidelines must be adhered to, these are to safeguard the children and ensure the photo exchange is helpful.

- ✓ Photos of children involved in an activity or a close up shot are particularly appreciated, e.g. climbing.
- ✓ Please send no more than 3 photographs to your child.
- ✓ Please send clear photos.
- ✓ Please do not include people/children outside of your family.
- ✓ Please ensure photos do not include identifying information, e.g. school or team badges, local landmarks.
- ✓ Please ensure the child is fully clothed.
- ✓ Please remember these photographs cannot be put on any social networking sites. If they are this may result in your Letterbox being stopped.

If your agreement states you are able to view a photograph of your child the Letterbox Coordinator will make arrangements for this to happen.

Examples of anonymised photographs:



Writing letters to siblings

- It's a good idea to let your brother/sister know what you are doing.
- Try to remember how old your brother or sister is and tell them things you think will interest them.
- They may like to know how you are getting on in school, if you have got a pet, had a new hairstyle, taken up a new hobby, attended a wedding/celebration or enjoyed a special holiday or day out.
- You could also describe what you look like now.
- You could also talk about things you think that your brother/sister would enjoy and congratulate them on any achievements they may have mentioned in their letter to you.
- If you are wondering about anything in particular about your brother/sister, your letter is your chance to ask.
- If you are responding to a letter from the adoptive parents, you may wish to answer their questions or make comment about what they have written.
- Try to avoid talking too much about your feelings. It will be enough for your brother or sister to know that you are interested in telling them what you are doing and want to find out about them and the things they like doing.
- If you wanted to you could always include a picture you have drawn
- If you still feel unsure about what to write please contact the Letterbox Co-ordinator who will be able to offer you some suggestions and support.

Sample letter – From Adopters

Dear

We hope you are keeping well. Since we last wrote so much has changed.

When we last wrote Matthew hadn't yet started crawling and was only rolling and shuffling. However, he pretty soon began to crawl! He was very wobbly to start with, but as he is a determined little fella, he was soon a super speedy crawler who races us across the room! Matthew really enjoys being outside, he likes touching the soil and the grass, but most of all likes to go on bike rides in his seat on the back of the bike, he shouts when the bike stops and looks very funny with his Fireman Sam cycle helmet on! He also loves splashing in the bath, so was super excited when he first went swimming in his big orange rubber ring and can now kick himself across the pool.

In September the whole family went on holiday to Wales and Matthew got to spend time with the family and really get to know them. He spent lots of time on the beach, trying to eat the sand and enjoyed paddling in the sea. Whilst on holiday he first pulled himself up on the edge of the sofa and since coming home he has got more and more confident. He now walks along the furniture and can walk pushing along a cart full of blocks. I'm sure he will be walking by Christmas.

During the holiday we found out that Matthew loves ice cream, so for his birthday party we decided to have it at an ice cream cake. All the family came and lots of his new little friends. He blew out all the candles on his birthday cake that was shaped like a number one with little blue stars all over it.

We have just started going to playgroup and Matthew especially loves the singing at the end. He is always playing with his instruments, he has a tambourine, maraca and a light up drum that he loves to shake and bang!

Everywhere we go people talk to him, as he always has a beaming smile on his face. He is able to clap his hands, wave, blow raspberries and puts his hands on his head if someone says oh no! He has just started to give hugs and gives very sloppy kisses!

We are looking forward to Christmas and will tell you all about it in the next letter in August.

Best wishes from
Sally, Robert and Matthew xx

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

Sample letter – Settling in Letter

Hello Janine

Annie came to live with us in May and has settled in really well. She is a happy little girl, always smiling and giggling.

We first met her at her foster carers house and spent a few hours playing with her and then took her out for a walk in the buggy. Over the next few days we spent different parts of the day with her, getting to know Annie and her routine.

She is now making her first attempts at walking and is saying a few words like 'bear', 'there' and 'bye bye'.

