

Case Examiner Decision
Richard S Bolt – SW22116
FTPS-22960

Contents

The role of the case examiners	3
Decision summary	4
The complaint and our regulatory concerns.....	6
Preliminary issues	9
The realistic prospect test	13
The public interest.....	26
Accepted disposal	27

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	
First preliminary outcome	16 April 2025
	Amendments requested Information requested Submissions requested
Second preliminary outcome	1 August 2025
	Accepted disposal proposed – removal order
Final outcome	4 September 2025
	Accepted disposal – removal order

Executive summary

This case was presented to case examiners following a successful request for review under the regulator's power to review case examiner decisions (fitness to practise rule 12G).

It was determined at stage two of the review process that:

- There was new information, which would probably have led to a different decision in respect of three regulatory concerns
- Four parts to the previous decision were revoked and, therefore, the case examiners would make a fresh decision in respect of those parts of the decision

- The previous case examiners' findings remain intact in respect of facts, grounds and impairment for one regulatory concern (1.2)

The case examiners considered the new evidence provided as part of the 12G review and initially paused their consideration of the case to request amendments and further information.

Upon receipt of an updated case file, the case examiners reached the following conclusions:

1. There is a realistic prospect of regulatory concerns 1 (1.1), 2, 3, 4 and 5 being found proven by the adjudicators. The previous case examiners' decision in respect of regulatory concern 1 (1.2) remains intact and there is a realistic prospect of it being found proven.
2. There is a realistic prospect of regulatory concerns 1 (1.1), 2, 3, 4 and 5 being found to amount to the statutory grounds of misconduct. The previous case examiners' decision in respect of regulatory concern 1 (1.2) remains intact and there is a realistic prospect of it amounting to the statutory grounds of misconduct.
3. For regulatory concerns 1 (1.1), 2, 3, 4 and 5, there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators determining that the social worker's fitness to practise is currently impaired. The previous case examiners' decision in respect of regulatory concern 1 (1.2) remains intact and there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators determining the social worker's fitness to practise is 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 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 subsequently confirmed that they accepted the terms of the proposed disposal in full, and having reviewed their decision, the case examiners remain of the view that a removal order remains the appropriate outcome for 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.

The complaint and our regulatory concerns

The initial complaint

The complainant	The complaint was raised by the social worker's former employer, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council
Date the complaint was received	21 November 2023
Complaint summary	

Regulatory concerns

As initially presented to the case examiners

Whilst registered as a social worker;

1. You failed to maintain professional boundaries in that you;
 - 1.1. Entered into an intimate relationship with [REDACTED] two children on your caseload.
 - 1.2. Attended the home address of [REDACTED] two children previously on your caseload, without professional reason to do so.
2. You failed to declare to your employer that you had entered into an intimate relationship with [REDACTED] two children on your caseload.
3. Your conduct at regulatory concern (2) was dishonest.

The matters outlined in regulatory concerns (1.1), (1.2), (2) & (3) amount to the statutory grounds of misconduct.

As amended by following adjournment (with further amendments by the case examiners in bold)

Whilst registered as a social worker;

1. You failed to maintain professional boundaries in that you;
 - 1.1. Entered into an inappropriate relationship with **a relative of** two children on your caseload.
 - 1.2. Attended the home address of **a parent of** two children previously on your caseload, without professional reason to do so.
2. You failed to declare to your employer that you had entered into an inappropriate relationship with **a relative of** two children on your caseload.
3. You informed Social Work England on the following dates; 5 February 2024, 14 March 2024 and/ or 28 August 2024; that a personal relationship with **a relative of** two children on your caseload, commenced after leaving your employment with Stockport Council, when you knew this to be false.
4. You provided the information in relation to regulatory concern 3 to Social Work England with the intention of trying to avoid or seeking to mitigate the severity of the regulatory action taken against you by Social Work England.
5. Your conduct alleged in regulatory concerns (2), (3) & (4) amounts to dishonesty.

The matters outlined in regulatory concerns 1- 5 amount to the statutory grounds of misconduct.

Your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of misconduct.

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.

In accordance with Social Work England's fitness to practise proceedings and registration appeals publications policy, the case examiners have anonymised the names of individuals to maintain privacy. A schedule of anonymity is provided below

for the social worker and complainant, and will be redacted if this decision is published.

