



# Social worker: Steven Holden

## Registration number: SW134044

### Fitness to Practise

### Final Hearing

Date of hearing: 16 March 2026 and 12 May 2026

Hearing venue: Remote hearing

Hearing outcome:

Discontinuance application granted, fitness to practise not impaired, warning

## Introduction and attendees:

1. This is a hearing held under Part 5 of The Social Workers Regulations 2018 (as amended) (“the regulations”).
2. Mr Holden did not attend and was not represented.
3. Social Work England was represented by Ms Sharpe, case presenter, instructed by Capsticks LLP.
4. The panel of adjudicators conducting this hearing (hereafter “the panel”) and the other people involved in it were as follows:

<b>Adjudicators</b>	<b>Role</b>
Karen McArthur	Chair
Warren Dillon	Social worker adjudicator
Colette Neville	Lay adjudicator

<b>Hearings team/Legal adviser</b>	<b>Role</b>
Poppy Muffett / Kathryn Tinsley	Hearings officer
Liam Dixon	Hearings support officer
Dido Ofei-Kwatia	Legal adviser

## Service of notice:

5. The panel was informed by Ms Sharpe that notice of this hearing was sent to Mr Holden by email to an address provided by Mr Holden (namely his registered address as it appears on the Social Work England register). Ms Sharpe submitted that the notice of this hearing had been duly served.
6. The panel had careful regard to the documents contained in the final hearing service bundle as follows:
  - A copy of the notice of the final hearing dated 29 January 2026 addressed to Mr Holden at the email address which he provided to Social Work England;
  - An extract from the Social Work England Register as of 29 January 2026 detailing Mr Holden’s email address;
  - A copy of a signed statement of service, on behalf of Social Work England, confirming that on 13 February 2026 writer sent by email service to Mr Holden at the address referred to above: notice of hearing and related documents.
7. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser in relation to service of notice. Having had regard to Rules 44 and 45 of the Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended) (“the Rules”), and all of the evidence before it, the panel was satisfied that notice of this hearing had been served on Mr Holden in accordance with the Rules.

## Proceeding in the absence of the social worker:

8. The panel heard the submissions of Ms Sharpe on behalf of Social Work England. Ms Sharpe, in summary, submitted that notice of this hearing had been duly served, no application for an adjournment had been made by Mr Holden and as such there was no guarantee that adjourning today's proceedings would secure his future attendance. Ms Sharpe invited the panel to proceed with the hearing given the nature of the application and that there would be no prejudice to Mr Holden.
9. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser in relation to the factors it should take into account when considering this application. This included reference to Rule 43 and the case of *General Medical Council v Adeogba [2016] EWCA Civ 162*. The panel was also reminded of Social Work England's guidance 'Service of notices and proceeding in the absence of the social worker'.
10. The panel considered all of the information before it, together with the submissions made by Ms Sharpe on behalf of Social Work England. The panel noted the contents of Mr Holden's last written correspondence dated 23 July 2025 in which he said "*I am writing this email with regards to communication received on 21.07.2025. I hope that this email clearly and objectively states both my position on this matter and the situation at hand. I no longer require my inclusion on the social work register. I have no further plans or desire to work within this profession again. I was falsely accused and acquitted in a court of law. [Private] In conclusion as previously stated I no longer require my registration and will not be attending the hearing*".
11. The panel was satisfied that the service of notice was effective and decided that Mr Holden was or should have been aware of today's hearing. The panel had no reason to believe that an adjournment would result in Mr Holden's future attendance, nor had he asked for an adjournment. The panel therefore concluded that Mr Holden had chosen voluntarily to absent himself. Having weighed the interests of Mr Holden, in regard to his attendance, with those of Social Work England and the public interest in an expeditious disposal of this hearing, the panel decided to proceed in Mr Holden's absence.