Annie loves her food and sleeps really well she will sleep from 7pm until around 8am every night!. She also enjoys her milky bottle before going to bed. Annie now has 8 teeth, 4 at the top and 4 at the bottom.

Annie attends a musical group once a week and other play groups where she enjoys playing with other children.

Her favourite cuddly toy is a small pink Hippo that she cuddles up with at night. She loves watching Iggle Piggle on the television and gets very excited when she sees the Ninky Nonk!

We have an older son and they really enjoy playing with each other.

We recently went on holiday were Annie loved splashing around in the pool and playing on the sand.

We hope that this letter reassures you that Annie is well and happy, and we look forward to starting letterbox contact next July.

Best wishes

Sue and Phil

POST PROCEDURE

PROCESS FOR OUTGOING CORRESPONDENCE

Objective

To ensure that confidential information sent out by staff within Together for Adoption (TfA) is protected and safe and thus reducing the risk of potential data breaches related to outgoing mail.

Scope

This applies to all documents:

- That are distributed by staff via the internal and external postal services
- Collected in person or delivered by hand
- Sent via secure email

Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of any TfA staff processing outgoing post to ensure that this process is followed. Failure to have post sent via Royal mail checked by a second checker may result in a serious breach of personal data and could result in disciplinary action being taken.

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10	24/08/2022	

- **ALL** post to be sent out from Time Square or Leigh Town Hall, to enable agreed procedure to be followed. No post should be sent out via any other spokes
- All post is to be sent out in WINDOW ENVELOPES ONLY, with the exclusion of internal mail. Depending on what is being posted out, a letterhead may need to be produced with the name and address typed onto it as a cover sheet for the window envelope. Template available in Admin folder.

- Please note that Private and Confidential must be typed on the first line of the address box within the letter, before the name and address of the person.
- All envelopes should have two initials on the back prior to leaving the building. This is the name of the author of the letter and the person **checking the address on the envelope, checking the contents** and sealing the envelope. Some members of staff have the same initials, therefore middle names may need to be ascertained to identify members of staff.
- If the checking of the address and contents of the envelope is completed virtually the countersignature should have an L/ in front of their initial
- **Post Spreadsheet / file headings found in admin folders**
 - Date
 - Name / House Number or Building Name / Postcode
 - Method (i.e. 1st, 2nd, Recorded, Special, e-mail)
 - Author's initials
 - Post person's initials

Emails

All emails that are sent to a recipient outside of the Council (external) and contain personal confidential information must be sent protected through OME. Or Egress when sending larger files. Please refer to the 'sending of secure emails on the intranet (The HUB) ***There is New information re secure mail and trusted networks on Wigan intranet If you are in doubt, please contact IT for advice on this.***

- All staff to have set a 3-minute delay when sending their e-mails
- Staff must ensure address of who the email is being sent to – to be checked and re checked in case outlook has “predicted” the wrong addressee and prepopulated the e mail address.
- Staff must also double check all attachments apply.

***Please refer to Blind Copying BCC function for sending emails to a number of recipients* THIS APPLIES TO ANYTHING SEND TO THE ADOPTERS MAILING LIST**

Letter/attachment/document created by TFA Staff member

When creating a letter/document, you must ensure that this is treated as a blank letterhead/document. Under no circumstances should you copy and paste or 'file save as' a previously saved document. This is to prevent any data breaches/losses.

When the letter (and any attachment) is produced and has been signed (sometimes by a Social Worker), it should be placed into an envelope **unsealed**. Author's initials should be recorded on the reverse of the envelope.

A second checker should then check the address corresponds with the address recorded in CHARMS or against the documentation you have been provided with e.g. email with the address on if this is being addressed to a person whose details are not in CHARMS, **check all of the attachments relate to that letter (remove any attachments not mentioned in the covering letter, and discuss with author)** and seals the envelope. The second checkers initials are then recorded on the back of the envelope alongside the authors.