Person A

Witness A

Preliminary issues

Investigation		
Are the case examiners satisfied that the social worker has been notified of the grounds for investigation?	Yes	☒
	No	☐
Are the case examiners satisfied that the social worker has had reasonable opportunity to make written representations to the investigators?	Yes	☒
	No	☐
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	☒
	No	☐
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	☒
	No	☐

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

The case examiners reviewed the 12G decision and the new evidence provided.

Amendments to the existing regulatory concerns

The case examiners recommended the following amendments to the regulatory concerns:

Whilst registered as a social worker;

1. You failed to maintain professional boundaries in that you;

1.1 Entered into an **intimate inappropriate** relationship with [REDACTED] of two children on your caseload.

2. You failed to declare to your employer that you had entered into an **intimate inappropriate** relationship with [REDACTED] of two children on your caseload.

The case examiners considered the amendments might be considered material, and as they were referring the case back to investigators on other matters, this would allow the social worker to be offered the opportunity to make submissions.

Potential new concern

The case examiners also identified a potential new concern, which was related, but distinct, to the existing regulatory concerns. The case examiners therefore recommended that the regulator consider the addition of a separate concern which alleges;

3. You sought to cover up the conduct described in regulatory concern 1.1.

The case examiners recommended that the regulatory concern regarding dishonesty be amended to include the new concern, as below.

4. Your conduct at regulatory concern (2) **and/or (3)** was dishonest.

The case examiners were mindful that social workers have the right to deny any concerns raised about them. However, relevant case law suggests that concerns can nevertheless be raised about a social worker who minimises or misrepresents their conduct during an investigation. The case examiners noted the social worker's most recent submissions, which clearly acknowledged that they were not honest about the extent and duration of their relationship with Person A. The social worker provided reasons for having done so, which included an awareness of potential consequences, should it be established that a relationship commenced whilst the social worker remained professionally involved with Person A.

The case examiners reserved judgment on any potential dishonesty concern, however they nevertheless noted that they considered there to be reasonable and legitimate cause, in accordance with relevant case law, for such a concern to be raised and explored.

For clarity, the case examiners suggested that the regulatory concerns read as follows;

Whilst registered as a social worker;

1. You failed to maintain professional boundaries in that you;

- 1.1. Entered into an inappropriate relationship with [REDACTED] of two children on your caseload.
- 1.2. Attended the home address of [REDACTED] two children previously on your caseload, without professional reason to do so.
2. You failed to declare to your employer that you had entered into an inappropriate relationship with [REDACTED] of two children on your caseload.
3. You sought to cover up the conduct described in regulatory concern 1.1.
4. Your conduct at regulatory concern (2) and/or (3) was dishonest.

The matters outlined in regulatory concerns (1.1), (1.2), (2) & (3) amount to the statutory grounds of misconduct.

Request for further information

The case examiners also identified 3 areas which might require some further action/clarification.

1. The case examiners recognised the attempts to engage Witness A and that it appeared an email address held by the regulator is no longer in use. They noted that the social worker's former employer, Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council, initially suggested Witness A as a possible witness and therefore might have had alternative contact details or further knowledge about who Witness A is and how they came to be in possession of the evidence provided to the regulator. The case examiners suggested that the regulator contact the local authority to see if any further information could be obtained.
2. It appeared the social worker's conduct in regulatory concern 1.2 occurred while the social worker was working in Wales. The case examiners suggested the regulator ascertain whether the social worker is also registered with Social Care Wales and if so, if they are aware of Social Work England's investigation.

3.





Once the amendments and requests for information have been considered, the case examiners suggested that it might be appropriate for the social worker to have a further opportunity to provide submissions.

Update – July 2025

The case examiners received an updated case investigation report and evidence bundle.

The case examiners noted that investigators had agreed to the addition of further concerns and had obtained further submissions from the social worker. Investigators have opted to set out the social worker's alleged dishonesty in greater detail and the case examiners have taken investigators' revised concerns forward in their deliberations.