## Hearing of 12 May 2026

12. The panel decided that today's reconvened hearing is to hand down its decision as made on 16 March 2026, as it was unable to do so on the previous occasion due to a lack of time. Notice of this hearing was duly served on Mr Holden in accordance with the rules and he has not responded. The position today has not changed from that on 16 March. Therefore, today's hearing serves as a continuation and as such the panel adopts its reasoning as set out above in relation to 'proceeding in absence of the social worker' being satisfied that Social Work England served notice of today's hearing effectively.

## Preliminary matters:

### Application to hear part of the proceedings in private

13. Ms Sharpe made an application for any parts of the hearing that referred to Mr Holden's health to be held in private due to its personal and sensitive nature. She relied upon Rule 38(a)(ii) of the Rules. The panel heard the advice of the legal adviser, and it decided to grant the application.

### Background:

14. On 14 June 2022, Social Work England received a referral from Ms Patient on behalf of Mosaic Drug and Alcohol Service within Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council regarding the social worker, Mr Steven Holden.
15. Mr Holden was employed as a drug and alcohol early intervention worker and his role involved offering advice, information and support to young people, primarily between the ages of 11 and 18 years old, in relation to substance misuse issues.
16. On 3 May 2022, Mr Holden telephoned Ms Patient, his line manager, and informed her that he was to be/had been criminally charged with an allegation of sexual assault. Ms Patient recalls that Mr Holden reported that he had been charged on 3 May 2022, but the information shared by the Police at the Initial Allegation Management Meeting – which the Police attended - confirmed that he had been charged on 4 May 2022.
17. The allegation of sexual assault arose from Mr Holden's interaction with a young woman "Person A" in the early hours of 16 October 2021 and who Mr Holden had met for the first time that evening, when Person A was returning home from a night out with friends. Person A alleged that Mr Holden had touched her bottom, her inner thigh and her vagina over her underwear. Person A alleged that this touching took place without her consent.
18. Person A described the incident which took place while walking back to her accommodation with Mr Holden. CCTV footage captures both of them walking together and shows Person A appearing upset on her return to her accommodation. The CCTV does not capture the alleged sexual touching.
19. Following the interaction, on her return to her accommodation, Person A was distressed and reported the matter to the Police. Person A's father spoke with her shortly after the incident and describes her demeanour.
20. Mr Holden was identified by Greater Manchester Police and arrested for the offence of sexual assault on 27 October 2021. Mr Holden did not report his arrest to Social Work England or to his employer.
21. Mr Holden was interviewed by Police in respect of the allegation on 27 October 2021 and provided an account in which he accepted touching Person A's bottom, but said that he believed she was consenting to this. He denied touching her vagina or inner

thigh at all. Mr Holden was charged with the offence of sexual assault on around 4 May 2022. He did not report his charge to Social Work England.

22. Mr Holden was tried in the magistrates' court for the offence of sexual assault and was acquitted, that is, found not guilty.

23. [Private]

### Allegations:

24. The allegation arising from the Regulatory Concerns referred by the Case Examiners on 10 October 2023 is:

*Whilst registered as a social worker:*

*1. On or around 16 October 2021 you touched Person A in the following ways:*

*a. Touching her bottom*

*b. Touching her thigh*

*c. Touching her pubic area*

*2. The touching at paragraph 1 was inappropriate in that Person A did not consent to the touching and you did not reasonably believe that Person A consented to the touching.*

*3. Your actions at paragraph 1 were sexually motivated*

*4. You did not declare to the regulator that you had been arrested and/or charged by Greater Manchester Police for the matters outlined in paragraph 1.*

*5. Your actions at paragraph 4 were dishonest.*

### Discontinuance application:

25. Ms Sharpe addressed the panel in line with the statement of case. In summary the panel was invited to discontinue the regulatory concerns against Mr Holden in full. It was explained that new evidence had come to light since the case examiners decision as set out below;

#### Evidence considered by the case examiners

1. The case examiners had the following evidence available which it considered to form its decision, the evidence included:

a. Person A's Police witness statement;

- b. Anonymised witness statements obtained from Person A's two flatmates;
- c. Record of police interview with Mr Holden;
- d. Emails between Social Work England and the Police regarding disclosure requests;
- e. Submissions from Mr Holden.

