



# Letterbox Contact

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London Borough of Hackney





## Letterbox Contact

We hope this information will answer any questions you may have about the Adoption Letterbox Exchange. Your Letterbox arrangement may last for many years so we suggest you keep the booklet as a guide to help you.

## What is the Letterbox?

The Letterbox is an arrangement through which birth relatives and adoptive parents can exchange information after adoption. It usually happens once a year at a time agreed between those involved and with confidentiality assured.

## Why have a Letterbox scheme?

There can be benefits for everyone involved in a Letterbox arrangement:

**Adopted children:** Although adopted children have become part of another family they may want news of their birth family. It is important for them to know that their birth family still thinks about them and interested in their progress.

The aim is to help children feel both accepted in their adoptive family and comfortable about their origins and identity. If in years to come adopted young people are thinking about meeting with birth relatives, having had news of them over the years will make them more confident about what to expect.

**Birth relatives:** Birth relatives often have a strong need to know that the child is well and appreciate news of the child's progress and wellbeing.

Although this news sometimes brings back painful memories, many birth parents and relatives feel they would rather stay in touch. Over time, it may help to build up a realistic picture of the child's developing personality and skills, as she/he grows up.

**Adoptive parents:** Adoptive parents often find the news they receive through the Letterbox service helps to answer the child's questions over the years. It gives them a picture of birth relatives' continuing lives and provides the opportunity for the families to stay in touch. It may support the discussions about adoption you have with your child.

The agreed information is sent through the Hackney Letterbox service to be shared with the child in a way and at a time you decide is right. Experience has shown that it is most helpful to the child if the information is part of the child's understanding about adoption early on.

Much of the news exchanged through the Letterbox is positive and reassuring, but there may be times when difficult or painful information is received, or when urgent news needs to be passed on. In these situations, you can contact your Post Permanency Social Worker at any time for support to you and your family.

Many adoptive parents and birth relatives have told us that preparing and receiving regular news and photographs through the Letterbox service arouses deep and sometimes painful feelings.

These feelings are natural and normal. If you feel overwhelmed and would like some support to help you come to terms with your emotions, please tell us so that we can support you.

## Who can use the Letterbox?

The Letterbox service agreements are generally between birth relatives and adoptive parents. Adopted children may sometimes write to birth relatives themselves with agreement from their adoptive parents, but the expectation is that it is the adults who will be exchanging news.

The adoptive parents will make the decision about what is passed on to the child and how and when this is shared. Some children, especially as they grow older, will have their own ideas about the Letterbox arrangement and sometimes changes may be made if it seems the right thing for everyone involved.

A Letterbox arrangement of some kind is made for most children who are adopted and all adoptive parents are encouraged to take part. In birth families, birth parents and birth grandparents are the people who use the Letterbox service most, but other relatives and significant people from the child's past may be involved in a Letterbox arrangement.

Brothers and sisters who have been adopted by separate families may have a Letterbox arrangement set up between the adoptive families if this is something everyone wants.

Sometimes, information may be sent from adopters to birth family only or either side may want to send news but not receive themselves. It is possible to have an arrangement in one direction if one party does not want to take an active part in the exchange of news. If this applies to you or you are feeling anxious about entering into a Letterbox arrangement, you can discuss your feelings with your Post Permanency Social Worker who is there to support you.

## What can I send through the Letterbox Service?

In all Letterbox agreements, the adoptive parents are encouraged to send general news of the child each year at a time agreed by both parties. Sending a photograph of the child may be something you agreed to. Birth relatives may want to send photographs and information about themselves and their families. CD's are sometimes a practical and creative way of sharing information.

It is not possible to accept presents, vouchers or money for practical reasons and because of the risk of things getting lost. We realise some people will be disappointed by this and hope you will understand.

In some circumstances, with agreement, it may be possible to set up a Standing Order with a bank or Post Office. This enables an adoptive parent to buy a present on behalf of the birth relative.