If the worker has passed a letter/attachment they have typed and has asked/mailed business support to send it out on their behalf, business support will check the name and address against the CHARMS, if in the office, or against the e-mail, if it was via an e-mail request. Business support will 'pp' the letter on the workers behalf and check any attachments are relevant to the person who the letter is addressed to (if applicable). Business support then seals the envelope and enters the 2 initials on the reverse of the envelope (the worker first, followed by e-mail (e.g. CS email) and then business support staff member as the second checker). This can then be entered onto the post log if not sending recorded delivery . If sending Recorded Delivery this is logged in the Royal Mail Book.

If there is a discrepancy with the address on CHARMS, do not send the letter, but please liaise with the relevant worker or manager to clarify this. If necessary record this in the post log notes that the worker/manager has clarified the address it is being sent to and update CHARMS if necessary.

Any discrepancy between the letter and attachment identified by the second checker will be recorded as a 'near miss/data breach depending on the individual circumstances'. Please inform the Administration Manager who must liaise with their Manager.

Where there is no content to be checked (e.g. generic letter with no identifying information) Letter can be verified by business support in the procedure outlined

above. Verifier must check no further enclosures other than the generic letter are included.

Letterbox

Where there is **Letterbox** content to check (e.g. photo, hand-written letter, school reports), then the verifier must be a member of the adoption support team, possibly duty worker. These letters should be considered whether to be sent recorded delivery and stamped with a return address on the back of the envelope. Marked confidential only to be opened by addressee.

If a parcel is received by a letterbox co-ordinator the original wrapping must be checked for any identifying information. The parcel should not be sent to the intended recipient within the original wrapping.

Where secure email is deemed to be the best way to communicate, prior to sending out an email please can you ensure -

- The email address is the correct one for the intended recipient
- That any attachments are the correct ones for this recipient on that occasion
- Scroll through any attachments to check there is no information within the attachment that shouldn't be included in this specific email.
- Please ensure all recipients are using the OME secure email system

When scanning in documents sent in the post (such as letterbox), if they have a covering letter or anything with personal information on, each item needs to be scanned separately to lessen the chance that it is sent out accidentally

Although it is the referring social workers responsibility to ensure the information on the letterbox referral form is correct, when setting up a new agreement the Letterbox co-ordinator must send a test email before any information is shared. [This email does not need to be #secure#](#). Once the recipient has confirmed the email address is correct then correspondence can be sent securely using [#secure#](#)

If no email is provided the Letterbox co-ordinator must undertake a telephone security check. The call should begin with introducing yourself and explaining that due to data protection you have a number of security questions that you want to ask: **Confirm their name, child's name and date of birth, address, phone number and email.**

The existing process of double checking mail sent via royal mail remains relevant. However, we should double with recipient that the address is correct.

Hybrid Mail

It is essential that PG1 and the letter template is set correctly to reduce the risk of a data breach.

Hybrid mail – due to the in build security aspects of Hybrid mail, it is not necessary to have mail double checked.

Sealed envelopes

On some occasions there may be a need to send out an item where it is inappropriate for a business support member to check it e.g. where the letter refers to a confidential staffing matter. In such cases it is the responsibility of the author to identify a manager who can verify the contents of the letter.

Letter sent by Panel Administrator

Where adopters are not TFA, and therefore not recorded on CHARMS, Address checked from Booking Form, and cross referenced with reports received. (CPR/PAR) Under no circumstance should the reports be used as a primary check. If addresses match, then proceed as per procedure above. Should information conflict, then Panel Administrator should return the form to the SW and request verification. Where there is no address to cross reference, Booking Form should be returned to the worker for verification. Once received, procedure above to be followed using post or email.

