Children and Families Directorate

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| **PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL****BY HAND** | Your Ref:Our Ref:Please ask for:Direct line / Extension:E-mail: |  |

[Enter date here in dd/mm/yyyy format]

Dear [first name of parent and or person with parental responsibility]

**RE: Herefordshire Council’s worries about [insert name(s) of child/ren] – letter before proceedings.**

**MEETING: [insert TIME, DATE and LOCATION]**

As you know I have been working with you to try to help you improve the care of your [insert child or children, as appropriate]. Unfortunately, despite our support you are still struggling to care for [insert name(s) of child/ren] and keep them safe, so I am writing to let you know what is going to happen next.

Other professionals working with you are also worried about the safety and wellbeing of [insert name(s) of child/ren] and this letter is to explain to you what we would like you to do, with our support, to try to improve things for [insert name(s) of child/ren]. If you are not able, with support, to make the improvements needed then we may need to go to court to ask a Judge to help decide whether [insert name(s) of child/ren] would be better cared for by someone else.

We would like to avoid this if we can, because children should as long as it safe to do so remain with their families, and we very much want to work with you to enable [insert name(s) of child/ren] to stay at home in your care. To give you the best chance of avoiding court proceedings we have attached to this letter an outline of our worries, along with what we would like you to do, with support, to improve things for [insert name(s) of child/ren].

**Important Meeting**

To enable you to be able to express your views, and be fully involved in how we can work together to make the changes needed to ensure [insert name(s) of child/ren] are safe, we would like to invite you to an important meeting.

The meeting has been arranged for [insert time and date] and will be held at [insert location details]. The meeting will be face-to-face. If this date and time is not right for you then please tell me so that an alternative one can be arranged.

If you would like a family member or friend to attend the meeting with you then please let me know beforehand, so that I can explain to you what this may mean in terms of them hearing information which may be personal and sensitive to you.

**Obtaining legal advice – I strongly recommend you take this letter to a solicitor**

It would be really helpful to you if you take this letter to a solicitor, who will be able to give you advice and come with you to the meeting if you would like them to. You will not have to pay for this. To help you I have included a list of local solicitors who specialise in family and child care law. Their advice is completely separate from Children’s Services. If you need any help with this then please let me know.

The solicitor will need to know the details of the legal contact in the Council, who will be [insert name and full contact details of legal contact].

I know this letter and its contents will be difficult and stressful for you. It would therefore be helpful if you can talk to your family about what support they can give you both individually and in caring for [insert name(s) of child/ren]. We all need to work together with you and your family to make the changes needed to ensure [insert name(s) of child/ren] are safe and well cared for.

It is really important that you come to this meeting. It is a chance to go through the concerns with you and to help you understand what needs to happen to prevent us going to court. It is not just about what you as [insert a parent or parents, depending on family structure] need to do, it is also about how best we and other professionals can support you and work with you to make things better for [insert name(s) of child/ren]. If, however, you do not attend the meeting, then I may have to apply to the court to ask for their help to ensure that [insert name(s) of child/ren] are safe.

I know that this may feel overwhelming and frightening and I want to help and support you as much as I can, but most importantly I would like you to attend the meeting so that we can do all we can to avoid going to court.

If you do not understand any part of this letter then please contact me as soon as possible so I can talk it through with you.

Yours sincerely

**[Name of Social Worker]**

**Social Worker**

**[Insert team title if appropriate]**

**Children and Families Directorate**

**Plough Lane Offices**

**Plough Lane**

**Hereford**

**HR4 0LE**

Copy to: [name] Social Work Team Manager

Enclosures: Leaflet providing more information

 List of concerns

 List of Children Panel solicitors

**List of Concerns**

These are the main worries we have and the ones which have the most effect on (names). We need to work together to see if we can improve things so that (names) are happy, healthy and safe.

Everything we ask you do is to improve the lives of (names). Some of the worries we have are more serious than others, so we would like you to concentrate on those changes first to ensure it is safe for (names) to stay at home and avoid us going to court.

Example: We are worried that by drinking so much you will neglect (names) and that you will get into arguments with (name) which is frightening for (names). To help you manage how much you drink we would like you to talk to someone about it.

Example: We think it would help if we asked for a psychological/psychiatric/specialist assessment to help us understand what support/help you might need in the future to enable you to look after (names safely).

**What’s working well and is positive for your children**