## How is a letterbox arrangement set up?

The letterbox service is managed by a Post Permanency Social Worker, based in the Post Permanency Unit. Before a child is adopted, there will have been a good deal of discussion with both parties and their social workers about what kind of contact there might be between the two families after adoption.

If it is agreed that a Letterbox arrangement is appropriate, before the adoption order is made, adoptive parents and birth relatives will each be asked by their social workers to complete a Letterbox form. This sets out what they hope to receive through the Letterbox, and what they are prepared to provide and when.



Your social worker will help you with this and together you should be able to work out what is practical and possible.

It is very important that you agree to an arrangement that you will be able to manage over the years ahead. A Letterbox agreement is a serious commitment and a long-term undertaking. A simpler arrangement may be easier to keep to.

Many people send information once a year. For some the month of the child's birthday is the one they choose, but others prefer to avoid this month there are no rules about this. If you are sending news and greetings for a child's birthday, you need to allow at least two weeks for the Letterbox to send it on in time.

We prefer you not to choose December if possible because the Letterbox service can become very overloaded at Christmas, causing lots of delays. You can enclose Christmas greetings with news sent at other times of year and they can be kept for Christmas time. If December is your month, you really need to send your letter in November to be on the safe side and to make sure that we can send it out in good time.

It is often useful to address questions about the child's well being directly so for this reason we suggest that your letter comes in the month before the adopter's letter so that they can respond to your questions.

When the Letterbox agreement forms are complete, they are sent to the letterbox coordinator. The needs of the child and the wishes of all concerned are then carefully considered and an agreement that everyone signs up to is reached. Although we try very hard, it is not always possible to meet everyone's requests.

## When can the Letterbox arrangement start?

Any exchange of news before an adoption order is made will be handled by the social workers involved. This is a separate arrangement that ceases when the adoption order is made. It is only after the order has been made by the court that the Letterbox arrangement can be formally set up.

The post permanency social worker sends a Letterbox agreement letter to the birth relatives and the adoptive parents confirming what has been agreed and setting out exactly what everyone needs to do in the future. She/he also sends each person a copy of the form they completed, as a reminder of what they have agreed to. It is a good idea to keep the letter and the form safe to remind you of what arrangements have been agreed.

## How does the letterbox service work?

Send all information (news, photos etc) for a Letterbox arrangement directly to the post permanency social worker at the address given in this booklet. Please include a cover note with the child's birth name and your full name so the right connections can be made. You will be sent an acknowledgement when your news arrives at the Letterbox.

Everything sent to us will be looked at by the post permanency social worker. It is easier if envelopes are left unsealed as the worker will need to make a copy of the contents of the envelope for our records.

We send all letters we receive by recorded delivery to limit the possibility of things going astray. If information sent is distressing or of a sensitive nature or difficult for the person for whom it is intended, the post permanency social worker will make contact before it is sent on.



Occasionally the worker might contact the writer of news to ask that something be written in a different way. If you are ever concerned about what you have received through the Letterbox service, or if you are not sure how to pass on some difficult news, do get in touch with us.

All information we receive is treated with sensitivity and Confidentially. Your news will only be read by post permanency social workers. If you accidentally include information in your news that has not been agreed beforehand (such as an address), this will normally be taken out before the letter is sent on.

If you change your address, please be sure to let us know. If you don't do this, it won't be possible to send on or pass on any letters which may arrive for you.

### What sort of things should I write?

Many people find it quite hard to write their letters for a Letterbox arrangement and especially with the first one. We have prepared a guide to give you some ideas about what you can write in your news to get you started. Please ask your social worker to provide one for you, or contact the post permanency social worker and ask for one to be sent. If you would like more help, ask your social worker or the post permanency social worker, who will be pleased to help you.

## What if I can't write or read very well?

We can provide our information booklet and guide in large print, Braille, other languages or on audio tape. If you need someone to help you write or read your Letterbox news, get in touch with us to discuss how we can support you.

