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The Legal Context/What is the Public Law Outline?

In the first instance, as outlined in Section 31 of the Children Act 1989 the Court may only make a Care or Supervision Order if it is satisfied that the child concerned is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm. See definition here [Safeguarding Wales](#)

The Public Law Outline (PLO. 2014) sets out the Legal duties Local Authorities have when thinking about making an application to Court to instigate Care Proceedings to request a Care or Supervision Orders, or for a child to be accommodated by the Local Authority. This is often described as initiating Public Law Care proceedings.

The Public Law Outline (PLO) Process



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When is PLO initiated/considered

Public Law Outline (PLO) sets out, amongst other duties, that Local Authorities must ensure they identify concerns they have about a child early and where possible provide support for the family to address these concerns. This is called pre-proceedings work and it is often what is referred to when social workers talk about PLO.

Usually, when PLO is initiated, the child has been subject to a Child Protection Plan, but insufficient progress has been made.

Where practitioners working with the child, feel that the risk of harm to a child is so great, or the case is so urgent, a decision may be made to instigate Care Proceedings therefore the pre-proceedings work does not take place.

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Possible Outcomes

PLO ends as progress has been made — If the parents have achieved the 'bottom line' actions that are needed to reduce the concerns/risks, it may be decided that the Local Authority is no longer considering care proceedings and this pre-proceedings work ends.

PLO continues — further period of change / work to be undertaken.

Instigate care proceedings — If the parents have made insufficient progress the Local Authority may issue care proceedings.

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Pre-Proceedings Work

What should pre-proceedings work include?

When it is decided that pre-proceedings (PLO) work with the family will take place, there are specific things that need to happen from the date of this decision being made. These are:

Letter Before Proceedings - this letter is sent to the parent(s)/carer(s). It outlines the main or 'bottom line' concerns and the help that has been provided by Children's Services so far. The parents are invited to a pre-proceedings meeting and advised to seek legal advice from a Solicitor who specialises in family law and to involve their wider family for safeguarding and support. [Please click here for list of solicitors](#)

Child protection core group meetings and conferences continue throughout the PLO process.

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Timescales

Period of change— this is the time for the parents/carers to make the necessary agreed changes to reduce the concerns. Support is provided by the Local Authority and progress is monitored for example: child protection core group meetings and conferences also including 3rd sector agencies.

Pre-Proceedings Review— This is a meeting held within 6 to 8 weeks of the pre-proceedings meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to review progress made against the bottom-line actions. If there is no evidence of progress being made within a reasonable timescale then the Local Authority would consider next steps.

PLO – lasts up to 16 weeks but can be extended with Service Management agreement if required

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Roles & Responsibilities

It is the joint responsibility of professionals to gather evidence to support threshold which can include, but is not limited to, case notes and records, reports, correspondence, and chronology. It is a multi-agency/collective approach. All agencies are accountable to allow for multi-agency evidence-based decision making.

- Social Services will assess the needs of the child/ren and their parent(s)/carer(s), this may include a parenting assessment, or commissioning a psychological assessment or perhaps drug and alcohol testing.
- Health, Education, EWO, Probation, NYAS, YOS 3rd Sector organisations etc. should continue to attend core groups and make sure their responsible actions are completed.
- All agencies are to ensure that information is shared with Social Services within the agreed timescales and continue to provide information for Child Protection conference, submit DTR's/PPN's and any disclosures that may be required.

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What Happens During the PLO Process?

Pre-Proceedings Meeting — this meeting takes place within 7 working days of the letter being received by the parents/carers. The purpose of the meeting is to identify whether it is possible to reach agreement about what needs to happen to protect the child/ren from harm, so that Court proceedings can be avoided.

The meeting involves parents, their legal representative, the Local Authority, and their legal representative. The safeguarding concerns are highlighted, what support is being offered and what the parent/carers needs to do to reduce the concerns—these are sometimes called the 'bottom line' actions. These actions now form the priority actions of the Child Protection Plan.