Investigators also confirmed the following:

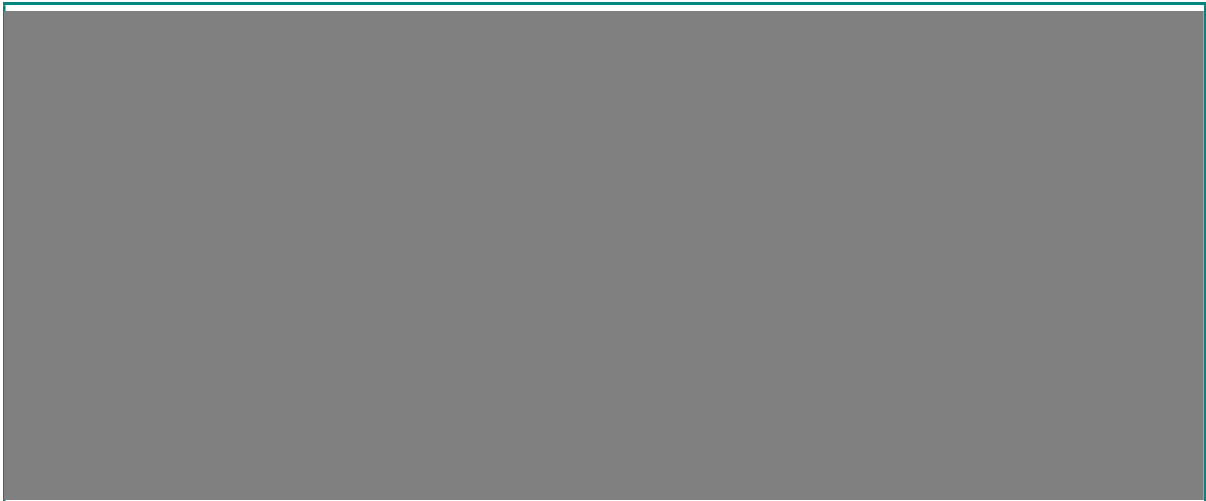
- The local authority hold no alternative contact details for Witness A.
- Social Care Wales are aware of this Social Work England investigation.

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The case examiners made some further, minor amendments to the regulatory concerns, in order to further anonymise members of the public. They were satisfied that their changes did not materially change the concerns and therefore no further submissions would be required.

The realistic prospect test

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 and 1.2), 2, 3, 4 and 5 being found proven, that those concerns could amount to the statutory grounds of misconduct, and that the social worker's fitness to practise could be found impaired.

Reasoning

Facts

Whilst registered as a social worker;

1. You failed to maintain professional boundaries in that you;

1.1. Entered into an inappropriate relationship with a relative of two children on your caseload.

The case examiners have carefully reviewed all available documentation and are satisfied that there is evidence to suggest the social worker entered into a

relationship with a relative of two children allocated to them. The case examiners' key reasoning is as follows:

- Documentation provided by the social worker's former employer suggests the social worker was allocated to the children from 18 August 2020 to 27 May 2022.
- Screenshots of case records indicate that the social worker had some professional contact with a relative of the two children, Person A.
- Screenshots of Person A's social media account suggest the social worker entered into a relationship with Person A. All social media posts available to the case examiners are dated after the social worker's professional involvement with the family had ended. However, a relationship status on Person A's social media site, the nature of which is disputed by the social worker, is dated March 2022.
- Screenshots of social media messages and emails provided by Witness A, along with further emails provided by the local authority, suggest overly familiar contact took place between the social worker and Person A from late March 2022 onwards. The case examiners consider it likely that adjudicators could reasonably characterise communication exchanged as flirtatious and, at times, professionally inappropriate. Emails include reference to Person A and the social worker meeting in person on a personal basis.
- The case examiners noted in particular that woven within broadly personal emails the social worker exchanged with Person A, were comments about the children and family the social worker was allocated to work with. On one occasion, in late March 2022, Person A referred to their communication with the social worker and stated [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The case examiners were particularly concerned by this comment, which suggests there were blurred personal and professional boundaries between the social worker and Person A.
- Of further concern, the case examiners noted that it appears the social worker was aware that they were likely misconducting themselves and made attempts to cover up their conduct with Person A. The case examiners noted, for example, that on 12 April 2022, the social worker emailed Person A from a personal email address, stating, *"You can use this account to keep in touch ... its an old account but its safe to use"* and *"Yes the work account can be monitored but it never needs to be"*.