### New information

2. The following new information has been obtained since the case examiners' decision:

- a. Case Management Meeting decision in respect of the admissibility of Person A's hearsay evidence, dated 21 January 2026;
- b. Discontinuance Decision dated 11 December 2024;
- c. Information from Police regarding assisting with contacting anonymous flatmates;
- d. Information from Magistrates' Court regarding availability of information;
- e. Information from CPS regarding disposal / no further information retained and
- f. Information in relation to Mr Holden's registration renewal.

26. It was submitted that the new information in this case means that there is no longer a realistic prospect of the facts being found proved in relation to paragraph 1 and 2 (and consequently 3) on the basis that there is no direct evidence to support the allegations.

27. It was additionally submitted that the new information in this case means that there is no longer a realistic prospect of paragraph 4 amounting to misconduct, as Mr Holden's conduct did not amount to dishonesty (consequently paragraph 5 falling away on the same basis).

28. Ms Sharpe invited the panel to consider the imposition of a no impairment warning in relation to Mr Holden's failure to report his arrest to Social Work England.

### Panel decision on discontinuance:

29. When making their decision the panel took into account Social Work England's 'Discontinuance guidance'.

### Discontinuance of allegation 1, 2 and 3

30. The panel began by considering the case management meeting (“CMM”) decision of 21 January 2026. The CMM panel considered the admission of person A’s hearsay evidence and decided as follows;

*“35. The panel reviewed the steps taken by Social Work England to obtain a witness statement from Person A and secure her agreement to the final hearing. It noted that she was provided with information about special measures which could be applied for and that she initially agreed to be interviewed and provide a statement. However, she subsequently raised concerns when she was asked to review the CCTV footage saying that would be difficult for her. She was advised that if she did not give oral evidence there may be insufficient evidence to support the concerns. The panel noted that the draft witness statement was sent to her on 29 August 2025 with a request that she review and sign it, but no response was received. Further emails were sent to her on 18 September 2025 and 4 November 2025 with the same request but again, there was no response. The panel noted and understood that in the circumstances of this case Social Work England would not seek to compel Person A to attend by issuing a witness summons. In these circumstances the panel considered that reasonable steps had been taken to secure Person A’s attendance.*

*36. The panel considered whether there was a good reason for Person A’s non-attendance and consequently, for admitting her untested account as evidence. It noted that Person A had expressed anxiety about attending the final hearing but had been advised about the possible availability of special measures. She also indicated that her experience at the Magistrates’ Court had been distressing and she clearly indicated that reviewing the CCTV footage would be difficult for her to do. She was advised that without her giving oral evidence there may be insufficient evidence to support the allegations but nonetheless, she has declined to engage further with Social Work England and has not returned or confirmed her draft witness statement. The panel appreciated how difficult it may be to give evidence in cases of this nature, particularly on a second occasion and some years after the incident. However, although the panel could appreciate Person A’s anxiety and misgivings about attending the final hearing, Person A had not provided any definitive information about why she has withdrawn her cooperation. The panel therefore concluded that without a clear explanation from Person A as to her non engagement, it is difficult to assess the extent to which she has good reason for not attending the final hearing to give evidence.*

*37. The panel noted Social Work England’s submission that Person A’s evidence constitutes the sole or decisive evidence in respect of the allegations. The panel agreed with this conclusion, noting that Mr Holden contested the allegations, only accepting that he had touched Person A’s bottom in the belief that she consented. The panel considered whether there was any other evidence in support of the allegations bearing in mind Mr Holden’s contention that he had been falsely accused. The panel had viewed the CCTV footage, noting that it confirms that interaction took place between Mr Holden and Person A but it does not show any of the alleged touching. Person A’s father had contact with Person A after the incident but neither he nor any other witness can*

