

Beck Fitzgerald

lawyers & consultants

Public Law Outline

Pre-proceedings process



*working for
accessible justice*

Beck Fitzgerald is a specialist family practice based in central London and committed to accessible justice.

Our aim is to enable more families to get the expert help they need when they need it, at a price they can afford.

Alongside our casework with clients, we strive to challenge the family justice system to improve outcomes for the children and families we serve

We work tirelessly to improve the laws and protection for victims and their children so that they can feel safe.

We do not judge, and all our team are trained in trauma informed ways of working. We will help you find the best legal solution for you and your children.

Pre-proceedings process

This guide is designed to help you understand what happens when you have been invited to attend a Public Law Outline (PLO) pre proceedings meeting in respect of your child.

What is the PLO pre-proceedings process

If a local authority has concerns that a child in their area may be suffering or be at risk of suffering serious harm, before commencing court proceedings or making any decisions about the child's welfare it should first follow a pre-proceedings process.

This is a stage at which the local authority will try to resolve the situation by working with the parents or carers to resolve concerns about the child's safety or wellbeing. It is hoped that by intervention at an early stage and by working together it will be possible to avoid going to court.

The PLO letter

The PLO process starts when the parent or carer receives a letter from the local authority. The letter is usually known as the PLO letter. The letter will explain that the local authority is considering going to court.

It will set out what the local authority's concerns about the child's welfare are and what steps the parent or carer can take to address those concerns and avoid going to court.

The letter will invite the parent or carer to attend a meeting – the PLO meeting - to discuss the concerns and agree a plan of the steps that need to be taken to ensure that child's needs are met. The letter will confirm that the parent is entitled to have legal representation at the meeting.

If you are a parent or carer with parental responsibility for the child concerned you are entitled to free legal advice and assistance for the PLO process, without any reference to your financial circumstances.

PLO meeting

The local authority will convene a meeting called the PLO meeting. The people who attend the meeting are the social work team (the social worker and his/her manager), the parents or carers and their legal representatives.

Sometimes the meeting will take place at the local authority's offices and sometimes it is possible for the meeting to take place remotely, by video link. The meeting is led by the social work team and they present the Local Authority's concerns.

The parents and their legal representatives have the opportunity to discuss the social work concerns and the aim is for discussions to be constructive.

The meeting will consider whether the concerns about a child can be addressed without starting court proceedings. The meeting will consider whether all possible steps have been taken to support the child and his or her family.

The meeting will consider the possible services and supports the parents can access in order to address the concerns. This can include parenting programmes, parenting and other assessments, housing support or domestic abuse intervention.

The meeting will also consider what support is available within the family's network and who the parent considers should look after their child if they are not able to. Each family's case is different and so the supports or interventions which are recommended in each case may be different.

In the meeting a clear plan and timeline is set for addressing the issues which have been identified, typically 12 weeks, and to enable the family to make changes.

The plan agreed will be put in writing and will be signed by the parents and the local authority. The parties will agree to a further review PLO meeting, the timing of which will depend on the plan agreed in each case.

Review PLO meeting

If the issues have been addressed by the time of the review PLO meeting, the process can be brought to an end. This signals that significant progress has

been made and court proceedings are no longer contemplated.

In this case, even though the case is no longer in the PLO process, the family may still be expected to continue to work with the social worker under a different process, such as a Child in Need Plan, to improve the child's circumstances.

If, however there has been insufficient or no progress and the concerns for the child remain significant despite the interventions under the PLO pre-proceedings process, the Local Authority may choose to issue care proceedings.

Conclusion

So, the PLO pre-proceedings process sets out the procedure for local authorities when they are considering initiating care proceedings. The aim is to ensure a fair process, focusing on the welfare of the child.

The PLO encourages early intervention and tries to resolve issues before formal care proceedings are necessary.

The pre-proceedings meetings are a key step in this process, designed to give families a final opportunity to demonstrate that they can resolve concerns without the need for court intervention. If the meeting results in a decision to proceed to care proceedings, the next steps involve a formal application to the court.

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