

Appendix E3: Principles for Letter Before Proceedings

When writing the letter before proceedings social workers should:

- Be honest and respectful;
- Ensure the letter is written clearly and is jargon free;
- Try to engage rather than alienate the parents;
- Be clear about the seriousness of the matter;
- Avoid delay but give reasonable notice of the meeting;
- Provide sufficient detail to inform the parents' lawyer;
- Not delay the letter by writing more than necessary;
- Make sure the letter links with the child protection plan;
- Identify and locate both parents, where the child is not living with both of them;
- Ensure that the parents understand the contents of the letter and have an opportunity to discuss it prior to the pre-proceedings meeting;
- Where a parent may lack capacity, consideration should be given as to whether a discussion involving an advocate/and or legal representative should take place before sending out this letter;
- Where English is not the first language of one or more parents then interpretation services may be required.

The letter should set out:

- A summary of the local authority's concerns, balancing it out with positives/strengths in the family in simple and respectful language;
- The impact of the identified concerns on the child(ren) should be set out clearly;
- A summary of what support has already been provided to the parents;
- What needs to change and what the parents should do to bring about change;
- What support will be provided by the local authority for them to avoid care proceedings including clear timescales of identified actions to be undertaken;
- Information on how to obtain legal advice (and advocacy where required), highlighting the importance for the parent to get legal representation;
- An invitation to pre-proceedings meeting, to be held within a maximum of 15 working days after the LGM/LPM.