

Factsheet:

What is the Public Law Outline process (PLO)



It is really important that families are aware of how processes work and what they should expect from Children's Services. When we start the Public Law Outline process it means that we are very worried about your children. It means we have offered you and your family support but unfortunately, this has not been successful in reducing the worries we and other agencies have.

It means that we are thinking about making an application to a Court for your child(ren) as we need the Court to support safe decisions being made for your child(ren). Going to Court is the absolute last resort and we will do everything we can to support you to care for your children safely before doing this. Our main aim is always to keep children within their families if it is safe to do so.

The Public Law Outline process was developed to give families every opportunity possible to make changes to their lives and reduce the need for Children's Services to make an application to the Court.

Steps in the process

What is a Public Law Letter?

You will have had a letter from your social worker that tells you what agencies working with your family are worried about, how we think this affects your children and what needs to change to mean that your child(ren) can safely remain with you. The Letter will also explain that if changes are not made we will ask the Court to make decisions that keep your child(ren) safe.

The letter strongly advises you to get a solicitor so they can act on your behalf in any meetings and give you advice about what will happen next. The letter will invite you and your solicitor to a meeting. It is really important that you come to the meeting because if you don't we may have no choice but to go to Court.

Public Law Outline meeting

Aside from you and your solicitor the other people there will be your social worker, their manager and the Local Authority solicitor who advises us.

We will talk to you about what we are worried about, how we think this affects your children and what we think you need to do to work with us to keep your children safe.

We will ask you what kind of support would be most helpful for you and your family and together we will write up a plan to say what actions need to be taken, who by and when they need to be completed.

We will also ask you to identify anyone else in your family or circle of friends who would be able to care for your children if you are unable to. **DON'T WORRY**— this does not mean that this will happen but we need to have a back up plan for the children just in case positive changes are not made.

It may be that we need to understand you better so a parenting assessment or drug/alcohol test may be part of the plan. Don't be afraid to ask questions or share your views in the meeting.



What happens next

If there are less worries because you have worked well with us and made positive changes to the lives of your children then the process will end. There will still be a plan in place to support you and your family but there will be no more meetings with a solicitor.

Unfortunately, parents do not engage with the plan sometimes and when this happens we have to go to court and ask a judge to consider whether an order is needed to make sure the children are safe. This can sometimes mean that children have to live with someone else.

REMEMBER— We want you to succeed and make the positive changes needed to keep your children safe and will help you as much as we can. We really want children to stay with their families but it has to be safe for them.