If you need your letters translated into another language, we can arrange this.

## What if I don't keep to the agreement?

We realise that it is easy to forget to send in your news to the Letterbox service as arranged, but please try your best to send it in the month agreed. We know that children, adoptive parents and birth relatives often feel very disappointed and let down if the news they are expecting is late or does not arrive at all. If we have not heard from you by the end of the following month, we will send you an automatic reminder.



If you are having difficulties preparing your news or for some reason you now do not wish to send or receive news, please let us know so we can let the adopters/birth relative know. This way they will not expect news from you and you may arrange to send something when you feel more confident.

## Am I legally obliged to keep to the agreement made?

Unless there is a specific contact order made by the court all Letterbox agreements are voluntary and depend on the goodwill of all those concerned to keep them going. We hope that everyone will keep to the agreements they have made. If you fail to keep to the arrangement without telling everyone that you are experiencing some difficulty may cause confusion and unnecessary distress to the other people involved.

## What happens if, as a birth relative, I do not wish to be involved in a Letterbox arrangement?

We know that at the time a child is placed for adoption, some birth relatives feel they do not want to take part in a Letterbox arrangement. These feelings may not change, but it may be that at some time in the future, even years ahead, you may begin to feel differently. For this reason, we let birth relatives know that their news will be kept safely with the letterbox service for them if they wish to claim it in the future. We ask adoptive parents to go on sending news to the Letterbox each year for the same reason.

If birth relatives or adoptive parents decide in years to come that they would like to begin taking part in Letterbox exchanges, or to begin again if they have withdrawn for a while, the post permanency worker will be pleased to talk about how to find out if this is possible.

## What happens if news is not claimed?

If the news you send in is not claimed, it will be kept on the child's adoption file. The Letterbox service will contact you prior to the child's 18th birthday or the end of the Letterbox arrangement, to ask you what you would like to happen to the news.

It can either be returned to you, or it can be placed on the adoption file, where it can be seen by the adopted person at any time in the future. She/he can decide whether to remove any news and keep it, or leave it on the file.

If the birth relative, for whom unclaimed news is intended, contacts the department in the future asking for the news, if it remains on the file it may be passed on to them at that stage.

If the adopted person, as an adult, wishes there to be a different arrangement, it is their right to say what should happen to any unclaimed news if and when they contact the department.

## What if the Letterbox agreement needs to be changed?

For various reasons, the Letterbox arrangements may need to be altered as the years go by. Some adopted children may not want news about them to be sent as they get older. With the agreement of the adoptive parents, some may want to start writing themselves. It is important that the child's wishes are respected at every stage.

The views and circumstances of birth relatives and adoptive parents may change with time. You may find it helpful to talk things over with a post permanency social worker if you are in touch with one. If not, the post permanency unit will be pleased to help.

If the proposed change seems to be the right thing for everyone involved, and everyone agrees, the letterbox arrangements can be changed. The post permanency social worker will normally write to everyone involved to confirm the change agreed.

## What happens when the adopted person becomes 18?

At 18, the adopted person can have access to the information held on the adoption file once they reach 18, although many adopted people do not request this until much later.

Some Letterbox arrangements can end when the adopted person reaches 18. In some situations it can be extended. At 18 the adopted person has the right to decide for themselves what contact there should be with birth relatives.



Some months before the adopted person becomes 18, the post permanency social worker will write to the adoptive parents and the birth relatives concerned, to remind them that the arrangement is due to end and to discuss their options.

The letterbox coordinator will provide information about sources of help and support for the future for the adoptive parents, the adopted young person and the birth relatives.

Any information which has not been claimed will be dealt with as outlined in the earlier section. The adoption file will be kept safely in the archives for a minimum of 100 years. If the adopted person asks to see the file, any transferred Letterbox information will be available, along with other records about the adoption.

The support of a post permanency social worker is always available if requested. The adopted person can decide whether to keep the Letterbox information (which may include letters to birth relatives from the adopters or items from birth relatives held in the Letterbox file) or whether to leave it on the file.

