



Case Examiner Decision
Natalie Hoole – SW124715
FTPS-22142

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The role of the case examiners

The case examiners perform a filtering function in the fitness to practise process, and their primary role is to determine whether the case ought to be considered by adjudicators at a formal hearing. The wider purpose of the fitness to practise process is not to discipline the social worker for past conduct, but rather to consider whether the social worker's current fitness to practise might be impaired because of the issues highlighted. In reaching their decisions, case examiners are mindful that Social Work England's primary objective is to protect the public.

Case examiners apply the 'realistic prospect' test. As part of their role, the case examiners will consider whether there is a realistic prospect:

- the facts alleged could be found proven by adjudicators
- adjudicators could find that one of the statutory grounds for impairment is engaged
- adjudicators could find the social worker's fitness to practise is currently impaired

If the case examiners find a realistic prospect of impairment, they consider whether there is a public interest in referring the case to a hearing. If there is no public interest in a hearing, the case examiners can propose an outcome to the social worker. We call this accepted disposal and a case can only be resolved in this way if the social worker agrees with the case examiners' proposal.

Case examiners review cases on the papers only. The case examiners are limited, in that, they are unable to hear and test live evidence, and therefore they are unable to make findings of fact.

Decision summary

Decision summary	
Preliminary outcome	3 September 2025
	Amendments requested Submissions requested
2 nd Preliminary outcome	27 February 2026
	Accepted disposal proposed – removal order
Final outcome	15 June 2026
	Accepted disposal – removal order

Executive summary

The case examiners have reached the following conclusions:

1. There is a realistic prospect of regulatory concerns 1a, 1b and 2 being found proven by the adjudicators.
2. There is a realistic prospect of regulatory concerns 1a, 1b and 2 being found to amount to the statutory ground of misconduct.
3. For regulatory concerns 1a, 1b and 2, there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators determining that the social worker’s fitness to practise is currently impaired.

The case examiners did not consider it to be in the public interest for the matter to be referred to a final hearing and determined that the case could be concluded by way of accepted disposal.

As such, the case examiners requested that the social worker be notified of their intention to resolve the case with a removal order. The social worker accepted the proposal. Having revisited the public interest in the case, the case examiners determined that a removal order remained the most appropriate outcome in this case.

The case examiners have considered all of the documents made available within the evidence bundle. Key evidence is referred to throughout their decision and the case examiners' full reasoning is set out below.

Anonymity and redaction

Elements of this decision have been marked for redaction in line with our Fitness to Practise Publications Policy. Text in [REDACTED] will be redacted only from the published copy of the decision, and will therefore be shared with the complainant in their copy. Text in [REDACTED] will be redacted from both the complainant's and the published copy of the decision.

Professional A

[REDACTED] ward manager of the unit where child A was placed.

Professional B

[REDACTED] the social worker's team manager

The complaint and our regulatory concerns

The initial complaint

The complainant	The complaint was raised by the social worker's former employer, [REDACTED]
Date the complaint was received	10 May 2023
Complaint summary	The complainant advised that, following an audit on the use of financial assistance for children allocated to the social worker, concerns arose regarding the social worker retaining cash that had not been used for the purpose it had been requested for.

Regulatory concerns

1. Whilst registered as a social worker between 10 October 2022 and 18 April 2023, you secured funding to provide financial assistance to child A and child B and:

- a) Did not use the money for its intended purpose and / or
- b) Where the funding was not required did not return the funds in a timely fashion.

2. Your actions at regulatory concern 1 were dishonest.

The matters outlined at regulatory concerns 1 and 2 amount to the statutory ground of misconduct.

Your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of misconduct.

Preliminary issues

Investigation		
Are the case examiners satisfied that the social worker has been notified of the grounds for investigation?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the case examiners satisfied that the social worker has had reasonable opportunity to make written representations to the investigators?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the case examiners satisfied that they have all relevant evidence available to them, or that adequate attempts have been made to obtain evidence that is not available?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Are the case examiners satisfied that it was not proportionate or necessary to offer the complainant the opportunity to provide final written representations; or that they were provided a reasonable opportunity to do so where required.	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>

Requests for further information or submissions, or any other preliminary issues that have arisen

September 2025

The case examiners adjourned the case to request that an additional regulatory concern related to dishonesty be added.

February 2026

The case examiners are satisfied that the social worker has been offered the opportunity to make submissions on the additional concern of dishonesty.

