

Name: Tracy Hands
Case Number: RES-23797
Restoration application hearing

Hearing Venue: Remote hearing

Date of hearing: 24 July 2025

Hearing Outcome: Restored

Introduction and attendees:

1. This was a hearing to consider an application from Ms Tracy Hands to be restored to Social Work England's register of social workers (the "**Register**"). The application was dated 22 August 2024 and made pursuant to Regulation 15 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018 (as amended).
2. Ms Hands attended but was not represented.
3. Social Work England was represented by Ms Aoife Kennedy, Counsel instructed by Capsticks LLP, solicitors to Social Work England.
4. The panel of adjudicators considering this application (the "**panel**") and the other people involved in this hearing were as follows:

Adjudicators	Role
Wendy Yeadon	Chair
Rosemary Chapman	Social Work Adjudicator

Jo Cooper	Hearings Officer
Lauryn Green	Hearing Support Officer
Charles Redfearn	Legal Adviser

Background to application:

Ms Hands' employment before the regulatory proceedings

5. Ms Hands qualified as a social worker on 25 June 2009. On 12 October 2015, she started working for Staffordshire County Council in an adult learning disability team. On 16 February 2016, due to concerns about her practice, Ms Hands was made subject to an informal performance improvement plan. However, concerns about Ms Hands' ability to complete her work and make records continued and she resigned in March 2016.

Substantive hearing panel's findings of fact

6. Between 5 and 7 June 2017, a panel appointed by the Health and Care Professions Council (the "**HCPC**"), Social Work England's predecessor as regulator of social workers in England, conducted a substantive hearing of the following allegations against Ms Hands:

Whilst employed as a Social Worker by Staffordshire County Council between 12 October 2015 and 15 March 2016:

1. In relation to Service User A:

- a) Between 24 December 2015 and 11 March 2016 you did not undertake and/or record any contact with the police;*
- b) Between 7 January 2016 and 11 March 2016 you did not undertake and/or record any visits to Service User A;*
- c) Between 24 December 2015 and 11 March 2016 you did not undertake and/or record an enquiry report;*

2. In relation to Service User B:

- a) Between 26 February 2016 and 11 March 2016 you did not complete and/or record your completion of a Mental Capacity Assessment of Service User B;*
- b) Between 26 February 2016 and 11 March 2016 you did not complete and/or record your completion of a referral to advocacy for Service User B;*
- c) Between 26 February 2016 and 11 March 2016 you did not contact Service User B to obtain her views;*
- d) Between 26 February 2016 and 11 March 2016 you did not liaise with community nurses and/or carers regarding Service User B; 2 191*
- e) Between 26 February 2016 and 11 March 2016 you did not ensure that protective measures were in place for Service User B.*

3. In relation to Service User C:

- a) Between 26 October 2015 and 11 March 2016 you did not adequately communicate with other professionals and/or the adoptive parent in relation to Service User C.*
- b) You did not complete an adequate FACE Overview Assessment of Service User C;*
- c) Between 10 November 2015 and 2 February 2016, you did not maintain adequate contact with Service User C;*
- d) Your actions at 3a, 3b and/or 3c caused a delay to Service User C's discharge from hospital;*

4. In relation to Service User D:

- a) Between October 2015 and 11 March 2016 you did not fully complete your FACE Overview Assessment of Service User D;*

b) You did not provide your FACE Overview Assessment of Service User D to the Continuing Health Care Funding Panel arranged for 9 March 2016 in a timely manner;

c) Your actions at 4a and/or 4b caused a delay to Service User discharge from hospital;

7. The substantive hearing panel found all of the allegations proved (except for 2(d) in relation to carers and 4(c) in relation to 4a).

Substantive hearing panel's findings on misconduct

8. With regard to the nature and effects of the failings on the part of Ms Hands set out in the allegations, the substantive hearing panel found as follows:
"The facts found proved relate to fundamental duties of a social worker, namely to carry out visits with service users, to communicate with other professionals, to complete assessments, to make records and to ensure that protective measures are put in place to safeguard vulnerable service users. Service Users A, B, C and D were vulnerable. Service Users A and B were the subjects of safeguarding concerns and were at a real risk of harm. Service Users C and D were vulnerable because they were reliant on the Registrant to assist in their discharge from hospital. Service User C had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and, on hospital staff assessing him as fit for discharge, it was particularly important that there were no delays in the Registrant assisting to secure his discharge. In the event, the discharge from hospital of Service Users C and D was delayed by the Registrant's omissions."
9. The substantive hearing panel also considered that Ms Hands had failed in the basic duties of liaising with other professionals, visiting service users and making assessments despite having significant support and supervision and a substantially reduced caseload.
10. In the circumstances, the substantive hearing panel found that the failings on the part of Ms Hands set out in the allegations amounted to misconduct.

