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

**Dear**

**Re:**

**LETTER BEFORE PROCEEDINGS**

I am writing to let you know how concerned Kent County Council has become about your care of your child. I am writing to tell you that the Council is thinking about starting care proceedings in respect of XXXXXXXXX. This means that we may apply to Court, and if the Court decides that this is best for XXXXXXXXXX, [she/he] may be taken into foster care whilst a permanent plan for your child/ren is decided.

We have set out in this letter the worries that we have about XXXXXXXXX.

**How to stop going to court**

We are so worried about your child/ren that we will go to Court unless things improve. You can do something to stop this happening. This letter has a list of the things we are worried about and what you need to do next.

**WHAT YOU MUST DO SO THAT WE WILL NOT GO TO COURT:**

Come to a meeting with us to talk about these concerns and how you can address them. **This meeting will be on XXXXXXXXXX at ADDRESS OF VENUE.** There is a map with this letter to help you find it. Please note there is no parking at the office, the nearest parking is XXXXXXXXX. Please let us know as soon as possible if you have any dififculties with travelling to the office or with childcare as we can try to helpyou , as this meeting date cannot be changed.

At the meeting we will:

• discuss with you what you will need to do to look after XXXXXXX and keep [him/her] safe;

• discuss with you what we can do to help you;

• discuss with you who in your family could look after your child if you are not able to; and

• explain what happens next if we continue to be very worried

**Please contact your social worker on 03000 XXXXXX to tell us if you will come to the meeting**.

**You should think about getting 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 give advice 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 and independent from Children’s Services. The following link to the Law Society website: [www.lawsociety.org.uk](http://www.lawsociety.org.uk) is where you can find a list of solicitors firms in Kent who undertake Child Care Law work who you could approach for advice. Alternatively, you can contact the Law Society on tel: 0207 24 21 222. Your solicitor will advise you about getting free legal advice. You do not have to bring a solicitor to the meeting, but it would be helpful if you do.

Information your Solicitor will need is:

**Kent County Council’s legal representatives**: [name of solicitor], Invicta Law Ltd, Priory Gate, 29 Union Street, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1PT and their phone number is 03000 XXXXXX.

**Get your wider family involved:** Our concerns about XXXXXXXXXX are very serious. If we go to Court and the Court decides you cannot care for XXXXXXXXX, we will first try and place them with his / her wider family or a person or person(s) close to XXXXXXXXXX, if it is safe for XXXXXXXXXX. At the meeting we will discuss with you and your solicitor who may be able to look after XXXXXXXXXX if the Court decides that it is no longer safe for you to do so.

**HERE ARE THE THINGS THAT WE ARE WORRIED ABOUT:**

*Detail here the categories of concerns we have and the evidence we have of how it is impacting the children. i.e. the physical harm, emotional harm, sexual harm and neglect the child(ren) are at risk of suffering or have suffered. For example:*

1. *Substance Misuse: We are worried that you use heroin and on (DATEs) you left XXXX in the care of unsafe adults whilst you have been taking drugs.*
2. *Domestic abuse: We are worried that XXXXX is hurting you and the children are seeing and hearing this. They are scared and frightened and not able to concentrate at school / their development is impaired. We have tried to support you to be safe with your children, but at the moment, you don’t feel able to accept our help.*

***XXXXXXXXX(Child’s) Needs***

***Education***

*In this section:-*

1. *Note the developmental needs, is it age appropriate?*
2. *What aspects of the child’s development is delayed, be specific and reference current development milestones*
3. *Liaison with Health Visitors/Nursery/Paedatricians/School/SEN to record their concerns about development*

***Medical***

*Outline issues in relation to medical issues:-*

1. *Medication and any concerns related to medication or medical issues for the parents impacting on the care of the children.*
2. *Medical issues in relation to the children including missing appointments, regular appointments with specialist doctors that need to be attended.*
3. *Comment on referrals made to Paediatrics be specific about concerns*
4. *Comment on injuries and assessment required be specific about worries.*

***Health and Diet***

1. *Comment on diet and what is happening, what needs to happen.*
2. *Consider sight and dentistry needs*
3. *Information from school nurse/health visitor.*

*Support that has already been provided –* ***this could be in a table format with date, agency, support offered, so it shows a timeline of support offered / declined***

