



Case Examiner Decision
Abigail Steel – SW132143
FTPS-23200

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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	26 May 2026
	Accepted disposal proposed - removal order
Final outcome	24 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 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 and 3 being found proven by the adjudicators. 

2. There is a realistic prospect of regulatory concerns 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 and 3 being found to amount to the statutory ground of misconduct.
3. For regulatory concerns 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 and 3, 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 this proposal.

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 **blue** will be redacted only from the published copy of the decision, and will therefore be shared with the complainant in their copy. Text in **red** will be redacted from both the complainant's and the published copy of the decision.

The complaint and our regulatory concerns

The initial complaint

The complainant	The complaint was raised by way of a self-declaration by the social worker during the registration renewal process with the regulator
Date the complaint was received	09 January 2024
Complaint summary	The social worker advised the regulator they were being investigated by their former employer following a complaint from a parent of service user 1 who stated they had never spoken to the social worker, despite records suggesting otherwise. The local authority then identified several other allegations of falsifying records.

Regulatory concerns

Whilst registered as a social worker between June and July 2023:

1. You failed to undertake calls to service users' families, on more than one occasion, including:
 - 1.1 Service user 1
 - 1.2 Service user 2
████████████████████
 - 1.4 Service user 4
████████████████████
2. You falsely recorded that you had attempted to call service users' families when this was not the case, on more than one occasion, including:

2.1 Service user 1

2.2 Service user 2

[REDACTED]

2.4 Service user 4

2.5 Service user 5

3. Your actions in relation to regulatory concern 2. were dishonest.

The matters outlined in regulatory concerns 1, 2, & 3 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"/>

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 1.1, 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 and 3 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

Whilst registered as a social worker between June and July 2023:

1. You failed to undertake calls to service users' families, on more than one occasion, including:

The case examiners note that the social worker was employed in a children's assessment team at the time of the concerns so was tasked to screen referrals and consider the needs and risks to referred children, concluding whether ongoing social care support was required.

The case examiners have been provided with the following evidence from the social worker's former employer:

- Case notes showing referrals being allocated to the social worker for screening

- Case notes where the social worker records efforts to contact family/other agencies as part of the screening process
- Telephone numbers for families of service users 1-5
- Call logs from Teams/Mitel which the social worker used to make work calls
- Confirmation from the IT department that the social worker's work mobile did not work and had not been used since 2020
- Confirmation that the social worker did not provide their personal phone records.

The case examiners have considered this evidence in relation to each of the presented service users.

1.1 Service user 1

The case examiners note that the evidence suggests the social worker was allocated to deal with this referral, made by the father of service user 1. The social worker has recorded that on 7 June 2023 they attempted to call the father but there was no answer.

The call logs provided do not appear to cover this date, the case examiners note that the date is recorded on the logs as YEAR-MONTH-DATE, therefore the logs for 2023-07-06 would relate to 6 July, not 7 June.

However, the case examiners have been provided with a written complaint from the father of service user 1 who stated they had received no contact from social care and had only spoken to someone on 16 June as a result of their efforts to call.

The case examiners have considered that in order to prove a failure, there must be evidence that a call to service user 1's father was required. It appears that the social worker did make a call to the mother of service user 1, to establish their response to the concerns. This may be argued to have been sufficient, however, the case examiners note that the father was the referrer so is likely to have required the opportunity to report their concerns. The evidence suggests that the father made several attempts to contact social care so would have required a response.


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.

1.2 Service user 2

The case notes for service user 2 record that the social worker was required to call the mother. The social worker records on 19 June 2023 that they attempted to call

both parents. However, call logs do not show any calls made by the social worker to either of the telephone numbers for the parents.


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.




1.4 Service user 4

The case notes for service user 4 record the social worker being required to call the mother and the social worker records on 6 July 2023 that a call to the mother is attempted but unsuccessful. However, call logs do not show any calls made by the social worker to either of the telephone numbers recorded for service user 4's mother.

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.