- The case examiners are mindful that Person A is not a direct relative (i.e. they are not a parent) of the children that were allocated to the social worker. However, the case examiners are nevertheless satisfied that the social worker's relationship with Person A could be viewed as inappropriate and a failure to maintain professional boundaries. This is because the available evidence is clear that it commenced whilst the social worker was allocated to the family and whilst the social worker was engaging with Person A on a professional basis in order to support and inform assessments and wider work with the family. The case examiners consider the evidence to suggest the social worker was aware that their personal relationship with Person A was inappropriate.

In light of the above, there is a realistic prospect of regulatory concern 1 (1.1) being found proven.

1.2. Attended the home address of a parent of two children previously on your caseload, without professional reason to do so.

The previous case examiners' reasoning in respect of regulatory concern 1.2 is replicated below.

The case examiners have been provided with evidence from the [parent] which states that the social worker visited them at their home address when the social worker was no longer working with the family. The case examiners are not aware of any professional reason for the social worker to carry out the visit. The social worker accepts this and was clear with their previous employer that they had checked on the [parent's] well-being, contacting the subsequent social worker for the family to advise what the social worker observed during this visit.

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

2. You failed to declare to your employer that you had entered into an inappropriate relationship with a relative of two children on your caseload.

The case examiners have had sight of a local code of conduct, which sets out two key expectations of employees:

- First and foremost, the code of conduct is clear that if a conflict occurs between an employee's private interests and their duties for the employer, they must inform their manager.

- Secondary to this, the code of conduct is also clear that for employees who are registered professionals, they should refer to the ‘code of practice for any professions that they may belong to’ for further guidance on expected conduct. The relevant ‘code of conduct’ in this instance is Social Work England’s Professional Standards (2019), which are clear that social workers will maintain professional relationships with people (standard 2.3), and declare conflicts as early as possible (standard 2.7).

The case examiners noted that within their initial complaint to the regulator, the social worker’s former employer stated that in November 2023 they were informed that the social worker was in an ongoing relationship with Person A. The local authority confirmed that they were unaware of this relationship previously.

In light of the above, there is a realistic prospect of regulatory concern 2 being found proven.

3. You informed Social Work England on the following dates; 5 February 2024, 14 March 2024 and/ or 28 August 2024; that a personal relationship with a relative of two children on your caseload, commenced after leaving your employment with Stockport Council, when you knew this to be false.

The case examiners have reviewed copies of correspondence and submissions the social worker shared with the regulator. The case examiners are satisfied that on each of the three dates listed, the social worker shared information that they knew to be false with the regulator. The case examiners’ key reasoning is as follows:

- Within the social worker’s initial comments to the regulator, received on 5 February 2024, the social worker stated, *“At the time that I began the relationship with [Person A] I was not an employee of Stockport. I was not in conflict at the relevant time.”* The social worker has since admitted that this was not the case.
- Within later comments to the regulator, received on 14 March 2024, the social worker stated, *“I exchanged a personal email address with [Person A] on the last day of my employment with Stockport.”* As set out earlier in this decision, the case examiners have received evidence demonstrating that the social worker began emailing Person A from a personal email address in April 2022, and the social worker accepts that personal email communication commenced earlier than previously stated.
- Within the social worker’s submissions, received on 28 August 2024, the social worker stated, *“I did not intend to start a relationship with [Person A] prior to leaving employment with Stockport Council. However, I accept that by*

providing [Person A] with a personal email address I had agreed to remaining in contact with [Person A]" and "At the time I did not think I would go onto have a personal relationship with [Person A] and it was not my intention to do so."

The social worker has since admitted that this was not the case.

In light of the above, there is a realistic prospect of regulatory concern 3 being found proven.

4. You provided the information in relation to regulatory concern 3 to Social Work England with the intention of trying to avoid or seeking to mitigate the severity of the regulatory action taken against you by Social Work England.

The case examiners have reviewed submissions made by the social worker during the case examiner review (rule 12G) process and noted that the social worker stated, with regards to their conduct and the regulator's investigation, *"I made unwise and flawed decisions including that in my original submission and subsequent submission. I was aware that the sanction for my conduct could include removal from the register"*.

The social worker explained more broadly the impact that removal from the register would have on them personally and the case examiners are satisfied that it is likely the social worker's reasons for providing false information to the regulator were multi-faceted. However, they are nevertheless satisfied that the social worker's own evidence suggests they were mindful of the regulatory penalty they might face for their actions and that this formed a part of their decision to mislead the regulator.