The realistic prospect test

Fitness to practise history

The case examiners have been informed that there is no previous fitness to practise history.

Decision summary

Is there a realistic prospect of the adjudicators finding the social worker's fitness to practise is impaired?

Yes

No

The case examiners have determined that there is a realistic prospect of regulatory concerns 1a, 1b and 2 being found proven, that those concerns could amount to the statutory ground of misconduct, and that the social worker's fitness to practise could be found impaired.

Reasoning

Facts

1. Whilst registered as a social worker between 10 October 2022 and 18 April 2023, you secured funding to provide financial assistance to child A and child B and:

a. Did not use the money for its intended purpose and / or

The case examiners have been provided with three finance request forms, described as section 17 forms, which the social worker appears to have submitted in relation to Child A, requesting £80 on 10 October 2022, £50 on 13 December 2022 and £150 on 27 February 2023. The local authority submit that no receipts were received for any of the money provided to the social worker for these claims.

The social worker admits that they did not use the £80 and £150 requested and has provided rationale for why this money was no longer required, such as discussions around a mobile phone being inappropriate for Child A given safeguarding concerns.

The social worker admits that they did not use the £50 for clothes as requested but submits that they used them for other expenses in relation to Child A. No receipts have been provided to evidence this expenditure; however it is noted that the case records make reference to Christmas presents being delivered to Child A, which may have been bought using this money.

The case examiners have been provided with statements from the local authority which suggest that money was also requested and not accounted for in relation to Child B, however there is no evidence of section 17 forms to prove that the social worker requested and received this money.

The case examiners cannot resolve conflicts in evidence but acknowledge that while there is a dispute relating to Child B or the money requested for Child A on 13 December 2022, it is accepted by the social worker and there is clear evidence to support that the social worker did not use the £80 and £150 for their intended purpose.

The case examiners are satisfied there is a realistic prospect of this regulatory concern being found proven, should the matter go forward to a hearing.

b. Where the funding was not required did not return the funds in a timely fashion.

The case examiners have been provided with statements from the social worker's former line manager which suggest that once they were made aware by the carers for Child A that they did not have adequate clothing, the line manager looked into the financial records and identified that no receipts had been provided for any of the three financial requests detailed above.

It is recorded that the social worker was asked about these and that they admitted they had not used the £80 or £150, but that the money was in an envelope in their work bag and they would return them. The social worker appears to have returned both amounts the following day.

The case examiners note that there appears to be no specific guidance directing when money should be returned to the local authority, if no longer required. However, the case examiners have been provided with an excerpt from the local authority's Code of Conduct which states, "*Borrowing Council money, even when the employee has every intention of returning it within a very short period of time, is also considered as theft*". The case examiners consider this suggests that social workers should not retain money for any longer than necessary.

The evidence suggests that the social worker returned the money on 18 April 2023, which the case examiners are satisfied could not be characterised as a timely manner, given the dates requested and noted above.

The case examiners are satisfied there is a realistic prospect of this regulatory concern being found proven, should the matter go forward to a hearing.

2. Your actions at regulatory concern 1 were dishonest.

The case examiners have applied the test for dishonesty, which consists of two parts – the subjective test and the objective test. The subjective test requires the case examiners to assess the evidence to ascertain the social worker’s actual knowledge or belief as to the facts. The question is not whether the social worker’s beliefs are reasonable, but whether they were genuinely held at that time.

The objective test requires the case examiners to consider whether the social worker’s alleged conduct may be considered dishonest by the objective standards of ordinary decent people. There is no requirement for the social worker to appreciate that their conduct is, by the objective standards of ordinary decent people, dishonest.

The case examiners consider there is some evidence which might suggest that the social worker knew the procedure for requesting and using section 17 funds; this includes the interview record with the social worker and their previous employer. This interview record also suggests that the social worker knew the money they requested needed to be used for the purposes authorised and that retaining this money for a long period was not acceptable.

The case examiners note that the social worker accepts that they did not use the money requested on 10 October 2022 and 27 February 2023 for Child A and retained the money until 18 April 2023. The social worker submits that they forgot about the envelopes of cash in their possession until asked about them. However, the case examiners note there is evidence that, when questioned, the social worker claimed to have the money available but did not immediately return it, rather they returned the sums of money a day later. This potentially undermines the social worker’s subsequent claim that they had forgotten having the money, and may also suggest that they did not have immediate access to it as claimed by them.