The case examiners acknowledge that the social worker states they may have made the calls using their personal mobile phone and that they have asked their mobile provider, who cannot access the call logs from this time. It is unclear why the social worker would use their personal mobile phone when they had access to a phone service through their computer. Without these records, the social worker has not provided evidence that they did make the calls detailed above and given that the parents stated they received no attempted calls during this period, the case examiners remain satisfied there is a realistic prospect of regulatory concerns 1.1, 1.2 and 1.4 being found proven.

2. You falsely recorded that you had attempted to call service users' families when this was not the case, on more than one occasion, including:

2.1 Service user 1


2.2 Service user 2

2.4 Service user 4

For all of the above service users, the case examiners have been provided with case notes where the social worker records their attempts to speak to parents in order to discuss the referrals made to social care.

As already established in regulatory concern 1, the evidence suggests that these calls were not made. The social worker denies this and states that while they cannot recall individual calls, they would not have recorded work they did not complete.

However, in the absence of evidence to support this, 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.



2.5 Service user 5

The case examiners note the social worker's recording on case notes for service user 5 where they state, "Telephone call attempts to Mum x2 - no answer - voicemail left". The call logs suggest that one call was made to service user 5's mother but the call is recorded as lasting 0 seconds which suggests an unsuccessful call and no voicemail left, as set out in the evidence of the former employer.

The case examiners acknowledge that it appears the social worker did attempt to call this family once, however there is also evidence to suggest that the social worker falsely recorded the number of attempts and that they left a voicemail.

Accordingly, 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.

3. Your actions in relation to regulatory concern 2. were dishonest.

When considering dishonesty, the case examiners have applied two tests, in line with relevant case law. Firstly, they have assessed the evidence to establish what adjudicators may determine the social worker's actual state of knowledge or belief was at the relevant time (the subjective test).

Secondly, they have considered whether the social worker's conduct could be deemed as dishonest by the standards of ordinary, decent people (the objective test).

In relation to the subjective test, the case examiners are of the view that the social worker would know whether they had made the calls to families and/or left voicemails to discuss the referrals. The case examiners note there is no evidence to suggest that they were unclear about what work they had done.

In relation to the objective test, the case examiners consider that if the social worker was found in regulatory concern 2 to have knowingly recorded calls which did not occur, ordinary, decent people would view this to be dishonest.

Accordingly, 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.

To help them decide if the evidence suggests a significant departure, 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.

3.2 Use information from a range of appropriate sources, including supervision, to inform assessments, to analyse risk, and to make a professional decision.

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.

5.3 Falsify records or condone this by others.

Regulatory concern 1

The case examiners have considered the regulatory concerns separately as although they are linked, it is important to be clear about which allegations could engage the ground of misconduct.

Within the social worker's role, calls made to parents during screening have a crucial function in ensuring that any risks are understood, considered and any concerns or issues can be dealt with in a timely way.

A failure to do this may be considered a significant departure from standard 3.2 as it means that important decisions about ongoing support could be made without key information. This could lead to children being left at risk of significant harm.

Regulatory concerns 2 and 3

The case examiners are of the view that dishonesty by a social worker, if 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 consider that dishonesty in the form of creating records of phone calls that did not occur is particularly serious as it has the potential to cause harm to service users. False recording undermines the reliability of professional judgement with managers and colleagues believing that interventions have been completed in order to promote and monitor safety. This may prevent any issues being noticed and service users' needs being met in a timely fashion. If proven, these concerns may be found to breach standards 2.1, 5.2 and 5.3.

The case examiners consider that allegedly falsifying records could be considered a significant departure from the standards, given the potential for a risk of harm to service users.

The case examiners are satisfied that regulatory concerns 1, 2 and 3 all have a realistic prospect of amounting 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 recognise that the social worker appeared to be in their second year of practice at the time of the regulatory concerns. They consider that the alleged failures to contact family members during screening could be remediated by undertaking further training and learning, alongside good quality reflection on what went wrong and what the social worker will do differently to avoid a recurrence.

The case examiners also acknowledge however that dishonesty is much harder to remediate, as it undermines the trust and responsibility placed upon social workers.

