

# Post Adoption Letterbox Scheme



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## **The Aberdeenshire Adoption Letterbox Scheme**

The Letterbox Scheme was initially set up for birth relatives and adoptive parents to receive and exchange information on behalf of adopted children. This is known as “Letterbox Contact”. The scheme has since been extended to Kinship and Permanent Fostering arrangements and can include any other situation where support may be required to enable children to remain connected with family members.

### **Who can use the Letterbox Scheme?**

The Letterbox Scheme is available for adoptive parents, kinship carers, permanent foster carers and birth parents and relatives who wish to exchange news regularly and safely and without addresses being identified. For these families, the Letterbox Scheme is a confidential way sharing up to date news about themselves and their family. Depending on the agreement made, information is usually shared once a year but can be more if this is agreed to be important for children. In some instances, information may be kept safely for the future.

As well as birth parents, it may be appropriate for other birth relatives to be part of the agreement in their own right. This may include grandparents, aunts, uncles, brothers and sisters. An agreement can be made with any individual who has been significant in the child’s life, where it is in the best interests of the child for information to be received and exchanged.

Children cannot use the Letterbox Scheme directly: all information will be received and exchanged through their adult carers. Children, particularly older children, may be encouraged by their parents to participate, but the correspondence will primarily be between the adults involved.

### **Why exchange information?**

Exchanging information allows adopted children to grow up with up to date information about their birth family that may help them make sense of their early experiences. It can also help children develop a sense of identity and provide reassurance about the wellbeing of birth family members.

Adoptive families benefit from knowing more about their children’s birth family origins and often find letterbox arrangements help them to talk openly with their children in the future about their adoption.

Letterbox Contact allows birth families to gain valuable reassurance about their child’s progress and development.

### **How does the Letterbox Scheme work?**

When considering an adoption plan for a child, Aberdeenshire’s Permanence Panel will consider at this point the arrangements for contact and “Letterbox Contact”. In all

cases, the best interests of the child are the most important consideration. The views of birth parents and the adoptive parents are also considered. If all parties are in agreement for Letterbox contact to go ahead, then a written agreement will be made between the adoptive parents and the birthparents and relatives before the adoption takes place. This is completed by those involved and their Social Workers and will include details of the kind of information that is to be exchanged and when.

Birth relatives and adoptive parents will be given full information about the Scheme and how it works. Normally Letterbox contact will start after the court has made the adoption order but can start sooner, if everyone is agreeable.

Aberdeenshire Council will also consider requests from birth relatives to be included in the Scheme where the adoption order was granted some time ago. Any request should be made to the Team Manager for Adoption Services and will be assessed on the child's best interests.

## **Who administers the scheme?**

The Letterbox Scheme Administrator manages the Letterbox Scheme: this is the person who holds all the relevant records for Aberdeenshire. Confidentiality is a very important part of the Scheme, and all information sent to the Administrator will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.

On receiving information from birth relatives, the Administrator will check the letters to make sure there is no content that may be distressing and these will be photocopied for the child's file. If any information contained in the letter is not felt to be helpful to the child, the writer will be contacted and offered advice about any changes. Copies of all correspondence are kept in case the adopted child should wish to gain access to them in their file when they reach the age of 18. The Administrator will write or phone the birth parents and/or adoptive parents to let them know that a letter has been received. This is to check that they still live at the same address, and to ask if the letter should be sent on.

The Administrator will send the letters on to birth parents and adoptive parents by recorded delivery or will hold them as requested. It is important that individuals involved in the agreement inform the Administrator of any change of address should they move. The Scheme allows for the exchange of information on an annual basis. The Scheme only allows for letters, cards, pictures and, when agreed, photographs or DVD's. Photographs should be identified with the name of the persons in the photo and the date when they were taken.

**It does not allow for the exchange of gifts, vouchers or money unfortunately.**

Your Social Worker will advise you when it is about to start and can help you with your letters, if you wish.

## What information will I put in the letter?

Many birth and adoptive parents worry about what to include in a letter. Often adoptive parents feel anxious about saying how happy the child is, in case this upsets the birth relatives.

We can provide you with sample letters and guidance if you would find this helpful. A Social Worker from the Adoption Support Service can provide you with a copy and ongoing support if you wish.

You could use the following list when composing a letter.

### For Birth Parents

Birth parents often feel that they can't give good news about their own lives and may focus on their feelings of loss. Writing to your child's adoptive parents may not only benefit your child but also perhaps help you deal with your own feelings. It may be important to your child's adoptive family and to the child to know that you are thinking of them and are glad to hear of their progress.

