



North East Lincolnshire Council

Information for **adoptive families** **The Contact Letter Box Service**

Adopters



Adoption service



What is the contact letter box service?

The Contact Letter Box Service is managed by North East Lincolnshire Council's Adoption Service and deals with the exchange of information about adopted children between adoptive parents and the children's birth families.

The information is usually a yearly newsletter from the adoptive parents sent to the Adoption Service and then passed on to agreed birth relatives. This newsletter will be sent each year, in the month agreed when the contact arrangements were drawn up.

It can also mean photographs, birthday and Christmas cards and the return of news from birth relatives to the adoptive parents.

Each child will have an individual "contact agreement" which will be discussed with you before the child is placed for adoption and will be sent to you in writing following a child's placement with your family.

How are contact agreements reached?

As the adoptive family you should be very clear about the proposed contact arrangements before the child is placed with you. As part of the child's adoption plan, the child's social worker and adoption social worker will have discussed with you the proposed level of contact. Once the child has been placed with you, you will receive written confirmation of the contact agreement.

You will need to consider what you would like to receive and what you would like to send. It is important to think about what is realistic to expect of your family and what would be best for your child.

Keeping to the agreement

We realise that it is easy to forget to send in your news to the letter box as arranged, but please try your best to send it in the month agreed. We know that birth relatives often feel very disappointed and let down if the news they are expecting is late or does not arrive at all.

If you are having difficulties preparing your news, or for some reason you now do not wish to send or receive news, please contact the duty adoption social worker on 01472 325545 as soon as possible.

Most arrangements are voluntary, that is, they are not subject to any legal order. However, if the agreement is not kept for any clear reason the birth family member could seek legal advice.

Practical points to remember

- Please remember to inform the adoption team if you change address.
- We will not know whom the information or cards from you are for unless you include a note to the Adoption Team, stating your name and your child's full name (birth name). This will help us to make sure that any letters are sent to the right person.
- We try to send out contact information within five working days of receiving it. You will need to bear this in mind if birthday cards are part of the agreement and allow enough time for us to send them on. Also please remember that the post at Christmas takes longer and we also have to deal with more cards and letters than usual.
- Your social worker or adoption worker will discuss the best way to sign cards or letters. If you are unsure about this, please ask.
- If your annual information does not arrive during the month agreed, please telephone the Adoption Team.
- Most contact arrangements work very well. However, if you do experience any problems, please contact the Adoption Team and we will be happy to try to sort out any difficulties.

How long will arrangements last?

If everything goes smoothly and your child is still happy to send and receive information the arrangements will last until your child is 18. However, several circumstances may lead to the arrangements being changed before your child is 18:

- Your child may have strong views about passing on information and/or photographs before they are 18 and may decide that they do not wish this to continue. The child's views will be respected and you will be contacted by the Adoption Service to discuss this and to explain the reasons.
- You may feel that your child is being upset by the information received and will seek to change the agreement on your child's behalf. Again, the Adoption

Service will contact the birth relative to explain the changes and the reason for them.

What happens when the adopted young person becomes 18?

The letter box arrangements will end when the adopted young person becomes an adult at 18 years old. At 18 the adopted person has the right to decide for him/herself what contact there should be with birth relatives in the future. An adopted person can have access to information held in the adoption file once she/he reaches 18, although some adopted people do not request this until much later, or not at all.

The year before the adopted person becomes 18, the adoption team will write to the adoptive parents and the birth relatives concerned to remind them when the arrangement will end and to discuss available options. The adoption team will provide information about sources of help and support for the future for the adoptive parents, the adopted young person and the birth relatives.

All correspondence should be sent to:

North East Lincolnshire Council
The Fostering & Adoption Service
Civic Offices, Knoll Street
Cleethorpes
North East Lincolnshire
DN35 8LN
Tel: 01472 325545





Writing an annual update to birth family members – some tips

- **How to begin the letter?**
We would suggest always using “Dear” and then the birth relative’s first name.
- **How to end the letter?**
Again we would suggest either “yours sincerely” or “best wishes” and sign off using your first names.
- **Typed or handwritten?**
It is a matter of personal choice. Not every one has access to a computer, so handwritten letters are fine.
- **Should it be formal?**
We would suggest not. Try to keep the tone light and chatty.
- **Should I keep a copy?**
Yes that’s often helpful to do this and would be interesting for you and your child to look back on in the years ahead.
- **Should we say anything about other members of the family?**
Try not to. The focus of this letter should be the adopted child alone.
- **Do I have to include a photo?**
Yes if this was part of the agreement. Some adopters have also included e.g. drawings made by children or handprints etc.
- **What kind of photo?**
Try to ensure the photo does not give obvious clues about your address; try to ensure that your child is not wearing their school sweatshirt (which will usually have the school logo)
- **What should I include in the letter?**
Well imagine you were waiting to hear information about someone very significant to you. What would you like to know? The kinds of things which are very helpful to write about are: the child’s health; likes/dislikes; hobbies/ interests; generally how things are going at school; friends; special events s/he may have attended; generally about holidays; personality
- **As my child gets older, should I tell her/him about these letters?**
Yes s/he has a right to know. With older children, they may also wish to write something or to help you with the letter
- **What happens if, when my child gets older, they have reservations about this annual letter?**
Then please contact the Adoption Service to discuss this further.
- **What happens if I send my letter to the Adoption Team as arranged but the birth family do not confirm their address?**
Then the Adoption Team will not release the letter until the birth family have been in touch. We will keep the information on file.



Contact us

If you would like to receive this information in another language or another format such as large print, braille or on audio tape please contact:

**North East Lincolnshire Council
The Fostering & Adoption Service
Civic Offices, Knoll Street
Cleethorpes
North East Lincolnshire
DN35 8LN**

**T: 01472 325545
www.nelincs.gov.uk**