Additionally, the case examiners note the evidence that the social worker requested section 17 funds for Child A on two occasions, in December 2022 and February 2023, as well as money for child B, despite having £80 of unused funds in their possession. The case examiners are of the view that, even if the social worker had forgotten they had money in their possession that they obtained in October 2022, the need for

further funds for the same child is likely to have prompted them to recall this fact, and to return it, before taking further funds.

The case examiners consider that the evidence suggests the social worker retained the monies for their own personal use, regardless of whether they intended to reimburse the funds at a later date if challenged. This evidence includes, that the social worker retained £80 for around 6 months and the further £150 for 2 months; that the social worker only returned the money a day after being questioned about it; that they did not provide receipts for all section 17 expenditure; and that they did not record requesting and taking the funds accurately in case notes.

There is also evidence that the social worker may have knowingly avoided using the money obtained by them for the purpose of purchasing clothes for child A, despite another professional repeatedly highlighting that the clothing was needed. This includes evidence from professional A, who has stated that they were highly concerned that child A's self-esteem was being impacted by not having suitable clothing. Professional A reports being concerned that no items were received from the social worker, despite them being aware that money was available for this purpose, and repeatedly asking the social worker for the clothing to be supplied.

The case examiner have also considered whether there is any evidence of why the social worker may have been motivated to keep money that was not their own, and note that the team manager professional B has stated that the social worker had spoken to them about an attachment of earnings order, suggesting that they may have been in financial difficulty around the relevant period.

If it was found proven that the social worker had retained money requested for expenses to meet a child's needs but did not use it for the intended purpose, and only returned it when challenged about having it, the case examiners are of the view that an ordinary decent member of public may view this as dishonest.

The case examiners are satisfied there is a realistic prospect of this regulatory concern being found proven, should the matter go forward to a hearing.

Grounds

The case examiners are aware that there is no legal definition of misconduct, but it generally would consist of serious acts or omissions, which suggest a significant departure from what would be expected of the social worker in the circumstances. This can include conduct that takes place in the exercise of professional practice, and also conduct which occurs outside the exercise of professional practice, but calls into question the suitability of the person to work as a social worker.

To help them decide if the evidence suggests a significant departure from what would be expected in the circumstances, the case examiners have considered the following standards, which were applicable at the time of the concerns.

As a social worker, I will:

2.1 Be open, honest, reliable and fair.

As a social worker, I will not:

5.2 Behave in a way that would bring into question my suitability to work as a social worker while at work, or outside of work.

The case examiners are of the view that allegations of dishonesty by a social worker, if subsequently found proven, should be viewed as significant and serious misconduct. They note the professional standards guidance (April 2020) which states “Where [social workers] are not open and honest, it can put people at risk and may damage confidence in them as a social worker and the social work profession”.

The case examiners note that section 17 funds are used to meet the needs of children consider to be ‘in need’ and are required to support vulnerable children and young people. Any suggestion of ‘borrowing’ or theft of these funds is likely to be viewed as particularly serious, due to it being public sector money which is expected to be used where necessary and as appropriate to care for and support people. There is also evidence that a vulnerable child (A) may have been adversely impacted by not having access to items of clothing that some of the money obtained by the social worker was intended to purchase.

The social worker has not provided submissions relating to the allegation of dishonesty, but they did address the conduct in regulatory concern 1. As noted above, they accept retaining money on two incidents and describe themselves as feeling under pressure due to work demands and experiencing burnout. The case examiners appreciate that pressure may result in errors, but it is unclear from the social worker’s submissions how they suggest they forgot about the money for so long and did not at any point recollect having possession of it, while claiming further money. The evidence suggests that the social worker immediately recalled having the money and claimed to know its location, when challenged by their team manager.

The case examiners are satisfied that there is a realistic prospect that the social worker’s conduct would be considered by adjudicators to be sufficiently serious as to amount to misconduct.

Impairment

Assessment of impairment consists of two elements:

1. The personal element, established via an assessment of the risk of repetition.
2. The public element, established through consideration of whether a finding of impairment might be required to maintain public confidence in the social work profession, or in the maintenance of proper standards for social workers.

Personal element

With regards to the concerns before the regulator, the case examiners have given thought to their guidance, and they note that they should give consideration to whether the matters before the regulator are easily remediable, and whether the social worker has demonstrated insight and/or conducted remediation to the effect that the risk of repetition is highly unlikely.

