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One Minute Guide: Impact of Public Law Outline

What is it?

The revised Public Law Outline (PLO) is part of the provision of the Children and Families Act 2014 and the changes in practice following the Family Justice Review. The PLO and the earlier implementation of revised rules in relation to expert evidence have provided a clear administrative framework for reducing delay and have led to a greater focus with the Courts on setting timescales. The final PLO was effective as of 22 April 2014.

What are the main points?

- On 22 April 2014, the largest reform of the family justice system was implemented. All the relevant provisions of the Crime and Courts Act 2013 and the Children and Families Act 2014 came into force.
- On 22 April 2014 the Family Court came into existence replacing the Family Proceedings Court. The final version of the revised PLO in public law cases was published, replacing the PLO 2008 and 2013, and the implementation in private law cases of the Child Arrangements Programme (CAP 2014) began.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 implements the Government's reforms in response to the Family Justice Review. These legislative changes are complemented by a simplification of the court system with the majority of family cases heard by a single Family Court.
- In private law, changes make clear that, where safe and appropriate, a child should have the opportunity to benefit from the involvement of both parents.
- The new legal framework and accompanying guidance addresses damaging delays in court proceedings. The objective of the PLO (2014) is to reduce delay in Care and Supervision Order cases in accordance with the timetable set for the child and timetable for court proceedings by providing a streamlined process to ensure, wherever possible, care proceedings conclude within 26 weeks and avoid unnecessary delay.
- Under the PLO (2014) there is an emphasis on the shared responsibility of the judiciary, CAFCASS, the Local Authority, the families and legal representatives to avoid unnecessary delay in care proceedings and make decisions within children's timescales.
- Now the Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service (HMCTS) will monitor, average duration of section 31 care or supervision cases and measures the average duration in weeks from the date of the first application for a care or supervision order to the date of the first full/final order for all applications that closed (i.e. were disposed

of) within the relevant quarter. Therefore to enable us to meet set standards, each one of us across children social care services is required to work in a systematic and outcome focussed manner.

- As with Key Performance measures, the data is taken from the HMCTS database with timeliness based on the duration of section 31 care or supervision cases as measured from the date of application to the date of the first full order. This is also measured on a 'per child' basis.
- The PLO, [Munro review of child protection: final report](#), (May 2011), [Family Justice Review](#) (November 2011) and the [Children and Families Act 2014](#) all outline the need for quality and evidence based approach to care proceedings from the initial stages.
- In the new [Statutory Guidance](#) on Court orders and pre-proceedings provides guidance in the initiation of proceedings under s31 of the Children Act 1989.
- The guidance outlines the duties on the local authority to ensure early notification of potential concerns and the requirement to provide support to children and their families in a timely manner to mitigate against identified needs and risk.

How are we doing it?

- Pre-proceedings assessments are actively encouraged at the fortnightly legal planning meetings. However, there remain a number of cases where assessments have been started once proceedings have been issued.
- The tracking system has worked well, monitoring of cases via the tracker and the quarterly progress reports has been invaluable in providing evidence of changes and progress towards achieving outcomes.
- Working with all of you both individually and via briefing sessions to provide a culture of learning and continued development.
- In June 2014, we will be providing targeted training sessions for all our frontline managers.
- For 2014-15, our ambition is that the average duration of s31 care or supervision cases should be within 26 – 30 weeks (averaged over the year). And increase the Percentage of section 31 cases which are completed within 26 weeks.
- To continue to promote better use of Family Group Conference, before and during PLO process
- Identification and assessment of family members as part the intervention and parallel planning.

How do I find out more?

For full information, please refer to the [Statutory guidance on court orders and pre-proceedings for local authorities](#), published by the Department for Education (DfE) in April 2014. . Please contact workforcedevelopment@redbridge.gov.uk for further information.