*provide direct evidence of the alleged touching. The panel therefore concluded that Person A's evidence is the sole or decisive evidence about the alleged touching, that she did not consent to it and that Mr Holden's belief that she consented was not reasonable. The panel further considered that, given Mr Holden's denials, Person A's account could only be tested if she was available for cross examination and therefore the panel could not conclude that her evidence is demonstrably reliable.*

*38. The panel considered the seriousness of the allegations, taking into account the impact which adverse findings may have on Mr Holden including his career. It concluded that the allegations were serious and, if proved, may result in a removal order and would be likely to significantly impact on Mr Holden's reputation and future prospects.*

*39. The panel also bore in mind the possible impact on the fairness of admitting Person A's hearsay evidence given the lack of any transcript or other information about the evidence given in the Magistrates' Court trial and the absence of any information about the reasons for Mr Holden's acquittal. The panel acknowledged that the evidence given in the Magistrates' Court could undermine or assist Social Work England or Mr Holden, but this cannot be ascertained. The panel considered that the absence of information about the evidence given in the trial had the potential to disadvantage Mr Holden and particularly so if Person A's evidence had revealed inconsistencies or had otherwise been undermined or weakened. In considering whether it would be fair to admit Person A's hearsay evidence in the final hearing the panel considered this potential disadvantage to Mr Holden was a relevant factor.*

*40. Having considered all the factors outlined above the panel concluded that it would not be fair to admit the hearsay evidence of Person A. Accordingly the Panel determined that Person A's hearsay evidence should not be admissible at the final hearing".*

31. The panel considered Rule 29 of the Rules which states that case management directions are binding on the parties and on any fitness to practise panel subsequently considering the case unless the panel considers that:

- (a) there has been a material change of circumstances; or
- (b) it is not in the interests of justice for that to be the case.

32. The panel decided in light of the position as forwarded by Social Work England there has not been a material change of circumstances nor anything to suggest that it would be in the interests of justice to depart from the CMM decision and direction that the hearsay evidence of Person A should not be admissible at final hearing.

33. The panel thus accepted the submissions of Social Work England and agreed that there is no longer a realistic prospect of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 succeeding as there is no admissible evidence to support the allegations being found proved as a matter of fact.

**Discontinuance of allegation 4 and 5**

34. In accordance with Rule 52(3) of the Rules the panel decided that there is insufficient evidence to make a finding of impairment and as such Mr Holden's fitness to practise is not impaired.
35. The panel noted that Mr Holden accepted that he did not inform Social Work England, or his employer of his arrest. Mr Holden confirmed that he only informed his employer of the charge, he stated that he was told by the police that no other notification was necessary and that he could continue working. Mr Holden also said that following the charge he did not inform Social Work England as he was under extraordinary levels of stress and anxiety and that he was also under the belief that his employers were going to inform Social Work England. Mr Holden indicated that he regretted this decision.
36. At the time of the concerns, Mr Holden was employed by MOSAIC (a substance and alcohol misuse service) in Stockport, as a Drug and Alcohol School Based Worker. This was a not a social work role, however, he was registered with Social Work England.
37. Mr Holden informed his employer that he was to be charged with the offence on 3 May 2022, the day before he was actually charged, or on the day he was charged and his employer then referred the matter to Social Work England on 14 June 2022.
38. The panel accepted the explanation as put forward by Mr Holden. It was satisfied that he failed to inform Social Work England due to the belief that he held at the time that this would be done by his employers. The panel was satisfied Mr Holden's omission fell short of amounting to misconduct as on the facts available that includes Mr Holden's mitigation, the personal insight demonstrated and his public acquittal of the criminal charges, it cannot be said that Mr Holden is personally or publicly impaired.
39. The panel also took note of and agreed with the previous panel's findings in relation to allegation 4 and 5 in the 'Final hearing application to discontinue in full decision of 09/10 December 2024'. The previous panel noted at paragraphs 71 – 73 of the decision stated *"The panel did not consider that there was sufficient evidence for a final hearing panel to find that Mr Holden's failure to declare to Social Work England that he had been arrested in connection with the incident on 16 October 2021 was dishonest, as alleged in Allegation 4. The reasons for this view were as follows:*
- *On being arrested, Mr Holden had disclosed to the police that he was a social worker. It is unlikely that he would have been done this if he was concerned about news of his arrest reaching Social Work England.*
  - *There was little evidence that Mr Holden was aware of the requirement in Social Work England's Professional Standards to report his arrest to Social Work England.*
  - *In his written responses to Social Work England, Mr Holden stated, "I accept that I had not inform [sic] anyone of my arrest and I did not inform my work prior to the official charge as I was told by the police it was not necessary and it was acceptable to keep working" and Mr Holden appeared to have acted in accordance with this advice. Similarly, the panel did not consider that there was sufficient evidence for a final hearing panel to find that Mr Holden's failure to declare to Social Work England that he had*

