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What is Public Law Outline?

The Public Law Outline (PLO) sets out the duties local authorities have when thinking about taking a case to court to ask for a Care Order to take a child into care or for a Supervision Order to be made. This is often described as initiating public law care proceedings.



Public Law Outline (PLO)

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Public Law Outline PLO (2014) sets out, amongst other duties that Local Authorities must ensure they identify concerns they have about a child early and where possible provide support for the family to address these concerns. This is pre-proceedings work and it is often what is referred to when social workers talk about PLO.

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Following this, at week 16, the case is considered again by a senior manager with advice from a senior legal advisor. The senior manager then makes a decision about how to proceed. This can be:

- a) PLO ends as progress has been made — If the parents have achieved the 'bottom line' actions that are needed to reduce the concerns, it may be decided that the local authority is no longer considering care proceedings and this pre-proceedings work ends.
- b) PLO continues — further period of change / work to be undertaken
- c) Pursue care proceedings — If the parents have made insufficient progress against the agreed actions, the Local Authority may issue care proceedings



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Usually, when PLO is initiated, the child has been subject to a Child Protection Plan but insufficient progress has been made. Child protection core group meetings and conferences continue throughout the PLO process. The decision to start pre-proceedings is taken by a senior manager with advice from a senior legal advisor.

Where the social worker feels that the risk of harm to a child is so great, or the case is so urgent, a decision may be made that the case should go straight to court and the pre-proceedings work does not take place.

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Period of change— this is the time for the parents to make the necessary agreed changes to reduce the concerns. Support is provided by the local authority and progress is monitored by them through for example child protection core group meetings and conferences.

Pre-Proceedings Review— This is a meeting held within 15 weeks of the decision to start pre-proceedings and includes the same participants as the first Pre-proceedings meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to review progress made against the bottom line actions.

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The Letter Before Proceedings triggers free legal advice for parents. The letter is sent within five working days of the PLO work decision. **Pre-Proceedings Meeting**— this meeting takes place within seven working days of the letter being received by the parents. The purpose of the meeting is to identify whether it is possible to reach agreement about what needs to happen to protect the child from harm, so that court proceedings can be avoided. The meeting involves parents, their legal representative, the local authority and their legal representative. The safeguarding concerns are highlighted, what support is being offered and what the parent needs to do to reduce the concerns—these are sometimes called the 'bottom line' actions. These actions now form the priority actions of the Child Protection Plan.

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What should pre-proceedings work include?

When it is decided that pre-proceedings (PLO) work with the family will take place, there are specific things that need to happen from the date of the decision. These are:

Letter Before Proceedings —this letter is sent to the parents. It outlines the main or 'bottom line' concerns and the help that has been provided by Children's Services so far. The parents are invited to a Pre-Proceedings Meeting and advised to get a Solicitor who specialises in family law and to get their wider family involved.