In light of the above, there is a realistic prospect of regulatory concern 4 being found proven.

5. Your conduct alleged in regulatory concerns (2), (3) & (4) amounts to dishonesty.

In considering regulatory concern 5, the case examiners have applied the test for dishonesty, which consists of two parts – the subjective test and the objective test.

The subjective 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 case examiners have reviewed submissions made by the social worker through the case examiner review (rule 12G) process and in the time since this case was reopened.

In relation to regulatory concern 2:

- The social worker has stated that they were aware that their relationship with Person A was a breach of ‘the code of conduct’, and they knew they were ‘playing with fire’ in relation to their career.
- The social worker has accepted that they could have brought the matter to an end by informing their line manager, thereby avoiding any risk of disrepute for their employer.
- The social worker has accepted that by engaging in communication via a personal email address, they had become “deceitful”.
- In light of the above, the case examiners are satisfied that the evidence suggests the social worker knew that their employer ought to be made aware of their emerging relationship with Person A and, rather than informing the employer, the social worker took steps to conceal the matter.

In relation to regulatory concern 3 and regulatory concern 4:

- The social worker has stated that they had contact with Person A before leaving their employment with Stockport Council and that this was not the position they put forward in their submissions to the regulator. The social worker has stated this was an “act of dishonesty”.
- As set out earlier in this decision, the case examiners are satisfied that the social worker’s intentions in respect of the conduct alleged in regulatory concern 3 were likely multi-faceted. However, the social worker has nevertheless been clear that they were aware that their conduct could result in removal from the register and they have indicated that this influenced the content of their submissions.
- In light of the above, the case examiners are satisfied that the evidence suggests the social worker knew their submissions on when their relationship with Person A commenced were false. The case examiners are also satisfied that the evidence suggests the social worker’s intentions were to (at least in part) avoid or mitigate the severity of regulatory action taken against them by Social Work England.

The objective test

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 are satisfied that ordinary decent people would likely consider the social worker's conduct in regulatory concerns 2, 3 and 4 to be dishonest. The available evidence suggests the social worker knowingly sought to cover up their relationship with Person A by failing to declare it to their employer, and knowingly sought to mislead the regulator as to when the relationship commenced in order to avoid or mitigate the severity of regulatory sanction.

In light of the above, there is a realistic prospect of regulatory concern 5 being found proven.

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.

Social Work England – Professional Standards (2019)

As a social worker, I will:

2.1 Be open, honest, reliable and fair.

2.2 Respect and maintain people's dignity and privacy.

2.3 Maintain professional relationships with people and ensure that they understand the role of a social worker in their lives.

2.7 Consider where conflicts of interest may arise, declare conflicts as early as possible and agree a course of action.

6.7 Cooperate with any investigations by my employer, Social Work England, or another agency, into my fitness to practise or the fitness to practise of others.

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 previous case examiners' assessment of regulatory concern 1 (1.2)

Whilst the [parent] of the children has not raised any concerns about the social worker visiting them after their professional involvement ended, the case examiners are of the view that maintaining contact is likely to be confusing. The case examiners are aware that the social worker appears to have been concerned about the [parent's] wellbeing, as [they] suffered from poor mental health. However, there were clearly other services and professionals involved, who could have monitored and supported the [parent] of the children.

The case examiners are satisfied there is a realistic prospect of regulatory concern 1.2 being found to amount to the statutory grounds of misconduct.

The case examiners' assessment of regulatory concern 1 (1.1)

The case examiners are satisfied that adjudicators could reasonably conclude that the conduct alleged in regulatory concern 1 (1.1) represents a significant departure from professional standards 2.3 and 5.2. The case examiners' key reasoning is as follows:

- Social workers hold privileged positions of trust and it is important that they are alert to relationships becoming inappropriate.
- The case examiners recognise that Person A was not a direct (i.e. parental) relative of the children allocated to the social worker. However, as the case examiners have set out earlier in this decision, they are nevertheless satisfied that adjudicators could reasonably conclude that the social worker's relationship with Person A was inappropriate. This is because there is evidence of the social worker having had professional involvement with Person A, whilst exercising their duties in respect of the two allocated children, and there is also some evidence of the social worker blurring personal and professional in their communications with Person A.
- In the case examiners' view, it is an aggravating factor in respect of regulatory concern 1 (1.1) that the evidence suggests the social worker was well aware

that their relationship with Person A was unprofessional and took steps to conceal it.