Points to remember

- ❖ All letters that are created by business support should follow the corporate standards. For further information, please refer to the Corporate Style Guide on the intranet.
- ❖ Any correspondence sent out to an address that is not recorded in CHARMS, must be confirmed by the worker/manager and recorded in the post log to this effect.
- ❖ Any post that is created by business support, must be recorded on the post log when the letter/attachment is being checked. The envelope can then be placed in the orange bag ready for collection.
- ❖ Where there is no full address, the individual or the agency that has supplied any partial address information should be referred to where possible. The Royal Mail postcode checker can be used if you have enough address information to establish the postcode or if you have the postcode and require the rest of the address. **Google or other search engines should never be used.**
- ❖ The second checker is the person who has checked the address, contents and sealed the envelope.
- ❖ Failure to follow the above procedure could result in a serious breach of confidential data and lead to disciplinary action.
- ❖ Ensure all envelopes are stamped with a return address on the back.

The post log must be retained for 12 months and then destroyed confidentially.



DECLARATION

I, confirm that I have read and understood the Post Procedure for Together for Adoption.

PRINT NAME:	
POSITION:	
BASE:	

Signed:

Date:

Letterbox referral process

```
graph TD; A[Child's social worker to complete a Letterbox referral form for each child] --> B[Completed referral form & matching documentation to be sent to tfapanel@wigan.gov.uk]; B --> C[Following Agency Decision Making Panel Admin to email the referral forms to tfalletterbox@wigan.gov.uk  
Recording the referring Local Authority within the subject line];
```

Child's social worker to complete a Letterbox referral form for each child

Completed referral form & matching documentation to be sent to tfapanel@wigan.gov.uk

Following Agency Decision Making Panel Admin to email the referral forms to tfalletterbox@wigan.gov.uk
Recording the referring Local Authority within the subject line

Continued on next page...



Letterbox coordinator to contact child's social worker to confirm placement and then make contact with adopters 4 weeks after placement.



Prior to setting up a Letterbox agreement it is the responsibility of the co-ordinator to confirm directly with all parties that their contact details are correct.



Once contracts have been agreed and verbal consent given an electronic file will be created & managed until the age of 18 years.

Letterbox Referral Form

All the information required to complete the referral can be located within the child’s CPR. It is the responsibility of the child’s social worker to complete the referral form and submit it along with panel papers prior to Matching Panel. Please complete one form per child. The completed form will then be passed to the Letterbox Coordinator who will draw up the contract with all parties and set up the contact.

Please complete all sections

Placing Authority	
Referring Social Worker	
Contact Details telephone + email	
Date Completed	
Proposed Date of Placement	
Date Received by Letterbox Coordinator:	

CHILD

Local authority child’s ID	Childs full birth name	Date of birth	Child’s proposed adoptive Name
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ADOPTERS

Adopter's Social Worker:

Contact Details (telephone / email):

Name of adopters	How are the adopters to be known to birth family?	Full address	Telephone	Email

BIRTH RELATIVES

Name	Relationship	Full address	Telephone	Email

SIBLINGS TO BE INCLUDED IN THE CONTACT

Local Authority I.D and social worker (if applicable)	Sibling name	Date of birth	Status: (SGO/ foster care / adopted)	Name of carer / parent	Full address / telephone / email

CONTACT DETAILS

<p>Frequency and Type of information to be exchanged e.g letters, cards, artwork, photographs.</p>	
<p>Additional / significant information i.e risks, learning difficulties etc. Please include support workers name and contact details</p>	

FOR THE REFERRING SOCIAL WORKER

<p>Please confirm that all parties included in the referral are aware of the arrangements and have given their consent and commitment to engage.</p>	
<p>It is the referring social workers responsibility to ensure that the information provided is current and accurate.</p>	
<p>It is the referring social workers responsibility to ensure that adopters provide a settling in letter within 6 weeks of placement, forwarded to birth parents and a copy is sent to the letterbox co-ordinator</p>	
<p>It is the responsibility of either the referring social worker or foster carer to inform the letterbox coordinator if the child has moved foster placement.</p>	

Social workers signature:	
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