Whether the conduct can be easily remedied

The case examiners are of the view that while a social worker could receive instruction or training on the appropriate procedures for requesting funds to use with children and young people, it is difficult to remediate conduct such as the dishonesty described above, as it is likely to be viewed as a behavioural or attitudinal issue. This is particularly the case if the social worker had retained the money with the intention of not returning it unless challenged. The case examiners are also mindful that honesty is a fundamental aspect of the social worker role and something that a social worker should be aware of as being key to their practice, without the need for additional training.

Insight and remediation

The case examiners note that the social worker has admitted the conduct in regulatory concern 1 and provided some explanation as to why they allegedly forgot about the money in their possession and what they should have done differently. However, the case examiners are of the view that the social worker's submissions would be significantly undermined should the social worker be found to have acted dishonestly in keeping the money and not just forgotten about it, as they claim.

The case examiners acknowledge that the social worker has the right to deny the regulatory concerns before them and the case examiners are mindful not to infer that the social worker lacks any insight because they have not accepted regulatory concern 2. However, the case examiners are of the view that they have limited submissions from the social worker, and none have been provided relating to

regulatory concern 2, so the case examiners cannot be satisfied that sufficient insight has been demonstrated.

The case examiners have not been provided with any evidence of remediation completed by the social worker but are mindful that they have not been in practice since the conduct of concern. The social worker submits that they have completed deep reflection but there is no objective evidence of remediation provided.

Risk of repetition

In light of evidence of a repeated pattern of dishonesty conduct and the absence of insight and remediation, the case examiners are of the view that the risk of repetition remains.

Public element

The case examiners have next considered whether the social worker's actions have the potential to undermine public confidence in the social work profession, or the maintenance of proper standards for social workers.

The case examiners acknowledge that honesty and integrity are of paramount importance for social workers. A finding of dishonesty and/or misuse of local authority finances undermines public confidence in the profession. The public and other organisations, including employers, need to be able to rely on social workers to be open and honest in their dealings.

The case examiners consider that the public would expect a finding of impairment to be made in a case involving dishonesty by a social worker. It therefore follows that a failure to find impairment could undermine public confidence.

The case examiners consider that there is a realistic prospect of the social worker's fitness to practise being found to be currently impaired.

The public interest

Decision summary

Is there a public interest in referring the case to a hearing?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Referral criteria

Is there a conflict in the evidence that must be resolved at a hearing?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Does the social worker dispute any or all of the key facts of the case?	Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is a hearing necessary to maintain public confidence in the profession, and/or to uphold the professional standards of social workers?	Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Additional reasoning

The case examiners have concluded that the public interest in this case is engaged. However, they are satisfied that this interest may be appropriately fulfilled by virtue of the accepted disposal process.

Whilst the matter is serious, the case examiners are not of the view that a hearing might be necessary to maintain public confidence in the social work profession, or in Social Work England's maintenance of the standards expected of social workers.

The case examiners have noted that while the social worker initially suggested they may not accept their actions were dishonest, they have not responded to the formalised regulatory concern 2, despite the efforts of the regulator and an extension request being granted. It is therefore unclear to the case examiners whether the social worker is disputing regulatory concern 2 or whether they consider their fitness to practise to be currently impaired. Where a social worker does not accept impairment, case examiner guidance suggests that a referral to a hearing may be necessary in the public interest.

However, the case examiners note that the guidance states the social worker must accept the matter of impairment at the point of *concluding* the case and are of the view that this does not prevent them offering accepted disposal prior to this. The case examiners consider that it is reasonable to offer accepted disposal in this case because:

- There is no conflict in evidence in this case.
- The case examiners are of the view that dishonesty may not be considered as a key fact, rather it is a subjective / evaluative fact. The case examiners recognise that the social worker may not understand the legal test which adjudicators would apply.
- The case examiners recognise that not all professionals will have an innate understanding of how and when the public interest may be engaged, or how exactly this might impact upon findings concerning current fitness to practise.
- The accepted disposal process will provide to the social worker an opportunity to review the case examiners' reasoning on impairment and reflect on whether they are able to accept a finding of impairment. It is open to the social worker to reject any accepted disposal proposal and request a hearing if they wish to explore the question of impairment in more detail.