Substantive hearing panel's findings on impairment

11. With regard to insight and remediation, the substantive hearing panel concluded, *"The Panel has not had any evidence of reflection or any real insight from the Registrant about how her omissions impacted upon the service users in question, or upon public confidence in the profession and how she would do things differently in the future. There was no evidence presented to it of any attempts by the Registrant to remediate her failings or undertake training which would assist in guarding against such failings recurring in the future."* In the circumstances, the substantive hearing panel found that Ms Hands' fitness to practise was impaired.

Substantive hearing panel's decision on sanction

12. With regard to sanction, the substantive hearing panel considered that, given the nature and seriousness of Ms Hands' misconduct and that it involved safeguarding, taking no further action or making a caution order were not appropriate as such measures would be insufficient to protect service users or maintain public confidence. Likewise, the substantive hearing panel decided that a conditions of practice order was not suitable because, during the time to which the allegations related, Ms Hands had the benefit of good supervision from a supportive line manager, which was insufficient to prevent her omissions from occurring and continuing. Accordingly, the substantive hearing panel made a nine-month final suspension order in respect of Ms Hands. The substantive hearing panel consider that *"This will protect the public, maintain public confidence in the profession and will uphold proper professional standards. At the same time it will allow the Registrant time in which to develop her insight into her misconduct and reflect on its impact upon the service users and upon public confidence in the profession."*

First review of final suspension order

13. The final suspension order was reviewed on 13 March 2018 by a panel appointed by the HCPC. Ms Hands did not attend that review.
14. With regard to impairment, the note of the first review stated, *"This Panel has concluded that the Registrant's fitness to practise is currently impaired. In coming to this conclusion this Panel noted that the Registrant had not engaged with the HCPC since the hearing last year. She has not provided any of the material that the original panel suggested would be of assistance to a reviewing panel. This Panel determined that for precisely the same reasons as those stated by the original Panel ... the Registrant's fitness to practise remains impaired. Both the personal and the public component remain engaged."*
15. In terms of sanction, the first review panel extended the final suspension order by nine months. The note of the first review explained, *"This Panel ... considered an extension of the existing Suspension Order. It was deeply troubled by the fact that the Registrant has not engaged with the HCPC since the last hearing and, in particular, that she has not complied with the suggestions made by the original Panel as to what would assist this Panel. However, this Panel has applied the principle of proportionality. It has taken into account that the matters found proved, are in principle, remediable in character. In these circumstances, this Panel concluded, albeit not without some hesitation, that on this occasion, the first review of the original Order, it would be disproportionate to make a Striking Off Order. Accordingly, this Panel has decided to make a further 9 months Suspension Order. However, and whilst not in any way seeking to bind any future panel, this Panel would urge the Registrant to engage with the HCPC and to comply with the suggestions made by the original Panel, which are summarised above. The Registrant should understand that, in the absence of engagement by her and should she fail to*

comply with the suggestions made by the original Panel, there is a very real possibility that the next review will result in the making of a Striking off Order.”

