



# Information to Parents about the Public Law Outline (PLO) process



This guide is designed to provide advice to parents or others with parental responsibility for a child/ren who has been considered at risk of harm and a move to pre proceedings has been discussed. The guide is not a substitute for independent legal advice.

## Frequently Asked Questions:

### Why has the local authority sent me a letter before proceedings?

If you get a letter before proceedings, it means your local authority are worried your child is not being looked after properly and want to invite you to a meeting which we call a Pre Proceedings meeting.

Read the letter carefully. The letter will tell you what the worries are about the care of your child. It might be helpful for you to note down what your thoughts are about the concerns and whether or not you agree with them or not. If you agree, think about what you could do with help and support to make things better. If you don't agree, you will need to tell the meeting why.

The pre-proceedings meeting is NOT just another meeting with children's services or a social worker. It is an important meeting to look at what needs to change to stop the local authority going to court. The meeting will look at the worries outlined in the letter and at how you can be supported to make the changes necessary to keep your children safe.

### What happens if I don't follow the instructions in the letter?

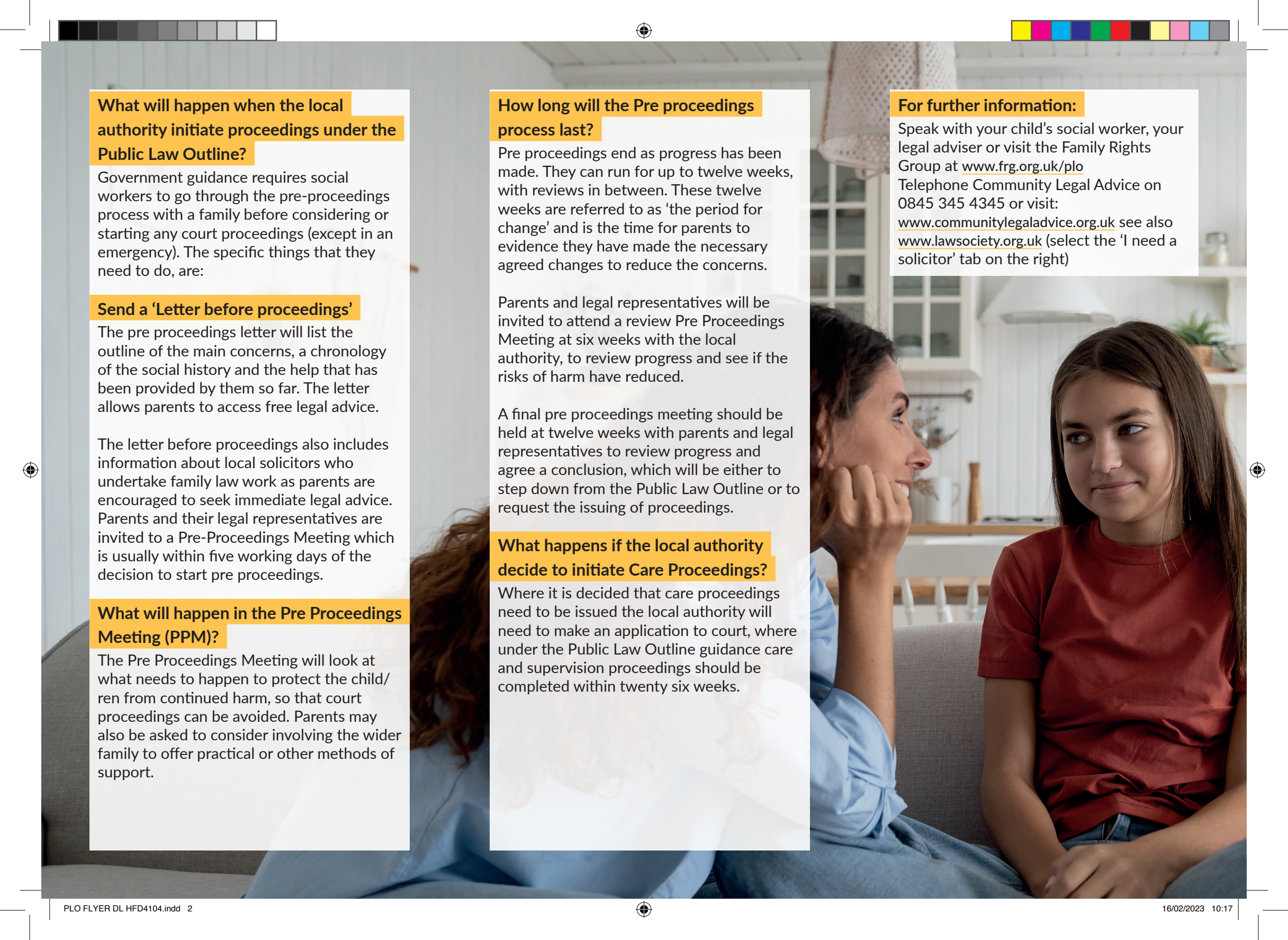
The letter tells you when and where the pre proceedings meeting will take place. If you do not attend the meeting, your local authority may apply to the court to start care proceedings. If there is a reason why you cannot attend at the suggested time it is important that you contact your children's allocated social worker so that they can change the time or date. There should be contact details on the letter.