The case examiners are also of the view that the public would be satisfied to see the regulator take prompt, firm action in this case, with the publication of an accepted disposal decision providing a steer to the public and the profession on the importance of adhering to the professional standards expected of social workers in England.

Accepted disposal

Case outcome		
Proposed outcome	No further action	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Advice	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Warning order	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Conditions of practice order	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Suspension order	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Removal order	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Proposed duration	<p>Where a social worker is removed from the register, there is no defined end to the finding of impairment. A social worker that has been removed from the register may only apply to be restored to the register 5 years after the date the removal order took effect. The adjudicators will decide whether to restore a person to the register.</p>	

Reasoning	
<p>In considering the appropriate outcome in this case, the case examiners have had regard to Social Work England’s impairment and sanctions guidance (December 2022) and reminded themselves that the purpose of sanction is not to punish the social worker but to protect the public and the wider public interest.</p> <p>The case examiners are reminded by this guidance that that should consider mitigating and aggravating factors when considering which sanction may be appropriate or proportionate. In relation to this case, the case examiners consider there to be limited mitigating factors, comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - an absence of previous fitness to practise history; - that the social worker claims to have been experiencing burnout at work; <p>The case examiners have identified the following aggravating factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - a repetition of concerns, in terms of the period the concerns occurred over and evidence of at least two repeated dishonest acts; 	

- limited insight demonstrated.

In determining the most appropriate and proportionate outcome in this case, the case examiners have next considered the available options in ascending order of seriousness.

The case examiners have decided that it is not in the public interest to refer this matter to a final hearing and have chosen the least restrictive sanction necessary to protect the public and the wider public interest. They have started at the lowest possible sanction and worked up, testing the appropriateness of each sanction to confirm their decision is proportionate.

The case examiners have already determined there is a realistic prospect that the social worker's fitness to practise would be found impaired. The sanctions guidance advises that if the personal element of impairment is found, "*a sanction restricting or removing a social worker's registration will normally be necessary to protect the public*". The case examiners are therefore led to consider sanctions which restrict the social worker's practice. They note that the guidance suggests it may therefore "be reasonable to move beyond the lower sanctions (no action, advice or a warning) on this basis alone". The case examiners have already determined that they do not consider that the social worker has demonstrated sufficient insight nor remediation. Therefore, the sanctions of no further action, advice or a warning are considered inappropriate on the basis that these outcomes will not restrict practice and therefore not sufficiently protect the public.

The case examiners have then considered a conditions of practice order, however they note the sanctions guidance again which states these orders are less likely to be appropriate in cases of character, attitude or behavioural failings. The case examiners have not been provided with any evidence that the social worker is motivated to remediate, and they are not currently in practice. Furthermore, the case examiners felt this order does not adequately address the serious nature of the alleged misconduct.

The case examiners have considered a suspension order, in order to mark the seriousness of their conduct; however, they are of the view that this is not a suitable outcome. They are guided to only consider a suspension order when the social worker has demonstrated some insight and when "*there is evidence to suggest the social worker is willing and able to resolve or remediate their failings*". The case examiners also note that the conduct described in this decision is extremely serious and they consider that public confidence in the profession could be undermined if a

social worker who had been repeatedly dishonest, as alleged in this case, was allowed to continue to practise.

The case examiners have concluded that there is no lesser sanction which could meet the regulators objectives; to protect the public, to maintain confidence in the profession and to maintain proper professional standards for social workers in England. Therefore, they propose that the social worker is removed from the register.

The case examiners will now notify the social worker of their intention and seek the social worker's agreement to dispose of the matter accordingly. The social worker will be offered 28 days to respond. If the social worker does not agree, or if the case examiners revise their decision regarding the public interest in this case, the matter will proceed to a final hearing.

Response from the social worker

On 14 June 2026 the social worker returned their completed accepted disposal response form, confirming the following:

“I have read the case examiners' decision and the accepted disposal guide. I admit the key facts set out in the case examiner decision, and that my fitness to practise is impaired. I understand the terms of the proposed disposal of my fitness to practise case and accept them in full”.

Case examiners' response and final decision

The case examiners have reviewed their decision, paying particular regard to the overarching objectives of Social Work England:

- The protection of the public
- Maintaining confidence in the social work profession
- The maintenance of professional standards.

The case examiners remain satisfied that an accepted disposal of a removal order is a fair and proportionate way to conclude this matter, and is the minimum sanction required to protect the public and the wider public interest.