Second review of final suspension order

16. The extended final suspension was reviewed on 30 November 2018 by a panel appointed by the HCPC.
17. Ms Hands did not attend this review but she provided six pages of written submissions. Those submissions:
 - described in detail her then current role as Mental Health Community Partner for the Department for Work and Pensions (the “DWP”);
 - detailed her achievements in the role, including the training which she had delivered to DWP staff, including training on safeguarding;
 - listed the learning and development which she had undertaken in relation to her role, which comprised attending meetings, groups, talks and conferences relating to safeguarding people with mental health conditions.
18. Notwithstanding that information, the reviewing panel concluded that Ms Hands’ fitness to practise remained impaired. In that regard, the reviewing panel explained, *“In coming to this conclusion this Panel noted that the Registrant had not provided core material that would have provided the Panel with evidence that the Registrant had gained insight into her former behaviour and what steps she had taken to ensure that there would be no repetition of her misconduct. The information supplied by the Registrant was unsupported by independent evidence of her current skills and abilities or education and training. This Panel determined that for precisely the same reasons as those stated by the final hearing and previous reviewing panel ... the fitness to practise remains impaired, both on the personal and the public components of its decision.”*
19. With regard to sanction, the note of the second review stated, *“This Panel then considered an extension of the existing Suspension Order. It was deeply troubled by the fact that the Registrant has not engaged with the HCPC since the last hearing and, in particular, that she has not, even now, fully complied with the suggestions made by the final hearing panel and previous reviewing panels as to what would assist this Panel. Further, the information which the Registrant has supplied shows little understanding of what is required in terms of insight. The lack of any supporting evidence of training, courses attended, and qualifications gained, was of concern. There was no evidence to support the Registrant’s assertions in her emailed letter that she has fully addressed the Panel’s concerns.”*
20. The second reviewing panel then considered the guidance and suggestions which had been provided to Ms Hands by the panels conducting the substantive hearing and the first review and by the HCPC. The second reviewing panel noted *“the strenuous steps which the HCPC had taken to bring to the Registrant’s attention the importance of her*

presenting to the panel information in terms of the guidance issued by the previous panels”.

21. Having determined that allowing the extended final suspension order to lapse or making a caution order or a conditions of practice order would not be appropriate, the second reviewing panel considered whether to further extend the final suspension order or whether to make a strike-off order. In that regard, it concluded, “... *the Registrant has shown an unwillingness to resolve matters and has not taken sufficient steps to demonstrate that she has remediated her previous failings or taken the opportunity of reflecting fully on her former behaviour, therefore has decided that after an 18-months’ suspension order only a Strike Off Order is appropriate and proportionate.*”

Submissions:

Submissions and documents from Ms Hands

22. In advance of this hearing, Ms Hands provided the following documents:
- a 15 page reflective statement;
 - details of her employment since July 2017;
 - 33 training certificates relating to courses taken by Ms Hands between January 2024 and February 2025;
 - a completed Updating Skills and Knowledge form, which stated that Ms Hands had completed 214.5 hours of private study, comprising reading and undertaking short courses, some of which were evidenced by the training certificates which Ms Hands had provided;
 - confirmation that she completed a post-qualification framework programme entitled Critical Reflection Professional Learning and Development between 23 May 2023 to 9 October 2023 at the University of Central Lancashire; and
 - three testimonials from former colleagues.
23. At this hearing, Ms Hands made oral submissions and responded to questions from the panel.
24. In her submissions, Ms Hands:
- acknowledged the seriousness of the failings in her practice which had led to the finding of misconduct against her;
 - accepted full responsibility for those failings and acknowledged their impact and potential impact on the service users concerned, the public and the social work profession;

- recognised the need for trust and accountability on the part of social workers and that her failings whilst at Staffordshire County Council had breached that trust and adversely impacted Social Work England's professional standards, the public's perception of social workers and the reputation of the social work profession
- stated that she was truly sorry for her misconduct.

25. **[PRIVATE]**

26. Ms Hands explained that the postgraduate course which she had undertaken at the University of Central Lancashire was a course for social workers returning to social work and she had undertaken it at the suggestion of Social Work England.
27. Referring to her current role as Mental Health Lead for the DWP in "Midlandshires", Ms Hands emphasised that she had done a lot of work training and developing a lot of different people in matters relating to mental health awareness and safeguarding. She stated that she now had a good understanding of how to keep people safe and recognised the need to follow the procedures which had been put in place for that purpose. Ms Hands explained that she had always felt a need to help people and social work had fulfilled that need but now she helped people through her current employment.
28. Referring to the training which she had undertaken, Ms Hands stated that, as a result of this training, she had improved her time-management, organisational and prioritization skills and had more awareness of the need to maintain up to date records. Ms Hands also stated that she had done a lot of reflection on her misconduct.
29. With regard to the three testimonials which she had provided, Ms Hands confirmed that she had made their authors aware of the regulatory findings against her and considered that to do otherwise would be dishonest.