charged in connection with the incident on 16 October 2021 was dishonest, as alleged in Allegation 4. The reasons for this view were as follows:

- Mr Holden had disclosed to his employer that he would be charged on the day before he was actually charged. This indicated that he was acting in accordance with what he claims he had been told by a police officer after his arrest. It is also inconsistent with an intention to conceal his being charged from Social Work England as Mr Holden would have been aware that his employer would be likely to refer the matter to Social Work England.

- Mr Holden maintains that he was told by his line manager that his employer would refer the matter to Social Work England and that he had therefore not informed Social Work England of that matter himself. In her witness statement, Mr Holden's line manager confirmed that she had indeed told Mr Holden that his employer would refer the matter to Social Work England. She also expressed the view that "given that it had been 6 months since he had been arrested, self-referral to Social Work England was taken out of his hands".

- In addition, Mr Holden had, in his written responses to Social Work England, also explained "I did not inform Social Work England as following this situation I have been under extraordinary levels of stress and anxiety, this has resulted in my struggling greatly to do much of anything at all."

- As the panel did not consider that there was sufficient evidence for a panel to find Allegation 4 proved, it followed that it did not consider that there was sufficient evidence to support a finding of misconduct or impairment as a result of the dishonesty alleged in Allegation 4."

40. In accordance with Rule 52(3) of the Rules the panel decided that there is insufficient evidence to make a finding of impairment and as such Mr Holden's fitness to practise is not impaired.
41. The panel decided to impose a warning noting that there had been a breach of the professional standards, and even though it is not serious enough to amount to impairment. In these circumstances, a warning will reflect that that repetition of the behaviour could amount to impaired fitness to practise in the future.
42. In making this decision the panel has taken into account Social Work England's 'Impairment and sanctions guidance'.

#### Warning:

43. The panel issues a warning to Mr Holden because he failed to notify Social Work England promptly that he had been arrested and/or charged in relation to a criminal allegation. The panel considers that this conduct fell below the standards expected of a registered social worker, as timely disclosure of such matters is necessary to maintain public confidence in the profession and the regulator's ability to assess and manage risk. While the panel has found that Mr Holden's fitness to practise is not impaired on

the evidence available, Mr Holden is reminded of the requirement to inform Social Work England promptly of relevant criminal, police or regulatory matters in future. Any repetition of a failure to declare such matters may be treated more seriously and could result in a finding of impaired fitness to practise and regulatory action.

## The Professional Standards Authority

44. Please note that in accordance with section 29 of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002, a final decision made by Social Work England's panel of adjudicators can be referred by the Professional Standards Authority ("the PSA") to the High Court. The PSA can refer this decision to the High Court if it considers that the decision is not sufficient for the protection of the public. Further information about PSA appeals can be found on their website at:

<https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work-with-regulators/decisions-about-practitioners>.