**Surrey County Council**

**Office Address:**

**Direct line:**

**E-mail:**

 **Date:**

**Private and Confidential**

**SENT BY [HAND] – you should read this letter with your social worker, who will help you go through the information included.**

**Dear [this is to be first and / or surnames of parent]**

**Re- Name(s) of child/(ren)] and date of birth (do not abbreviate and put the date in full)**

**Letter Before Proceedings**

I am writing to you on behalf of Surrey Children’s Services.

As you know, I have been very worried about your care of **[insert name/s of child(ren)]** for some time. We haven’t seen enough improvement in the care of [name] so this letter outlines the next steps.

We have become so worried for **[insert name(s) of child(ren)]** that if we don’t see any positive change, Surrey Children’s Services will need to apply to Court so that a Judge can decide what is best for **[him/her/them].** This means that **[insert** **name/s of child(ren)]** could be placed in the care of Surrey Children’s Services if the Court decides this would be best for **[him/her/them].** We know that you love your **child(ren)** and have strengths in your parenting, there are things you can do which might stop this happening.

We always want children to stay with their families where it is safe to, so this letter sets out ways we can work together to give you the best chance of this happening. For your **child(ren)** to stay in your care we need to see changes happen to create a safe and nurturing environment for your children. These changes need to happen within a timescale that we agree on.

The next section of this letter sets out:

1. What will happen next.
2. Why we are so worried about your care of **[insert** **name/s of child(ren)]**
3. What we have already done to help your family
4. What support we will offer you to make changes to avoid us having to go to Court.
5. **What happens next?**

**An Important Meeting about what will happen next:**

Please come to a meeting with us to talk about our worries and how we can help and support your family. This meeting will be on **[date and time]** at the **[name of office]**. The address is **[address]** and we have included a map with this letter to help you find it.

At this meeting we will talk about what we are worried about, what you need to do to make **[insert name/s of child(ren)]** safe and to meet **[his/her/their]** needs and how we will support you to do this. We will make sure there is space for you to talk about your views, wishes, worries and goals. We will also explain what will happen if we continue to be worried about **[insert** **name/s of child(ren)]**. This includes exploring with you which family and friends support network could support you to look after your **child(ren)** if you are not able to.

**Please bring a solicitor to the meeting on [insert date]**

It is important for you to have some free legal advice from a solicitor who specialises in Family Law as soon as possible. You will not need to pay for your solicitor if you give them this letter. If you do not have a solicitor, there is a list of local solicitors who work with children and families included in this letter. They are all independent from Children’s Services. You can also find a solicitor on the Law Society website at: <https://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/>

We recommend that you bring a solicitor, but you do not have to. It is a good idea to bring one as they will help you to understand the situation and advise you about your rights and options.

You can also bring a member of your family, a close friend, or a support worker to the meeting with you. Please know that we will be talking about some sensitive things about your family so whoever you bring along will hear that information too. Everyone at the meeting will need to agree this.

**The information your Solicitor will need is:**

Local Authority Legal Contact: **[Insert name and email address]**

Address: **[Legal Service]**

Telephone: **[Insert extension number]**

**Get your family involved:**

Our worries about **[insert** **name/s of child(ren)]** are very serious. Before this meeting think about who might support you to look after them if it happened that we have to go to Court and a Judge decides **[insert name/s of child(ren)** cannot remain at home with you. We will first try and place [him/her/them] with one of your relatives or a person close to your child(ren), if it is best for [name/s] to do this. This might include having a Family Group Conference to make a plan that is best **[insert name/s of child(ren)** . In this letter we have included the brochure to explain more about the Family Group Conference Service.

1. **Here are the main things we worried about:**

*Include a succinct summary of the Local Authority’s worries balancing this with some strengths within the family. Highlight what we are worried about (which includes the impact on the child) and examples of when this happened and dates of when it happened. Use language that is respectful, compassionate and non-judgemental.*

*Brief bullet points, no more than 8 points*

EXAMPLES

* Your continued use of alcohol and its adverse impact on your behaviour, where (Child/ren names ) have witnessed distressing situations such as fights with your partner and neighbours. For example, an incident on 14 July 2024, during which you were intoxicated and assaulted a neighbour, led to (Child/ren name) being placed under police protection, this meant that you were not able to care for and supervise your (child/ren)’s needs and safety.
* Regular absences from school are negatively impacting (Child/ren name)’s behaviour and learning. Mr Teacher has reported (child/ren name ) have only attended school 40% of the time this year. This means that they are falling behind in their studies and might make it more difficult for them to reach their full potential. The school report that (Child/ren name) are often tired at school which makes it harder for them to learn.
* A school nurse’s report from the Core Group Meeting on (date) showed that, (Child/ren Name) have missed her last 6 essential speech therapy appointments on (add dates). This means (Child/ren Names)’s speech and language and overall health needs are not being met.
1. **What support we have already offered you and your family to make changes to improve things for [child/ren name/s]**