- What is happening in your life, interests and hobbies
- News about events in the family
- Any health aspects that would be important for the child's adoptive family to know about
- News of any brothers and sisters and other relatives especially those that the child will have memories of
- A reassurance that you are happy to hear that your child is doing well
- Include any particular questions you have about your child

There may be times when it is not always easy to send information but please remember your child may benefit greatly from these communications. It can be very important to the birth relatives to know that the child is well, and regular letters keep them in touch and reassure them.

We suggest avoiding using the term "mum" or "dad", for example on their own as this can often lead to confusion. The child's name should be used and discussions should take place to determine how you will sign the letter, for example by your first name or for example 'Mum Susan'. How everyone will address themselves in letters will be written into the agreement to avoid confusion. All adoptive parents are strongly encouraged to bring up the child to know who their birth parents and family members are. You can ask the Administrator for a copy of your agreement at any time.

If you need help to write a letter, an Adoption Worker can do this with you.

### For Adoptive Parents

- The child's health and any information about their development

- Progress at school/teachers' comments
- How your child gets on with friends and relatives
- Looks/personality/interests and hobbies
- Areas the child excels in
- Your child's daily life, for example their favourite food/TV programme
- Any comments that your child has made about adoption and their birth family, perhaps in their life storybook.

You may want to send drawings or photos.

## **What happens if people don't keep to the agreement?**

All agreements made under the Letterbox Scheme are voluntary and we ask that people only enter into agreements that they feel able to keep. Not keeping to an agreement can cause considerable distress to the child as they grow up.

If information is not sent to the Administrator at the agreed time, a letter will be sent to remind you that this opportunity is open to you. If birth relatives or adoptive parents want to withdraw from the Agreement, a Social Worker will make contact to discuss this. If the withdrawal is permanent, the other people in the agreement will be informed and the reasons explained in order that everyone has an understanding of why letters have stopped.

Agreements which end, may be restarted at any time by contacting the Adoption Team Manager who will arrange for a Social Worker to help with this.

## **How long will the Letterbox Agreement last?**

The Letterbox arrangement will be available to a child until they reach the age of 18. At the point of a child reaching 18, the Letterbox Administrator will write to the adoptive parents and the birth parents involved to remind them that the arrangements will soon end. We will provide information about sources of help and support for the future for adoptive parents, the adopted young person and birth parents. The letterbox file becomes part of the child's adoption record and will be held for 100 years from the date of the adoption. The adopted person will have the right to access this information at any time.

## **What Support is available?**

If any of the parties involved in the Scheme want support in preparing a letter or to discuss information that has been sent, support is available. Contact details for the Letterbox Administrator and Adoption Team are at the end of this leaflet. We are here to help ensure everyone can keep up good communication for the child.

If birth relatives or adoptive parents want to withdraw from the agreement, they should contact the Administrator. A discussion will take place with all involved and a decision in the best interests of the child will be made and reasons noted for this in the child's file.

## Additional Information

- When we receive letters for you we will write to you and check you still live at that address first
- Letters sent out with agreements will be kept on file for the child should they request it in the future and adoptive parents informed the letter is there
- If you move house, please inform the Administrator of the Scheme at the address below
- All letters will be treated with the utmost confidentiality but will be read by the Administrator to ensure a level of safety to all parties involved and in particular the child
- If you would like to participate in the Letterbox Scheme or would like to know more, please discuss this with your Social Worker.

## Contact details

### Letterbox Scheme Administrator

Social Work Service  
93 High Street  
Inverurie  
AB51 3AB  
Tel: 01467 532800

email – [letterbox@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:letterbox@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

**Adoption Team Duty Line** 01467 532800

email: [adoption@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:adoption@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)

## Representation and Complaints

Whilst it is Aberdeenshire Council's aim to provide a good service, if you have issues regarding representation or a complaint please ask for the leaflet 'A Guide to Commenting, Complimenting or Complaining about Aberdeenshire Services', which is available from all Social Work Offices or from the Aberdeenshire Council Website – search for 'Have Your Say - Make a complaint, compliment, or comment'.

<https://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/contact-us/have-your-say/>

As Aberdeenshire Council's Adoption Service is regulated by The Care Inspectorate in Scotland, you may also contact The Care Inspectorate, Johnston House, Rose Street, Aberdeen, AB10 1UD, Telephone: 01224 793870.

<https://www.careinspectorate.com/index.php/complaints>