Submissions on behalf of Social Work England

30. In advance of this hearing, Social Work England provided written submissions. At the hearing, Ms Kennedy reiterated those submissions.
31. As far as training and remediation are concerned, Social Work England accepted that *"Based on the information provided by the Applicant, it appears that she has satisfied the requirement to spend at least 60 days updating skills, knowledge and experience in the 12 months prior to submitting her restoration application"*. However, in terms of remedying the failings in Ms Hands' practice which had led to the findings of misconduct against her, Social Work England submitted that *"... the training does not appear to address the concerns which led to the Applicant's removal from the Register. For example, there is nothing which immediately appears to address record keeping or completing assessments/carrying out visits with service users. Further, the majority of the courses were completed in quick succession. For example, eighteen of the courses were completed over an eight-day period (4-9 February 2024), and eight courses were*

completed on 6 February 2025. Without further explanation from the Applicant, the panel may question how in-depth this training was.”

32. With regard to the three testimonials provided by Ms Hands, Social Work England submitted that these were of limited value given their lack of detail or reference to the concerns which led to Ms Hands’ removal from the Register.
33. Commenting on Ms Hands’ reflective piece, Social Work England submitted, “... *the reflective piece is general and superficial. It reads like a piece of academic writing that could be applied generally to social work. However, it does not detail in any meaningful way what led to the concerns with the Applicant’s practice; how the training she has done is relevant and has addressed the concerns; or how she would apply her learning if she were to practise as a social worker again in the future... She has not demonstrated meaningful insight or provided reassurances that the risk of repetition has reduced since her removal from the Register. The Applicant does not refer to the findings of the final hearing panel at all in her reflection. She does not refer to any of the service users or specific incidents which led to her strike-off. She does not detail the relevance of her employment since her removal, or what she has learned from the multiple training certificates she has provided*”.
34. Social Work England concluded its written submissions by saying, “*The past behaviour of the Applicant was very serious, spanning a 5-month period and relating to four vulnerable service users. The Applicant has provided limited meaningful or focused reflection in respect of the substantive panel’s findings. There is no evidence provided which offers any explanation as to what led to the Applicant’s omissions, and there is limited evidence of insight into the potential harm to the service users in question or confidence in the wider profession. Further, the Applicant has not demonstrated if or how she has remediated the concerns through training or employment... The Applicant has been out of social work practice since 2016 and has provided limited information in respect of how she has spent her time over the last 9 years... Taking the above matters into account, Social Work England do not consider that the Applicant has demonstrated that she is capable of safe and effective practice.*”

Panel’s decision:

Legal Advice

35. The panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal adviser on restoration applications. In that advice, which is referred to in more detail in the panel’s decision, the Legal Adviser referred the panel to regulations 11 and 15 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018, as amended (the “**Regulations**”), rules 18 to 24 of Social Work England’s Fitness to Practise Rules (the “**FTP Rules**”), Social Work England’s Registration Rules (the “**Registration Rules**”), Social Work England’s Guidance on Applications after Removal Orders (the “**Restoration Guidance**”) and Social Work

England's Impairment and Sanctions Guidance (the "**Impairment and Sanctions Guidance**").

36. The panel understood from that advice that:
- Reg 15(4) of the Regulations sets out the three conditions which must be satisfied in order for Ms Hands to be eligible to be restored to the Register.
 - One of those conditions states that Ms Hands must satisfy the four conditions for registration set out in reg. 11(2).
 - One of the conditions in reg. 11(2) is that she must be capable of safe and effective practice. This, in turn, involves consideration of the extent to which Ms Hands has developed insight into, and remedied, the failings in her practice which led to the finding of misconduct against her.
37. In addition, the Legal Adviser referred the panel to the case of *General Medical Council v Chandra [2018] EWCA Civ 1898*, in which the Court of Appeal held that, when a person applies to be restored to a professional register after being struck off:
- The panel considering the application is required, by statute, to have regard to, and to actively pursue, the over-arching objective, which comprises not only protecting the health, safety and well-being of the public but also maintaining public confidence and proper professional standards.
 - The panel considering the application should therefore first consider with care all of the evidence of remediation against the backdrop of the matters which had led to erasure and make findings in that respect. It should then metaphorically step back and balance those findings against each of the three limbs of the over-arching objective.

Matters taken into account

38. In arriving at its decision in this matter, the panel took account of the advice provided by the Legal Adviser and the regulations, rules, guidance and case law to which he referred; the submissions from Ms Hands and Social Work England; and the documents in the hearing bundle.