*List the previous interventions and ‘help provided the family by the LA in a succinct way, no more than 8. Highlight who has helped, what support has been given and dates of when support was provided.* *Please be factual and use language that compassionate; respectful and non-judgemental. Please do not just refer to a CP plan, take out the point that have been offered that are relevant to the PLO.*

* EXAMPLES
* We have planned meetings for you to work with the children’s Social Worker (add name) on (add dates) to complete a parenting assessment. Where these have not been attended, it makes it hard for us to identify areas you need more support for parenting approaches so that (child/ren name)’s needs are met and that they are kept safe from harm.
* We have offered support from our domestic abuse practitioner, who suggested to meet with you on (add dates). To look after the welfare and safety of (child/ren name)’s, it is important that we work to reduce the domestic abuse issues. By not accessing this support the safety of your children could be at risk.
* We have planned meetings to help (Child/ren Name) attend school more often have not been attended. The school have reported that (Child/ren Name) have missed (number of days) of school this year, which might make it harder for them to reach their full potential

**4. What needs to happen for us not to go to Court and what support Children Services will offer your family.**

*At the point of sending the letter you will have tasks that you want the parent to achieve that will be put forward at the PLO meeting. This letter is the start of the plan and will show the parent what we would like them to do. Use bullet points to keep this section succinct avoid directives such as (“YOU MUST”; “YOU WILL”) which is not in line with Motivational Interviewing and Surrey’s Family Safeguarding Practice Model.*

* Ensuring the safety and wellbeing of ( Child/ren Names) is everyone’s top priority. It is very important that you ensure that you protect (child/ren name) from further exposure to fighting and arguing. This is so that they don’t get hurt during physical incidents or emotionally harmed by seeing and/or hearing the domestic abuse incidents. This will help them to feel safer. We would wish for you to report any further incidents involving (add names) to the police and Children’s Social Care immediately. This can be in relation to any form of verbal abuse and physical violence.
* For the safety and wellbeing of (child/ren), it is crucial that (add Name) avoid visiting or living in the family home until a risk assessment is completed on (date). Additionally, ( add name) should make sincere effort to attend the four assessment sessions scheduled between (add dates), to be conducted by the allocated Social Worker (add Name). This collaborative approach is essential to address any potential risk to ensure a safe environment for (child/ren names) whilst a risk assessment is being completed.
* WE would like to offer you support through the Freedom Programme, starting with weekly sessions on (date). This programme aims to boost your understanding of domestic abuse and the impact on your children. During the sessions you can learn useful ways to protect yourself and your children from possible harm and to create a safer environment for your family .
* We strongly encourage you to think about working with Change Grow Live (CGL), a drug and alcohol support service. They will help you to work towards reducing your alcohol use and explore why you might want to. This might help improve your availability for your children and create a safer home environment for your family. This will also show your commitment to your children’s safety and wellbeing and your own personal growth.
* To ensure the safety and welfare of your children, we would like to do a hair strand drug test with your consent by (add date). This test will help us understand your level of alcohol use and whether drugs are involved. This will enable us to provide you with any extra support you may need to create a healthier and safer home environment of your children to improve your children’s lives.

I know that this will be a very difficult letter to read, and I know that this meeting may feel overwhelming, but we would really like to see you and your solicitor there. I will support you to attend however I can.

If you need some help with childcare, accessibility or transport to the meeting, tell me as soon as you can so we can talk about how we can help you. If you do nothing about this letter, we will have to go to Court. If you do not answer this letter or come to the meeting, we will go to Court as soon as we can to make sure (child/ren) are safe.

If there is anything in this letter that you do not understand or you would like to talk it through with me, please contact me on [telephone number] as soon as possible**. [Social Worker to provide best contact details for this parent].**

Yours sincerely

**Service Manager**

Enc -List of Solicitors firms who are members of~~f~~ Law Society’s Children Law Accreditation Scheme

Enc-Family Group Conference Brochure; Office Map