- The case examiners consider the social worker's conduct to represent a significant abuse of trust, with the social worker having disregarded professional boundaries in full understanding of the impact their conduct could have on confidence in them as a social worker, their employer and the wider social work profession.

The case examiners' assessment of regulatory concerns 2, 3, 4 and 5

The case examiners are satisfied that adjudicators could reasonably conclude that the conduct alleged in regulatory concerns 2, 3, 4 and 5 represents a significant departure from professional standards 2.1, 2.7, 5.2 and 6.7. The case examiners' key reasoning is as follows:

- Honesty is key to good social work practice. Social workers are relied upon when important decisions are made about service users, their relatives and carers. It is therefore essential that social workers can be trusted to be open and honest.
- It is of paramount importance that social workers declare conflicts of interest. Failure to do so prevents assessment of risk and the implementation of protective measures by employers. In this case, there is evidence to suggest the social worker actively and knowingly concealed a conflict of interest - their relationship with Person A. The case examiners consider this to represent a particularly serious example of dishonesty and an abuse of trust.
- It is also of paramount importance that social workers are open and honest with their regulator. Whilst the case examiners accept that all social workers have the right to deny allegations, relevant case law is clear that a professional who gives a false or misleading account of actions and events when confronted with allegations of wrongdoing is highly likely to be someone who does not understand the importance of their professional responsibilities. The social worker's previous submissions to the regulator were lengthy, detailed and, it now appears, substantially false.
- The case examiners are satisfied that the evidence in this case suggests that the social worker did, in fact, understand their professional responsibilities, but sought to conceal the extent of their conduct for personal gain. The case examiners are satisfied that adjudicators might reasonably consider such conduct to be exceptionally serious.

Conclusions

In light of the above, the case examiners are satisfied that there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators determining that in respect of regulatory concerns 1 (1.1), 2, 3, 4 and 5, the statutory grounds of misconduct are engaged.

Impairment

Assessment of impairment consists of two elements:

- The personal element, established via an assessment of the risk of repetition.
- 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

Although the case examiners are satisfied that the social worker's crossing of professional boundaries with Person A was serious, they nevertheless consider that it is capable of remedy. The case examiners consider that the social worker could remedy this particular concern through a demonstration of clear and unambiguous insight and reflection on the importance of professional boundaries, and the impact that a failure to maintain them may have on public confidence in the social work profession.

With regards to the dishonest conduct before the regulator, the case examiners are mindful of their decision making guidance, which explains that cases involving dishonest conduct can be more challenging to remediate. This is because it is more difficult to produce objective evidence of reformed character.

In this case, the case examiners consider that it would be exceptionally challenging for the social worker to successfully demonstrate that they have remedied concerns in respect of dishonesty. This is because it would appear that the social worker knowingly sought to conceal their relationship with Person A from their employer, and they maintained a position minimising the extent of the relationship for a

substantial period of time, across three separate sets of submissions to the regulator. The evidence is clear that admissions were only made once it was apparent that the regulator had obtained key evidence in support of the concerns.

In light of the above, although the case examiners are satisfied that the social worker's crossing of professional boundaries is capable of being easily remedied, the social worker's dishonesty is not.

Insight and remediation

With regards to regulatory concern 1 (1.2), the previous case examiners stated the following:

The social worker also indicated that they had reflected on why they chose to visit the [parent] of the children, describing it as an opportunistic visit as they were in the area and they had never visited a service user after professional involvement, before or since. The social worker accepts that they overstepped the boundaries of their role and have considered how they will prevent this being repeated, "I would be significantly more reflective in supervision and explore the family dynamics with managers to ensure that my working relationship with families is as open and honest as possible".

The case examiners have carefully reviewed the social worker's submissions. Having done so, the case examiners consider the social worker to have shown a degree of insight into the concerns before the regulator.

The case examiners noted that the social worker accepts that they have brought their profession into disrepute. The social worker recognises that they crossed professional boundaries and that their dishonesty is likely to be of concern to the regulator and the public. In the case examiners' view, the social worker has some level of genuine remorse for doing so.