Form and content of the application

39. The Legal Adviser had informed the panel that rule 18 of the FTP Rules requires that an application for restoration after a removal order must (a) be made in writing; (b) include certificates of any relevant education or training courses, which the applicant has successfully completed since the removal order was made; (c) provide details of any employment, paid or unpaid, undertaken by the applicant since the removal order was made; and (d) must indicate whether the applicant wishes to attend before the adjudicators and be represented in order to make oral submissions.

40. The panel noted the documents provided by Ms Hands for the purposes of this hearing as described above. Some of those documents had been provided by Ms Hands on her own initiative; others had been provided by her in response to requests from Social Work England or at the direction of the adjudicators who conducted the administrative meeting on 24 June 2025. Having considered the nature and contents of those documents, the panel was satisfied that the requirements of rule 18 had been satisfied.

Timing of the application

41. The Legal Adviser had informed the panel that reg. 15(4) of the Regulations states that a person whose entry has been removed from the register as the result of a removal order may not apply to be restored to the register until after the end of a period of five years beginning with the date on which the removal order took effect.
42. In its written submissions Social Work England had informed the panel that, although the removal order in respect of Ms Hands was made at the review which took place on 30 November 2018, it did not take effect until 28 days later on 28 December 2018. As that date was about six and a half years since the removal order took effect, the panel was satisfied that Ms Hands was not precluded from applying for restoration to the Register by reg. 15(4).

Conditions for restoration

Conditions in Regulation 15(4)

43. The Legal Adviser had informed panel that regulation 15(4) of the Regulations also states:
- A person whose entry has been removed from the register as the result of a removal order is eligible to be restored where—*
- (a) the adjudicators are satisfied that the person meets the requirements for initial registration referred to in regulation 11(2),*
 - (b) the person has not, in the preceding 12 months, made an application for restoration to the register which was refused, and*
 - (c) the person meets any further requirements as to additional education, training or experience as are determined by the regulator to apply to them.*

44. The panel considered those conditions in reverse order.

Condition 15(4)(c): requirements as to additional education, training or experience

45. The panel noted that:
- Rule 14(2) of the Registration Rules states, “(2) *Where a recognised qualification was awarded... more than five years before an applicant applies to be registered, the applicant must demonstrate that they have relevant additional education or training by providing evidence of 60 days of updating their skills, knowledge and experience in accordance with guidance produced by the regulator.*
 - Rule 14(3) of the Registration Rules states that this additional education and training may include supervised practice; formal study; or private study. (However, according to SWE’s Registration Guidance, private study can make up no more than half of the required period of updating an applicant’s skills, knowledge and experience.)
 - Rule 14(4) of the Registration Rules states that the training must be done in the 12 months prior to submission of the restoration application.
46. To demonstrate satisfaction of this condition, Ms Hands, on 20 August 2024, provided an Updating Skills and Knowledge form. In the ‘Private Study’ section of that form she specified a number of training courses which she had undertaken and she has provided certificates for several of them. In that form, Ms Hands also set out the reading which she had done in 2024. In total, the form indicated that Ms Hands had completed a total of 214.5 hours of private study in the 12 months prior to 22 August 2024, being the date on which she applied to be restored to the Register.
47. In the ‘formal study’ section of her Updating Skills and Knowledge form, Ms Hands stated that, between 25 May and 9 October 2023, she had undertaken a post-qualification course entitled Critical Reflection Professional Learning and Development at the University of Central Lancashire. The panel noted that the Registration Guidance states that, for a post graduate course to be treated as ‘formal study, the course must be linked to a university and a qualification in social work must be mandatory to enrol on the course. In evidence of her completion of the course and of its satisfaction of the conditions for formal study set out in the Registration Guidance, Ms Hands provided an email dated 14 November 2024 from a lecturer at the University confirming that (a) she attended and satisfactorily completed all elements of course; (b) the course was equivalent to 30 days (210 hours) of formal study; and (c) Ms Hands’ social work qualification “was seen as a pre requisite for attending this course”.
48. Given the information on training and study provided by Ms Hands, as described above, the panel concluded (i) that Ms Hands had satisfied the requirement in rule 14(2) of the Registration Rules to provide evidence of having spent at least 60 days updating her skills, knowledge and experience in the 12 months prior to submitting her restoration application and (ii) that she had therefore satisfied condition (c) of regulation 15(4).
49. In arriving at the conclusion, the panel noted that, despite some reservations regarding certain training certificates, Social Work England had expressed the same view in its written submissions.

