**LETTER BEFORE PROCEEDINGS**

**IMPORTANT!**

**PLEASE DO NOT IGNORE THIS LETTER - TAKE IT TO A SOLICITOR NOW**

**Office Address Contact**

**Direct line**

**E-mail**

**Date**

SENT BY [HAND/ FIRST CLASS POST/RECORDED DELIVERY]

Dear [parent and/or full name(s) of all people with parental responsibility]

**Re: West Sussex County Council concerns about [Insert name(s) of child(ren) and dates of birth]**

**How to avoid West Sussex Children’s Services making an Application to Court**

As you know, West Sussex County Council has been very worried about your care of [name(s) of child(ren)] for some time. Even though the children’s social worker, [name of social worker], has explained to you why we are worried and what you need to do, things have not improved. The situation for your child(ren) is now so serious that we may need to go to Court.

We want to give you a last chance to make the changes to show us that [name(s) of child(ren)] can be kept safe now and in the future and we want to support you to do that. If you do not make these changes and we do go to Court, the Court will decide what is best for your child(ren). This could mean that your child(ren) are removed from your care.

We have set out at the bottom of this letter why we are so worried about your care of [name(s) of child(ren)]and the things you can and must do if you want to avoid us asking the Court to remove your children from your care.

**Please come to a meeting to talk about our concerns and what we want you to do.** This meeting will be on [insert date] at [time] at [insert full name of venue and address]. At the meeting we will:

* discuss our concerns with you and tell you what you will need to do to make sure your child(ren) is/are safe.
* set out how we will support you to do this.
* ask you to agree a safety plan that will keep your child(ren) safe now and in the future.
* discuss with you who in your family could look after your child(ren) if you are unable to or are not able to achieve those safety goals; and
* explain what steps we will take if we continue to be worried about [name(s) of child(ren].

**Please contact your [name of social worker] on [telephone number] to tell us if you will come to the meeting.**

**Please also go to see a solicitor. It will not cost you anything if you give them this letter.** It is very important that you get advice from a solicitor who specialises in family law as soon as possible. They will help you understand the situation and advise you about your rights and options. You also have the right to bring your solicitor to the meeting. You do not have to bring a solicitor to the meeting, but it will be very helpful if you do.

Please find enclosed a list of local solicitors who have experience in this area of work. They are all independent from Children’s Services.

**Information your solicitor will need:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Local Authority Legal Contact:  Name  Address  Telephone no:  Email Address: | [enter name of solicitor]  West Sussex County Council  Childcare and Advocacy Team Room 202,  County Hall,  West Street,  Chichester,  West Sussex,  PO19 1RQ  [enter telephone number]  [enter name]@westsussex.gov.uk |

**Get your wider family involved:** Our concerns about [enter child/ren’s names] are very serious. If we do have to go to Court and the Court decides you cannot care for your child(ren) we will look first at whether we can place them with any of the people in your safety network if this is best for your child(ren). At the meeting we will discuss with you and your solicitor who might look after your child(ren) if the Court decides that it is no longer safe for you to do so.

We therefore ask you that before the meeting you please think about who from your safety network can be involved and what they could do. Speak to your friends and family about this and bring their details to the meeting with you. They need to know that if they are going to be involved in helping, they will have to have police and Children’s Services checks to make sure they are safe and able to care for your child/ren.

**Here are the things that we are most concerned about:**

*This should be completed via bullet points, be clear and to the point.*

**This is what we have already done to help you make changes:**

*This should be completed via bullet points, be clear and to the point.*

**What you must do so that we will not go to Court:**

*This should be completed via bullet points and should be a very clear list of what is expected of the parents, for example*

* *A Meeting Before Proceedings has been convened (see above for date). You are to attend with your solicitor.*
* *You are to put forward names of family members who you consider can be alternative carers for the children so assessments of them can take place. This is in the event where it is deemed that your children cannot safely remain in your care.*
* *You will abide by all the requirements of the Safety Plan put into place by Children’s Services which you have signed. This will ensure that the children are safeguarded while in your care.*
* *You are requested to engage in a (name assessment/service use separate bullet points for each assessment and what the aim of the assessment/service is, what it will give us i.e capacity to change assessment, will give us an understanding in to the understanding, insight and acknowledgement of Children’s Services concerns and your capacity to make sustained change. This assessment will also assess your ability to work openly, honestly and consistently with services and agencies to effect change.)*

We look forward to seeing you at the meeting with your solicitor on [date]. If there is any part of this letter that you do not understand please contact [name of social worker] on [telephone number] to discuss further.

**Yours sincerely**

**[Name]**

**Group Manager, [Team]**

Cc: Social Worker [name]

Local Authority Lawyer

Enc:

Map of office

Safety Plan