The social worker has also offered some reflection on what they could and should have done differently, both in terms of managing emerging feelings for Person A with their employer, and in being candid with the regulator. However, the social worker has been clear in their submissions that they were essentially 'unable' to stop themselves once a relationship started to form with Person A. In the case examiners' view, the social worker has failed to demonstrate an understanding of how they personally would act differently in the future if professional boundaries were to start to slip, or if they were subject to further regulatory investigation.

Risk of repetition

In the case examiners' view, although the social worker has demonstrated an awareness of how serious their conduct has been, there remain a number of gaps in the social worker's insight. Accordingly, the case examiners can only conclude that 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.

As the case examiners have set out at the grounds stage, they consider all elements of this case to represent particularly serious departures from the professional standards. The case examiners have also set out in this decision their view that the social worker is unlikely to be able to easily remediate their dishonest conduct, and the case examiners have determined that a risk of repetition remains.

It is of paramount importance that the public can trust social workers to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with people they are supporting and working with on a professional basis. Furthermore, it is essential that the public can trust that social workers will be honest with their employers and their regulator.

The case examiners consider that well informed members of the public would therefore be concerned if a finding of impairment was not made in this case. Accordingly, a failure to find impairment could seriously undermine public confidence in the social work profession, and in the regulator's maintenance of proper professional standards for social workers.

In light of the above, there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators determining that the social worker's fitness to practise is impaired.

The public interest

Decision summary

Is there a public interest in referring the case to a hearing?	Yes	☐
	No	☒

Referral criteria

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

Additional reasoning

The case examiners are satisfied that there are no conflicts in the available evidence, and the social worker has accepted all of the key facts in this case.

The case examiners have determined that the public interest in this case is engaged, but consider that it could appropriately be addressed through the accepted disposal process, which includes the publication of a decision on the regulator's website.

Accepted disposal

Case outcome

Proposed outcome	No further action	☐
	Advice	☐
	Warning order	☐
	Conditions of practice order	☐
	Suspension order	☐
	Removal order	☒
Proposed duration	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.	

Reasoning

Having found a realistic prospect the social worker's fitness to practise is currently impaired, the case examiners then considered what, if any, sanction they should propose in this case. The case examiners have taken into account the sanctions guidance published by Social Work England. They are reminded that a sanction is not intended to be punitive but may have a punitive effect and have borne in mind the principle of proportionality and fairness in determining the appropriate sanction.

The case examiners are also mindful that the purpose of any sanction is to protect the public which includes maintaining public confidence in the profession and Social Work England as its regulator, and upholding proper standards of conduct and behaviour.

The case examiners have taken into account the principle of proportionality by weighing the social worker's interests with the public interest when considering each available sanction in ascending order of severity.

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

No further action, advice and warning

The case examiners consider that the outcomes of no further action, advice, and warning order would be insufficient in this case.

In reaching this conclusion, they reminded themselves that the regulator's sanctions guidance is clear that all three outcomes, which offer no restriction to a social worker's practice, are not appropriate where a risk of repetition remains. In addition, the case examiners consider that all three outcomes would be insufficient to mark the seriousness of the concerns before the regulator.

Conditions of practice order

With reference to the regulator's sanctions guidance, the case examiners note the following:

Conditions of practice may be appropriate in cases where (all of the following):

- *the social worker has demonstrated insight*
- *the failure or deficiency in practice is capable of being remedied*
- *appropriate, proportionate, and workable conditions can be put in place*
- *decision makers are confident the social worker can and will comply with the conditions*
- *the social worker does not pose a risk of harm to the public by being in restricted practice*

In considering the above factors, the case examiners are satisfied that although the social worker's evidence of insight is limited, it is nevertheless the case that the social worker has demonstrated some insight.

However, in the case examiners' view, a conditions of practice order would nonetheless be insufficient in this case, in part because the available evidence suggests the social worker has already sought to mislead the regulator. Accordingly, adjudicators could only have limited confidence in any submissions and evidence submitted by the social worker in accordance with any conditions of practice that might be formulated.

The case examiners note that this position is supported by their decision making guidance, which explains that conditions of practice are unlikely to be appropriate in cases of dishonesty.

In light of the above, the case examiners are satisfied that a conditions of practice order would be insufficient to protect the public and, in any event, the case examiners consider that such an order would also fail to mark the serious nature of the concerns before them.