### What do I have to do next?

It is very important that you contact a child care solicitor for independent legal advice. With the letter will be a list of local solicitors who can help you understand the law, the process and attend the meeting with you.

If you do not want to instruct one of the solicitors from the list, you can ask Community Legal Advice for details of other solicitors or you can look on the Law Society website ([lawsociety.org.uk](http://lawsociety.org.uk)). If you have parental responsibility, you will not have to pay for the solicitor to come to the meeting with you as they can apply for legal aid for you. You will need to take the letter and some ID (driving licence/passport) to the solicitor.





**What will happen when the local authority initiate proceedings under the Public Law Outline?**

Government guidance requires social workers to go through the pre-proceedings process with a family before considering or starting any court proceedings (except in an emergency). The specific things that they need to do, are:

**Send a 'Letter before proceedings'**

The pre proceedings letter will list the outline of the main concerns, a chronology of the social history and the help that has been provided by them so far. The letter allows parents to access free legal advice.

The letter before proceedings also includes information about local solicitors who undertake family law work as parents are encouraged to seek immediate legal advice. Parents and their legal representatives are invited to a Pre-Proceedings Meeting which is usually within five working days of the decision to start pre proceedings.

**What will happen in the Pre Proceedings Meeting (PPM)?**

The Pre Proceedings Meeting will look at what needs to happen to protect the child/ren from continued harm, so that court proceedings can be avoided. Parents may also be asked to consider involving the wider family to offer practical or other methods of support.

**How long will the Pre proceedings process last?**

Pre proceedings end as progress has been made. They can run for up to twelve weeks, with reviews in between. These twelve weeks are referred to as 'the period for change' and is the time for parents to evidence they have made the necessary agreed changes to reduce the concerns.

Parents and legal representatives will be invited to attend a review Pre Proceedings Meeting at six weeks with the local authority, to review progress and see if the risks of harm have reduced.

A final pre proceedings meeting should be held at twelve weeks with parents and legal representatives to review progress and agree a conclusion, which will be either to step down from the Public Law Outline or to request the issuing of proceedings.

**What happens if the local authority decide to initiate Care Proceedings?**

Where it is decided that care proceedings need to be issued the local authority will need to make an application to court, where under the Public Law Outline guidance care and supervision proceedings should be completed within twenty six weeks.

**For further information:**

Speak with your child's social worker, your legal adviser or visit the Family Rights Group at [www.frg.org.uk/plo](http://www.frg.org.uk/plo)  
Telephone Community Legal Advice on 0845 345 4345 or visit:  
[www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk](http://www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk) see also [www.lawsociety.org.uk](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk) (select the 'I need a solicitor' tab on the right)