

Pre Proceedings (PLO)

The Pre-Proceedings process, commonly known as the Public Law Outline (PLO), is a legal framework used by children's services before starting care proceedings in court. The aim is to work with families to address concerns about a child's welfare and avoid the need for court action where possible.

1. Identification of Concerns

- **Referral/Assessment:** Concerns about a child's welfare are identified through referrals from various sources (e.g., schools, health professionals, or the police) or during an ongoing assessment by children's services.
- **Threshold Criteria:** Children's services must determine whether the concerns meet the threshold criteria for significant harm or the risk of significant harm as defined under the Children Act 1989.

2. Decision to Initiate PLO

- **Strategy Meeting:** A multi-agency strategy meeting is held to discuss the concerns and determine whether the threshold for significant harm may be met.
- **Legal Planning Meeting (LPM):** Children's services hold a legal planning meeting with their legal department to review the evidence and decide whether to initiate the PLO process.

3. Notification to Parents

- **Pre-Proceedings Letter (Letter Before Proceedings):** If it is decided to proceed, a letter is sent to the parents/carers. This letter outlines the concerns, explains what needs to change, and informs them that failure to make improvements may lead to care proceedings. It also invites them to a PLO meeting.
- **Legal Representation:** The letter advises parents to seek legal advice and representation. Parents are always eligible for legal aid during the PLO process.

4. Pre-Proceedings (PLO) Meeting

- **Initial PLO Meeting:** The PLO meeting is a formal meeting attended by the parents, their legal representatives, the child's social worker, and the local authority's legal representative. During this meeting:
 - The local authority explains their concerns.
 - The parents are given an opportunity to respond.
 - A plan is developed (the Pre-Proceedings Agreement) outlining the changes required to avoid court proceedings.
- **Timescales:** The meeting should set clear timescales for the parents to make the necessary changes, typically within 12 to 16 weeks.

5. Review Meetings

- **Review PLO Meetings:** The progress is reviewed in follow-up PLO meetings, typically scheduled every 4 to 6 weeks. The social worker monitors whether the parents are complying with the agreement and whether improvements are being made.
- **Multi-Agency Support:** Various services, such as parenting programs, substance misuse services, or domestic violence support, might be involved to assist the parents in making the required changes.

Pre Proceedings (PLO) Continued

6. Outcome of the Pre-Proceedings Process

- **Successful Resolution:** If the parents make sufficient progress and the risks to the child are reduced, the local authority may decide that no further action is needed, and the case is closed or stepped down to a lower level of intervention.
- **Care Proceedings:** If the parents do not make the necessary improvements, or if the situation worsens, the local authority may decide to initiate care proceedings. A decision to proceed to court would typically involve another Legal Planning Meeting to confirm that court action is necessary.

7. Issuing Care Proceedings

- **Court Application:** If the decision is made to proceed to court, the local authority will file an application for a care or supervision order with the Family Court.
- **First Hearing:** The first court hearing is when the Local Authority's application for a Interim Care Order (ICO) is considered. Case Management Hearing, usually takes place within a 18 days of the application. The court will consider whether an interim care order is necessary and will set a timetable for the proceedings.

8. Post-PLO Support

- **Continued Support:** Even if care proceedings are avoided, children's services may continue to work with the family to provide ongoing support and ensure the child's welfare is maintained.
- **Step-Down Process:** If the situation has improved significantly, the child and family can be supported through early help or universal services.



Summary of Key Points:

The PLO process aims to avoid court action by giving parents a final opportunity to address concerns.

Parents are strongly advised to seek legal advice throughout the PLO process.

The success of the PLO process depends on the parents' ability to make necessary changes within the agreed timeframe.

