

LETTER BEFORE PROCEEDINGS

IMPORTANT!

PLEASE DO NOT IGNORE THIS LETTER - TAKE IT TO A SOLICITOR NOW

Office Address Contact

Direct line

E-mail

Date

SENT BY [HAND/ FIRST CLASS POST/RECORDED DELIVERY]

Dear [parent and/or full name(s) of all people with parental responsibility]

Re: Insert [name(s) of child(ren)] –

**LAST OPPORTUNITY TO STOP YOUR CHILDREN BEING REMOVED
FROM YOUR CARE**

I am writing to you on behalf of West Sussex Children's Services.

As you know, [insert name of social worker] has been very worried about your care of [name(s) of child(ren)] for some time. Things have not improved sufficiently and the situation for your child(ren) has become so serious that we may need to take action.

We are writing to you now to give you a last chance to make the changes to show us that [name(s) of child(ren)] can be kept safe now and in the future.

Otherwise we will go to Court to ask for them to be removed from your care, if the Court decides that is best for them.

We have set out below why we are so worried about your care of [name(s) of child(ren)] and the things you can and **MUST** do if you want to avoid us asking the Court to remove them from your care.

WHAT ARE WE WORRIED ABOUT?

HARM (What has already happened that has caused harm?)

DANGER (What are we worried will happen to the child/children if nothing changes)

WHAT IS GOING WELL?

SAFETY (If there is any existing safety that has been evidenced over time detail here)

STRENGTHS

SAFETY GOAL (What is our safety goal for the child to remain in the parents care)

NEXT STEPS:

WHAT YOU MUST DO SO THAT WE DON'T GO TO COURT

Come to a meeting with us to talk about these concerns. This meeting will be on [date and time] at the [insert name of office]. The address is [address] and there is a map with this letter to help you find it. At the meeting we will:

- outline what the Local Authority needs you to do to keep your children safe now and in the longer term

- set out how the local authority will help you to do this and set out what you need to do to make this happen
- ask you to agree to a safety plan that will keep your children safe now and in the longer term
- discuss with you who in your family could look after your child(ren) if you are not able to achieve those safety goals; and
- explain what steps we will take if we continue to be worried about [name(s) of child(ren)].

Please contact your social worker on [tel.no.] to tell us if you will come to the meeting.

1. **Get a solicitor:** It is really important that you get advice from a solicitor who specialises in family law as soon as possible. They will help you to understand the situation and advise you about your rights and your options. You also have a right to bring your solicitor with you to the meeting. If you give them this letter you will not have to pay.

In case you do not have a solicitor, we have sent with this letter a list of local solicitors who work with children and families. They are all separate from Children's Services. You do not have to bring a solicitor to the meeting, but it will be very helpful if you do.

Information your Solicitor will need is:

Local Authority Legal Contact:

Name

Address

Telephone no:

2. **We need to see if together we can keep your children safe by getting your wider family and/or friends involved. This is called the "safety network".** Before the meeting, please think about who can get involved and what they could do. Speak to your friends and family about this and bring their details to the meeting with you. They need to know that if they are going to be involved in helping, they will have to have police and social services checks to make sure they are safe people.

Our concerns about your children are very serious. If we do have to go to Court and the decides you cannot care for your child(ren) we will look first at whether we can place them with any of the people in your safety network if this is best for your child(ren). At the meeting we will discuss with you and your solicitor who might look after your child(ren) if the Court decides that it is no longer safe for you to do so.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER THE MEETING?

- The social worker and other professionals involved will keep working with you, the child(ren) and other important people in the child(ren's) life to see if you can meet your child(ren)'s needs safely.
- If it is not possible with the support of the local authority and your family and friends for you to continue to care for the child(ren) safely we will need to look at all of the options that would meet the safety goals for your children.
- If there are still lots of worries and we don't think that you can keep your child safe, we will have to go to court and ask the judge to say what the safest option is for your child.

We look forward to seeing you at the meeting with your solicitor on [date]. If you do not understand any part of this letter, please contact your social worker [name] on [tel. no.]. Please tell your social worker if you need any help with child care or transport arrangements in order to come to the meeting, and we will try to help.

Yours sincerely

Service Manager

Cc: Social Worker [name]
Local Authority Lawyer

Enc:

Map of office
List of solicitors firms