



One minute guide

Public Law Outline



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What is Public Law Outline?

Public Law Outline is sometimes called 'PLO', or 'pre-proceedings'. It is a legal process that happens when social care is extremely worried about a child's safety.

Public Law Outline means the social work team have been given legal advice that the worries for a child are so high that they may need to ask a court how to keep a child safe, but that more work and assessments are needed to better understand what could help a family, and there is hope that with a lot of support a family can make things safer and they won't need to go to court. It is really important that during this legal process, the family think about other family or friends who could be able to support them and their children. This should include taking part in a Family Group Conference.

The start of Public Law Outline

1. Parents will receive a letter from the social work team explaining what they are worried about, examples of times when these worries have been evidenced, and what they think needs to happen next to make things safer. The letter will include details of different solicitors a family can use, and details of the Public Law Outline Meeting. The letter will also ask the family to share details of any family or friends who could help them make things safer for the child.
2. Parents are encouraged to share this letter with a solicitor of their choice, to receive legal advice and representation. Families do not need to pay for this legal advice, and it is independent of the local authority. They can talk to a solicitor about whether they agree or disagree with what the letter says, and what they think might help them to make changes. If parents do not appoint a solicitor or attend the meeting, the social work team and their solicitor may decide they need to go to court.
3. Parents, with their solicitor, will attend the Public Law Outline meeting with the social work team and the local authority's solicitor. They will talk about what was written in the letter, and agree a plan for different support or assessments to try and make changes and understand the family's situation better. This will always aim to include the wider family in a plan of support.

During Public Law Outline

The social work team and the family will follow the plan agreed in the Public Law Outline meeting. This might include different visits and meetings, assessments or work between the family and professionals, and following an agreed safety plan at home. If parents agree, it might include meetings with other family members to talk about how they can help. It is also important that everyone talks about any other family members who could look after the child if the parents can't make the changes needed – this might include family members taking part in their own assessments.

The Child Protection Plan will continue during this time, and there should still be Core Group Meetings and Review Conferences.

Ending Public Law Outline

Public Law Outline should last approximately 12 weeks, but sometimes it is shorter or longer. There will be a final review meeting and if things have got better then Public Law Outline will end. If this happens, the parents' solicitor will stop being involved, but the social work team will continue supporting the family to keep the positive changes going, under a Child Protection or Child in Need Plan.

If things do not get better, the social work team may decide they need to ask a court to decide how the child should be kept safe. This is called 'Court Proceedings'. This might also happen before the final review meeting, if there are more worries, or things happen that mean the child isn't safe in the immediate future. If the decision is made to start Court Proceedings, the social work team and the local authority solicitors will let the parents and their solicitor know. Parents will continue to have free legal advice throughout the Court Proceedings.

Where else to get advice

You can find more information or advice about Public Law Outline from the Family Rights Group at <https://frg.org.uk/get-help-and-advice/what/pre-proceedings/>.

If you need a solicitor but don't want to use one on the list the social work team shared, you can look on the Law Society website at www.lawsociety.org.uk.

Key contacts

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