**Office Address Contact**

**Direct line**

**My ref**

**E-mail**

**Date**

SENT BY [HAND/ RECORDED DELIVERY]

**LETTER BEFORE PROCEEDINGS**

**PLEASE TAKE THIS LETTER TO A SOLICITOR**

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

**Re: [name(s) of child(ren)]**

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

As you know, [name of social worker] has been very concerned about your care of [name(s) of child(ren)] for some time. The situation has not improved enough. The circumstances for your child/ren have become so serious that we may need to take further action. This means that we may apply to Court and [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.

The Local Authority does acknowledge that there are some strengths in your parenting and there are things you can do which could stop this happening.

We have set out in this letter what needs to change so that we will not go to Court. This is an opportunity for you to work with us to make the necessary changes within set timescales.

We have also set out in this letter the concerns that we have about [insert name/s of child(ren)] and the support which has been provided to try to help your family.

**An important meeting about what will happen next**

Please come to a meeting with us to talk about the concerns and how we can work together to help your family. This meeting will be on [date and time] at the [name of office]. The address is [address] and there is a map with this letter to help you find it. At the meeting we will:

* discuss with you what you can do to make your child(ren) safe and meet his/her/their needs;
* discuss with you how we will support you to do this;
* discuss with you who in your family could look after your child(ren) if you are not able to; and
* explain what steps we will take if we continue to be worried about [name(s) of child(ren].

Please contact [name], social worker on [telephone number] to confirm your attendance at the meeting.

If we do have to go to Court and the Court decides it is no longer safe for you to care for [name/s of child(ren)], 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. Please think about who might be able to care for your [child(ren)] so that we can discuss this with you and your solicitor at the meeting.

**Here are our main concerns:**

*Include a summary of the local authority’s concerns, balancing it out with positives/strengths in the family in simple and respectful language. The impact of the identified concerns on the child(ren) should be set out clearly. You may wish to use bullet points to keep this succinct.*

**The support which has been provided to your family**

*Provide a summary of what support has already been provided to the family. You may wish to use bullet points to keep this succinct.*

**What needs to change so that we will not go to Court and how we will support your family**

*Set out what needs to change and what the parents should do to bring about change (expectations section of PLO plan)*

*Set out what support will be provided by the local authority for them to avoid care proceedings including clear timescales of identified actions to be undertaken (include assessments e.g. parenting, expert, family members etc and support/interventions which will form part of the PLO plan). You may wish to use bullet points to keep this succinct.*

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

It is really important that you get advice from a solicitor who specialises in family law as soon as possible. They will help you to understand the situation and advise you about your rights and your options. You also have a right to bring your solicitor with you to the meeting. If you give them this letter you will not have to pay.

In case you do not have a solicitor, we have sent with this letter a list of local solicitors who work with children and families. They are all separate from Children’s Services. You can also find a solicitor on the Law Society website at: <https://solicitors.lawsociety.org.uk/>

You do not have to bring a solicitor to the meeting, but it will be very helpful if you do.

Information your Solicitor will need is:

 [Local Authority Legal Contact: Name, Address & Telephone:]

Please do not ignore this letter because if you do nothing we will have to go to Court.

If you do not understand any part of this letter, please contact your social worker [name] on [tel. no.]. Please tell your social worker if you need any help with child care or transport arrangements in order to come to the meeting, and we will try to help.

Yours sincerely

**[name]**

**Service Manager**

**[Team details]**

Cc: Social Worker [name]

Enc:

Map of office

List of solicitors’ firms who are members of the Law Society’s Children Law

Accreditation Scheme