Insight and remediation

The social worker has provided limited submissions, which focus on their denial of the concerns before the regulator.

Within the interviews conducted by the social worker's former employer, the social worker demonstrated that they understood why contact with children's family was necessary and the importance of recording work completed accurately. They have demonstrated no further insight which the case examiners appreciate may be linked to their denial of the concerns.

The social worker has offered no evidence of remediation and has consistently stated that they have left the social work profession and have no intention of returning to practice.

Risk of repetition

The case examiners are of the view that without evidence of insight or remediation from the social worker, a 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 note Social Work England's sanctions guidance, which states that "the most serious instances of dishonesty in professional practice are those which (do either of the following):

- directly harm service users
- have the potential to put service users at risk".

One of the examples provided of these serious instances is falsifying records. Given the serious allegations and in the absence of insight and remediation, the case examiners consider that public confidence in the social work profession and standards could be significantly undermined if a finding of impairment was not made.

The case examiners consider that there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators finding the social worker's fitness to practise is 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 it is so serious 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 social worker has indicated to the regulator that they dispute the regulatory concerns. Where a social worker does not accept the key facts, 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. The case examiners 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 limited conflict in the evidence which would a hearing could

interrogate. Whilst the social worker denies the concerns, they have not provided evidence to support this position.

The case examiners are of the view that there is a risk of repetition and that the risk of repetition can be managed by way of the accepted disposal process. There are a range of sanctions available to the case examiners to satisfy the public that this risk is being managed and to safeguard public confidence. Therefore, there is no need for this matter to be examined within a public hearing.

The accepted disposal process will provide to the social worker an opportunity to review the case examiners' reasoning on facts, grounds and impairment and reflect on whether they are able to accept the social worker's decision. It is open to the social worker to reject any accepted disposal proposal and request a hearing if they wish to explore the allegations 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.

Furthermore, the case examiners have concluded that the public would support efforts made by the case examiners to resolve this case in a timely and proportionate manner, without the need to refer to a hearing.

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

The case examiners have identified the following mitigating and aggravating factors;

Mitigating

- There is no history of practice concerns however the social worker appears to only have been practising for around 2 years, so the weight placed upon this factor is reduced.

Aggravating

- The risk of harm to service users, both from not making required calls and from falsifying records, as alleged.
- Lack of insight and remediation.

In considering the appropriate outcome in this case, the case examiners had regard to Social Work England's sanctions guidance (December 2022) and reminded

themselves that the purpose of a sanction is not to punish the social worker, but to protect the public.

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.

No further action, advice and warning order

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.

Conditions of practice order

Conditions of practice orders are often appropriate in cases relating to professional practice. The case examiners have not been provided with any evidence that the social worker is motivated to remediate. Their sanctions guidance suggests that conditions of practice are only appropriate when a social worker has demonstrated insight and case examiners "are confident that the social worker can and will comply with the conditions". Therefore, the case examiners do not consider a conditions of practice order would be appropriate in this case.

Suspension order

The case examiners are similarly 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*". As previously noted, the case examiners are aware that the social worker states they will not be returning to practice. However, they also recognise that the social worker was near the beginning of their career and therefore may change their mind.

The case examiners remind themselves that the concerns alleged are very serious and that the sanctions guidance sets out that dishonesty “is likely to warrant a finding of impairment and a more serious sanction of suspension or removal”.

The case examiners are of the view that a suspension order may only be suitable in cases involving serious dishonesty where a social worker has demonstrated extensive insight and remediation, to evidence that they understood fully what had gone wrong and the steps they had taken to prevent any recurrence.

Removal order

The sanctions guidance describes factors which may lead to a proposed removal. It says this may be appropriate for both concerns relating to dishonesty and for *‘social workers who are unwilling and/or unable to remediate (for example, where there is clear evidence that they do not wish to practise as a social worker in the future).’*

Given that the social worker has not demonstrated any insight or remediation and the significance of the concerns, which may undermine public confidence in the profession, the case examiners conclude that they cannot propose a lesser sanction than removal.

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 for a response.

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 24 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.