Suspension order

With reference to the regulator's sanctions guidance, the case examiners note the following:

Suspension may be appropriate where (all of the following):

- *the concerns represent a serious breach of the professional standards*
- *the social worker has demonstrated some insight*
- *there is evidence to suggest the social worker is willing and able to resolve or remediate their failings*

For the reasons set out earlier in this decision, the case examiners are satisfied that the concerns in this case represent a serious breach of the professional standards. The case examiners are also satisfied that the social worker has demonstrated some, albeit limited, insight.

However, given the social worker has made clear that they do not intend to return to practice, the case examiners are satisfied that there is no evidence to suggest the social worker is willing or able to resolve or remediate their failings. The case examiners consider also that regulatory concerns 2, 3, 4 and 5 in this case could reasonably call into question the social worker's fitness to hold a position of trust and responsibility. The case examiners consider that the public might therefore question whether a suspension order would be sufficient in the circumstances to mark the serious nature of the concerns before the regulator, or to maintain public confidence in the social work profession.

Removal order

With reference to the regulator's sanctions guidance, the case examiners note the following:

A removal order must be made where the decision makers conclude that no other outcome would be enough to (do one or more of the following):

- *protect the public*
- *maintain confidence in the profession*
- *maintain proper professional standards for social workers in England*

A removal order may be appropriate in cases involving (any of the following):

- *abuses of position or trust (see section ‘abuse of trust’)*
- *sexual misconduct (see section ‘sexual misconduct’)*
- *dishonesty, especially where persistent and/or concealed (see section ‘dishonesty’)*
- *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)*

Having stepped through all lesser sanctions, the case examiners must consider whether a removal order is the only outcome that would be sufficient to protect the public, maintain public confidence in the social work profession, and/or maintain proper professional standards for social workers. In the case examiners’ view, it is the case that all three criteria apply. The case examiners’ key reasoning is as follows:

- The social worker has been clear that they do not intend to return to practice and, accordingly, the social worker’s ability to remediate the concerns before the regulator is limited.
- The case examiners consider the social worker’s crossing of professional boundaries, in respect of a relationship with Person A, to represent an abuse of trust. Whilst the case examiners recognise the nuances of this case, in that Person A was not a direct relative of the children allocated to the social worker, they nevertheless consider the social worker’s conduct to have been serious because the social worker was still actively working with the family when the relationship commenced.
- With regards to dishonesty, the available evidence suggests the social worker actively sought to mislead the regulator for personal gain. The case examiners consider the social worker’s conduct to have been sufficiently serious as to

call into question the social worker's fitness to hold a position of trust and responsibility.

- As a result of the social worker's dishonesty, the regulator's ability to assess risk and protect the public was negatively impacted upon. A fitness to practise decision was made that, in the case examiners' view, was insufficient to protect the public. It is only thanks to a member of the public sharing additional evidence, which unveiled the social worker's dishonesty, that the regulator has been able to revisit and reassess the social worker's fitness to practise. Had Witness A not challenged the social worker's evidence, it is plausible that the public would remain insufficiently protected.

Taking all of the above into consideration, the case examiners consider that a removal order is necessary first to protect the public, but also to ensure that public confidence in the social work profession is maintained. A removal order will also set out clearly for the wider profession the expectations of the regulator in respect of maintaining appropriate professional boundaries, and of being open and honest with employers and the regulator.

The case examiners have decided to propose to the social worker a removal order. They 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 1 September 2025 the social worker accepted the proposed disposal, confirming as follows:

"I agree with this method of disposal and removal from the register".

Case examiners' response and final decision

In light of the social worker's acceptance of the removal order, the case examiners have considered again whether there would be a public interest in referring this

matter to a hearing. They remain of the view that this is unnecessary for the reasons set out earlier in the decision. Having been advised of the social worker's response, the case examiners have again turned their minds as to whether a removal order remains the most appropriate means of disposal for this case. They have reviewed their decision, paying particular regard to the overarching objectives of Social Work England, i.e. protection of the public, the maintenance of public confidence in the social work profession, and the maintenance of proper standards. Having done so, they remain of the view that an accepted disposal by way of a removal order is a fair and proportionate disposal, and is the minimum necessary to protect the public and the wider public interest.