This can be a time of disappointment, uncertainty and frustration for birth relatives in particular, if previously regular exchanges of news cease.

The post permanency social worker can offer support or suggest other sources of help. It is important, to respect the wishes of the adopted person about future contact.

## Where do I send my Letterbox letters?

The address for all letters and all Letterbox correspondence is:

**The Letterbox Service**  
**Adoption Post Permanency Unit**  
**Hackney Service Centre**  
**1 Hillman Street**  
**Hackney**  
**E8 1DY**

## Can I telephone the Letterbox direct?

You can telephone the post-permanency social worker on:

**08000 730 418**

If you are not happy with the service you have received then you can write or call Children's Social Care complaints

**Hackney Service Centre**  
**1 Hillman Street**  
**London**  
**E8 1DY**

**[children.complaints@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:children.complaints@hackney.gov.uk)**  
**[www.hackney.gov.uk/Childrens-Social-Care-Complaints](http://www.hackney.gov.uk/Childrens-Social-Care-Complaints)**



## Useful Contacts

### Post Permanency Adoption Unit

Hackney Service Centre  
1 Hilman Street  
London  
E8 1DY.

Tel: **08000 730 418**

**[www.hackney.gov.uk/adoption](http://www.hackney.gov.uk/adoption)**

### Adoption UK

46 The Green  
South Bar Street  
Banbury  
OX16 9AB.

Helpline: **0844 848 7900**

**[www.adoptionuk.org.uk](http://www.adoptionuk.org.uk)**

Adoption UK is a national voluntary self help group supporting families before, during and after adoption.

### Post Adoption Centre

5 Torriano Mews,  
Torriano Avenue  
London  
NW5 2RZ.

Tel: **020 7284 0555**

Advice Line: **0870 777 2197**

**[www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk](http://www.postadoptioncentre.org.uk)**

This centre offers a confidential specialist advice service, counselling and family work for anyone who has been involved with adoption.

**NORCAP** [National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and Parents]

112 Church Road  
Wheatley  
Oxfordshire  
OX33 1LU.

Tel: **01865 875000**

Email: [enquiries@norcap.org](mailto:enquiries@norcap.org)

[www.norcap.org.uk](http://www.norcap.org.uk)

NORCAP is a national organisation who provide support and advice to those who are adopted, birth relatives of adopted people and adoptive families. It holds an Adoption Contact register, and provides specialist advice and support groups.

It also has a search room containing records of births, deaths and marriages for 1904-2000, telephone directories and other sources of information.

**The Salvation Army Family Tracing Service**

1 Tirverton Street  
London  
SE1 6NT.

Tel: **0207 378 1021**

[www.salvationarmy.org.uk](http://www.salvationarmy.org.uk)

**The Care Quality Commission**

Citygate,  
Gallowgate  
Newcastle Upon Tyne  
NE1 4PA

Tel: **03000 616161**

[www.cqc.org.uk](http://www.cqc.org.uk)

**General Register Office**

Smedley Hydro,  
Trafalgar Road  
Southport  
PR8 2HH.

Tel: **0151 471 4830**

[www.gro.gov.uk](http://www.gro.gov.uk)

The General Register Office [GRO] forms part of the Office for National Statistics [ONS] an independent government agency which produces regular analysis of social, economic and business information.

**NAPAC** [The National Association for People Abused in Childhood]

42 Curtain Road  
London  
EC2A 3NH.

Tel: **0800 085 3330**

[www.napac.org.uk](http://www.napac.org.uk)

NAPAC offers advice and support to people affected by childhood abuse.

**Wills and Divorce Records**

First Avenue House  
42-49 High Holbon  
London  
WC1V 6NP.

Tel: **020 7947 6000**

[www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk](http://www.hmcourts-service.gov.uk)

Holds the records relating to probate and divorce matters.