Condition 15(4)(b): No refused application within the past 12 months

50. With regard to condition (b) of reg. 15(4), the panel noted that, in its written submissions, Social Work England had stated, “*The Applicant originally submitted a restoration application on 14 March 2024, but this was closed on 19 June 2024 due to outstanding information. Therefore, this application is the Applicant’s first effective restoration application since her removal from the Register.*” Accordingly, the panel concluded that condition (b) of reg. 15(4) was satisfied in that Ms Hands had not, in the 12 months preceding her application or this hearing, made an application for restoration to the Register which had been refused.

Condition 15(4)(c): meeting the requirements for initial registration

51. In relation to condition (c) of reg. 15(4), the Legal Adviser had advised the panel that the requirements for initial registration were set out in reg. 11(2) of the Regulations, which reads:

In the case of a registration under regulation 10, a person is eligible to be registered where the regulator is satisfied that they—

(a) have a recognised qualification which was awarded—

(i) within such period, not exceeding five years ending with the date of the application for registration, as is set in rules made under paragraph (6)(a), or

(ii) before the period mentioned in paragraph (i), and the person has met such requirements as to additional education, training and experience as are determined by the regulator to apply to them,

(b) are capable of safe and effective practice in accordance with the professional standards relating to proficiency, performance, and conduct and ethics,

(c) have the necessary knowledge of English, and

(d) have not been convicted of a listed offence (other than a conviction that has been quashed).

52. The panel considered each of those four conditions in turn, leaving condition 11(2)(b) until last.

Condition 11(2) (a): having a recognised qualification

53. The panel concluded that condition (a) of reg. 11(2) was satisfied in relation to Ms Hands given that:
- The panel was satisfied that Ms Hands had a recognised qualification, namely a degree in social work from the University of Wolverhampton awarded in 2009, as this was evidenced by the degree certificate which she had produced.
 - The panel had concluded in relation condition (c) of reg. 15(4) that Ms Hands had undertaken the additional education and training required by reg. 11(2)(a) and rule

14(2) of the Registration Rules in cases where a recognised qualification had been awarded more than five years prior to a registration or restoration application.

Condition 11(2)(b): being capable of safe and effective practice

54. The panel's conclusions regarding the extent to which Ms Hands satisfied condition (b) of reg. 11(2) are set out in a separate section below.

Condition 11(2) (c): having the necessary knowledge of English

55. On the basis of her degree in social work from the University of Wolverhampton, the additional education and training which she had undertaken and her having worked as a social worker for Staffordshire County Council between October 2015 and February 2016, the panel were satisfied that Ms Hands had the necessary knowledge of English as required by condition (c) of reg. 11(2).

Condition 11(2)(d): not having been convicted of a listed offence

56. The panel was satisfied that condition (d) of reg. 11(2) had been satisfied as there was no evidence before it to indicate that Ms Hands had been convicted of any offence listed in Schedule 1 to the Regulations or any other offence.

Condition 11(2)(b): being capable of safe and effective practice

57. In considering whether Ms Hands was capable of safe and effective practice for the purposes of condition (b) of reg. 11(2) of the Regulations:
- The panel first identified the failings in her practice which had led to the finding of misconduct against her at the substantive hearing in June 2017.
 - It then considered the work and training which she had undertaken since that hearing in order to determine the extent to which that work and training helped to remedy the relevant failings in her practice.
 - The panel also considered the extent to which Ms Hands had, since the substantive hearing, developed insight into her misconduct and its causes and effects.

Failings in Ms Hands' practice

58. With regard to the first of those issues, the panel noted that the adjudicators at the final hearing had found that Ms Hands had failed to visit service users, to communicate with other professionals, to complete assessments of service users, to keep proper records and to ensure that protective measures were put in place to safeguard vulnerable service users. The panel considered that those failings were essentially failings in competence which, because of their seriousness, amounted to misconduct. Moreover,

they did not involve behavioural issues, such as dishonesty. Accordingly, the panel considered that they were capable of remedy.

