

PUBLIC LAW OUTLINE (PLO)

Information for Parents, Carers and Families

Newcastle Children's Social Care



WHAT WILL HAPPEN WHEN THE LOCAL AUTHORITY INITIATE PROCEEDINGS UNDER THE PUBLIC LAW OUTLINE? 02

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.

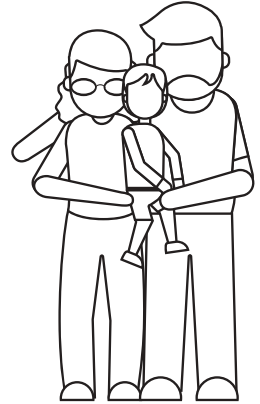
WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE PRE PROCEEDINGS MEETING (PPM)?

The Pre Proceedings Meeting will look at what needs to happen to protect the child/ren from continued harm, so that going to court (court proceedings) can be avoided. Parents will also be asked to involve wider family members and sometimes close and trusted friends, to offer support to help reduce any risk to the child/ren and increase safety.



HOW LONG WILL THE PRE PROCEEDINGS PROCESS LAST? 03

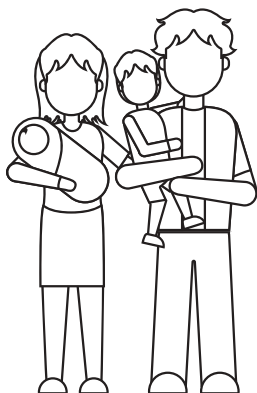
Pre proceedings end when progress has been made. They can run for up to sixteen week, with reviews in between. In some circumstances, a longer period of time is needed for pre proceedings and this will be discussed and explained to you. The time in pre proceedings is referred to as ‘the period for change’ and is the time for parents to evidence they have made the necessary agreed changes to reduce the risks and concerns.



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

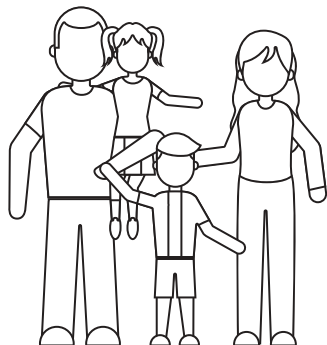
A final pre proceedings meeting will be arranged at an appropriate time (normally within 16 weeks) with parents and legal representatives to review progress and agree an outcome, which will be either to step down from the Public Law Outline or to request the issuing of proceedings.

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 make an application to court. Under the Public Law Outline, guidance care and supervision proceedings should be completed within twenty six weeks.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



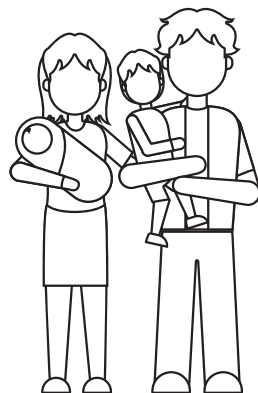
Why has the local authority sent me a letter before proceedings?

If you get a letter before proceedings, it means the local authority are worried your child is not being cared for safely 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 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 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?

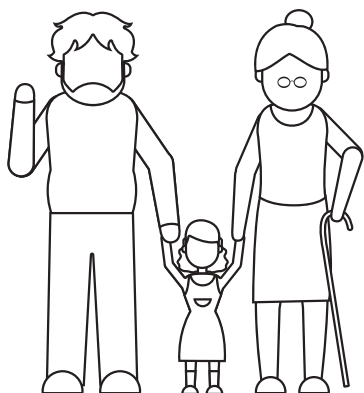
The letter tells you when and where the pre proceedings meeting will take place. If you do not attend the meeting, the local authority may apply to the court to start care proceedings. If there is a reason why you cannot attend at the suggested time it is important that you contact your social worker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



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.

FURTHER SUPPORT

For further information: Speak with your social worker, your legal adviser or visit the Family Rights Group at www.frg.org.uk/plo

Telephone Community Legal Advice on 0845 345 4345 or visit:

www.communitylegaladvice.org.uk see also www.lawsociety.org.uk (select the 'I need a solicitor' tab)

Your Social Worker:

How to contact them:

Useful contact numbers

Initial Response Service (IRS) - 0191 277 2500

Long Term Service - 0191 211 5485

Children in Care & Care Leavers - 0191 278 2700

Children with Disabilities - 0191 277 4700

Children's Safeguarding and Care Standards (IRO Office) - 0191 277 4636