## London Metropolitan Archives

40 Northampton Road  
London  
EC1R OHB.

Tel: **020 7332 3820**

[www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/ima](http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/ima)

## Tha National Archives

Kew  
Richmond  
Surrey  
TW9 4DU.

Tel: **0208 876 3444**

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk)

If you would like to find out what this document says please tick the appropriate box, put your name, address and phone number at the bottom of this page and return it to the address below.

### Bengali

এই দলিলে কি লেখা আছে সে সম্পর্কে যদি আপনি জানতে চান তাহলে অনুগ্রহ করে উপযুক্ত বাস্তব টিক দিন, এই পাতার নীচে আপনার নাম, ঠিকানা ও ফোন নম্বর লিখুন এবং এটি নীচের ঠিকানায় ফেরত পাঠান।

### Somali

Haddii aad jeclaan lahayd in aad ogaato waxa dokumeentigani sheegayo fadlan calaamadi godka ku haboon, ku qor magacaaga, cinwaanka iyo telefoon lambarkaaga boggan dhankiisa hoose ka dibna ku celi cinwaanka hoose.

### French

Si vous désirez connaître le contenu de ce document, veuillez cocher la case appropriée et indiquer votre nom, adresse et numéro de téléphone au bas de cette page et la renvoyer à l'adresse indiquée ci-dessous.

### Spanish

Si desea saber de lo que trata este documento, marque la casilla correspondiente, escriba su nombre, dirección y número de teléfono al final de esta página y envíela a la siguiente dirección.

### Kurdish

Ger hun dixwazin bizanibin ku ev dokument çî dibêje, ji kerema xwe qutîka minasib îşaret bikin, nav, navnîşan û hejmara telefona xwe li jêrê rûpel binivîsin û wê ji navnîşana jêrîn re bişînin.

### Turkish

Bu dökümanda ne anlatıldığını öğrenmek istiyorsanız, lütfen uygun kutuyu işaretleyerek, adınızı, adresinizi ve telefon numaranızı bu sayfanın alt kısmına yazıp, aşağıdaki adrese gönderin.

### Polish

Jeśli chcesz dowiedzieć się, jaka jest treść tego dokumentu, zaznacz odpowiednie pole, wpisz swoje nazwisko, adres i nr telefonu w dolnej części niniejszej strony i przeslij na poniższy adres.

### Vietnamese

Nếu bạn muốn biết tài liệu này nói gì hãy đánh dấu vào hộp thích hợp, điền tên, địa chỉ và số điện thoại của bạn vào cuối trang này và gửi lại theo địa chỉ dưới đây.

### Urdu

اگر آپ یہ جاننا چاہتے ہیں کہ دستاویز میں کیا لکھا ہے تو ازراہ کرم مناسب باکس میں صحیح کا نشان لگائیے اور اپنا نام، پتہ اور فون نمبر اس صفحہ کے نیچے لکھیے اور اسے نیچے دیئے گئے پتہ پر واپس بھیج دیجئے۔

### Chinese

如果你想知道這份文件的詳細內容，請在方框內打鉤，在本頁下面寫下你的名字、地址和電話號碼並寄到下面的地址。

If you would like this document in any of the following formats or in another language not listed above, please complete and send the form to the address below.

In large print

In Braille

On Disk

On audio tape

In another language, please state:

Name:

Address:

Tel:

Return to:

Hackney Adoption Unit, Children and Young People's Services,  
Hackney Service Centre, 1 Hillman Street, Hackney E8 1DY.

# What happens next?

If you would like to find out more about adoption or you have queries about your eligibility and the sort of children who currently need families, contact us now and we will be happy to give you more information.



Freephone **08000 730 418**

**[postpermanency@hackney.gov.uk](mailto:postpermanency@hackney.gov.uk)**

**[www.hackney.gov.uk/adoption](http://www.hackney.gov.uk/adoption)**



**Stonewall**  
DIVERSITY CHAMPION



**INVESTORS  
IN PEOPLE**