***Early Help***

***Open Access/Chidlren’s Centre***

***Health Visitor***

***Pre-School / School***

***Domestic Abuse Services***

***Substance Misuse services***

***Adults Services***

***Probation***

**Social Work Services –** Allocated Social Worker, SWA ( be specific about the work both the SW and the SWA has completed / offered), assessments already undertaken – C+F and outcome, referrals to any agencies for support

**What we need you to do**

You will need to show that you can understand our worries and that you can care for your children safely all of the time, to the point that we agree the level of support from children’s services can reduce. We ask that you please attend and take part in in this process, which includes attending meetings, preferably with your solicitor, to understand what needs to change to reduce our worries for XXXXXXXX.

*This is an example selection of what is proposed in pre-proceedings. For each section there needs to be clarity as to the purpose of the assessment and why this will help parenting:*

1. *We require you to engage in a Family Group Conference (FGC). This meeting will help to see if there are family or friends who can support you to care for XXXXXXXXX and remain at home with you. If this is not possible, the FGC will look at who else in your network can care for XXXXXXXXX and help keep them safe*
2. *We need you to engage in a PAMs based parenting assessment so that we can understand how you function and the quality of your parenting skills. This will help us understand if you have any learning needs so that we can support and work with you in the right way to look after your children.*
3. *We need you to meet with a psychologist who will assess your cognitive functioning and ability to understand. This will help us to understand how best to help you and if you are able to understand our concerns about XXXXXXX.*
4. *We need you have a hair strand test/DNA/other test because XXXXXXX*
5. *We need you to go to XXXXX Service [insert appropriate service - probation/substance misuse service/therapy]. Attendance needs to be for XXXXX amount of time or to achieve XXXXXXXX results. They can talk to you about your [offending/substance misuse/behaviour (be specific)] and how this affects your parenting of XXXXXXXX. It is important you talk to them to understand how you can stop / reduce [insert issue – offending, drug / alcohol abuse], so that it is not harmful to your child/ren*
6. *We need you to agree that we can approach the police and the health services / [any other agencies], to understand what contact they have had with you. We need this information to understand if they have any information about you that we need to consider in our assessment and work with you*
7. *We need you to allow the children to be seen and spoken to by a social worker at least every 10 days. The visits to see them will be announced, this is when you know we are coming and have an appointment to see them) and unannounced, this is when we do not have an appointment to see you, and you are not expecting us)*
8. *We want you to agree to be assessed by professionals that we consider necessary,*
9. *We want you to meet and be involved with other professionals to support you and your family and keep XXXXXXX safe.*

**OUTCOMES: *This is what we need to see to know that XXXXXXXXXXX is safe. This will include what needs to be different to make sure that XXXXXXXX is parented appropriately and is safeguarded.* Be specific**

1. *Engagement with assessments and intervention that will support your parenting and makes sure the children are happy.*
2. *There should not be any further incidents of domestic abuse as the work with social work services will have enabled more healthy resolution of family conflict.*
3. *Increased stimulation so that there is attendance at playgroups and use of the Early Help service to progress the parents’ understanding of child development. Provide an example in relation to the child/ren/YP you are considering. They will be able to read/write/count.*
4. *Morning and evening routines are in place. The children will have a bedtime routine, with meal times to be regular, ensuring the children are dressed and washed every morning with clean clothes. Provide examples appropriate examples for the family of the routines that will be in place.*
5. *Show that you can keep your home clean. The kitchen and bathroom to be clean and hygienic. Toilets to be sanitary, nappies to be thrown away in bins and rubbish collected by the council.*
6. *Maintain a tenancy, and ensure there is no anti social behaviour, parents recognise numerous adult visitors can impact on the routines for the children.*
7. *Attendance at medical appointments; specify what the children need and clarify the physical developmental milestones that will be achieved. Give examples*
8. *Substance misuse has reduced/no longer impacting on the care of the children.*
9. *Give examples of what good parenting look like.*

**We look forward to seeing you at the meeting with your solicitor on XXXXXXX. If you do not understand any part of this letter, please contact your social worker XXXXXXXXX on 03000 XXXXXXXXXX. 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

Included: List of local solicitor’s firms who are members of the Law Society’s Children Law Accreditation Scheme

Chronology