



# Public Law Outline

## What is it?

**When Social Workers are worried that a child is at risk of significant harm, they may apply to court for an order to keep the child safe. Before a social worker makes an application to court, they may initiate the Public Law Outline process.**

The Public Law Outline known as (PLO) process sets out several rules which Social Workers must adhere to when they are thinking of making an application to the court in respect of children. The rules set out within the Public Law Outline help Social Workers manage these types of cases.

The PLO process is about getting social workers and parents together along with legal representative to discuss the concerns they have. When social workers are thinking that they may need to go to court they should invite the parents to a meeting to discuss their concerns. This is known as a “pre-proceedings” meeting.

There are a few pathways that may be relevant in PLO process.

- Local Authority informs parents of concerns and that the Local Authority are thinking about making an application to the courts, via a pre-proceedings meeting. This will be reviewed, a review period will be no longer than 12 weeks, this may be extended depending on the circumstances, or if progress is made the PLO process can be ended.

- The Local Authority believes that an application to the court is necessary because managing the risk to the child is no longer felt safe enough to do so. Parents are informed of this and given the opportunity to seek legal presentation.
- The risk is so significant emergency protection is required via the making of an Emergency Protection Order.

### What is a Pre-Proceedings Meeting?

A Pre-Proceedings meeting is a meeting to discuss what needs to be done to protect the child from harm, and to see if a plan can be put into place to reduce the risks to children. Before the meeting, parents will receive a letter detailing the concerns for the children and what needs to be done next. This letter, known as a “pre-proceedings” letter then entitles parents to fee legal aid from a solicitor who will attend the meeting to support the parents. Each parent will be entitled to their own solicitor.

### Who attends the meeting?

At the meeting will be the allocated social worker, their manager and a legal representative for the local authority. Parents will be at the meeting along with their legal representatives.

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## What happens at the meeting?

At the meeting the social worker will discuss the concerns and what the local authority have already done to help the children and family. A very clear plan to keep the children safe will be discussed with everyone. This will include what needs to be done, by whom and the timescales that the progress needs to be achieved by. The aim of this is to reduce the risks to the children and to prevent the need for social workers applying to court.

Part of the meeting will focus upon identifying any potential family members who may be able to look after the children should parents be unable to do so.

The local authority will also discuss with parents what will happen should no improvements be made. This will usually involve the local authority applying to the courts for a legal order to keep the children safe.

If the Local Authority decides to make an application to the court, the court set the timetable for care proceedings at 26 weeks; only in exceptional cases will the court extend this timetable.

The social worker will continue assessing and working with the family to conclude the relevant care plan for the child. The child will be represented by a guardian and child's solicitor independent of the Local Authority.

## For more information...

Please contact Bolton Safeguarding Children Partnership at [www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk](http://www.boltonsafeguardingchildren.org.uk)

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Email [boltonsafeguardingchildren@bolton.gov.uk](mailto:boltonsafeguardingchildren@bolton.gov.uk)

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