Remediation: work and training since the substantive hearing

59. With regard to Ms Hands' activity since the substantive hearing, the panel had the benefit, not only of the extensive written details which she had provided about her work and training, but also of her oral submissions on those matters.
60. The training which Ms Hands had undertaken is described earlier in this decision. In relation to that training, the panel considered that:
 - Whilst much of it was of a general nature, this was not surprising given that it was aimed at bringing Ms Hands' knowledge of practice up to date in anticipation of a return to social work.
 - In addition, some of her training was relevant to the safeguarding training and support which she provided as part of her work. Again, this was not surprising. Indeed, as the concerns about Ms Hands' practice related to matters connected with safeguarding, this training appeared to the panel to be both relevant and appropriate.
 - The failings in Ms Hands' practice concerned her ability to do basic elements of social work effectively. This indicated a lack of organisation on her part. It also appeared that this was set against a backdrop of what she described as "challenges in my life". Accordingly, it seemed to the panel appropriate that she should undertake training in time management and prioritisation (as she had done) and Ms Hands confirmed that she had benefited from that training.
 - **[PRIVATE]**
61. With regard to the work which she had performed since first being suspended, from the information which Ms Hands had provided, the panel ascertained that:
 - Between July 2017 and April 2019, Ms Hands had worked as a mental health community partner for the DWP, strengthening mental health awareness within Jobcentre Plus and coaching Jobcentre Plus staff to deliver an enhanced level of support.
 - Between July 2019 and December 2023, Ms Hands had worked as a high intensity user lead in a medical practice. This involved using a health coaching approach to help reduce frequent user and non-elective activity in order to free up front-line resources and reduce costs. She also reported incidents, identified gaps in services and developed relationships with stakeholders in order to ensure quality of service delivery.
 - From May 2024 to the present, Ms Hands worked as a neurodiversity coach, delivering coping strategy coaching to people who are neurodivergent. She

works under different contracts, including with the probation service. She works with people seeking employment and apprenticeships, including people on probation and people with mental health conditions.

62. The panel noted that Ms Hands' work since her suspension had been focussed on safeguarding. As mentioned above, as the concerns about her practice related to matters connected with safeguarding, this type of work appeared relevant to those concerns. The panel also noted that there was no evidence of Ms Hands' misconduct being repeated in the work which she had undertaken since the substantive hearing.

Insight

63. When assessing Ms Hands' insight into her misconduct, the panel considered both the contents of her reflective statement and her submissions at this hearing. In the latter, the panel noted that:
- Ms Hands had expressed genuine remorse for the failings in her practice which had led to the finding of misconduct against her and took full responsibility for those failings without making any excuses. She had also expressed a genuine commitment to helping others and to social work, the former being evidenced by the work which she had undertaken since first being suspended.
 - Ms Hands had recognised the need to follow appropriate safeguarding procedures (and indeed now appeared to be training others in such matters).
 - Ms Hands had not referred to the specific details of her failings in respect of the four service users to which the allegations against her related but the panel did not consider this to be surprising as those events took place almost ten years ago.
64. With regard to Ms Hands' reflective statement, the panel accepted that much of it was general in nature but, as with her submissions, this may be explained by the lapse of time since the events which led to regulatory proceedings being brought against her and, as with her training, parts of it may have been written with a return to practice in mind. In any event, the reflective piece covered the key issues of safeguarding and record-keeping. Overall, the panel considered it sufficient to give a view of how Ms Hands would approach safeguarding issues in the future.

Testimonials

65. In assessing the extent of Ms Hands' insight and remediation, the panel had regard to the three testimonials which she had provided. These comprised:
- A character reference dated 18 November 2022 from the services manager at the medical practice where Ms Hands had worked as the High Intensity User Lead.
 - A character reference dated 18 November 2024 from a mental health nurse who had known Ms Hands as a friend and colleague for about 19 years. At this hearing,

Ms Hands explained that she had worked with the nurse in mental health services around 2010.

- A character reference dated 17 March 2025 from a work coach at the office of the Department of Work and Pensions where Ms Hands had worked between April 2017 and May 2019.

66. In relation to the testimonials, the panel noted that:

- Paragraph 54 of the Impairment and Sanctions Guidance stated, “*Decision makers should give little weight to testimonials from persons not aware of the fitness to practise proceedings or the actions behind them.*” None of the testimonials gave any indication that its author was aware of the regulatory findings made in respect of Ms Hands. However, during this hearing, Ms Hands had assured the panel she had made each referee aware of the regulatory findings against her.
- Paragraph 58 of the Impairment and Sanctions Guidance stated that testimonials should be relevant to the specific findings in the case. However, the testimonials commented on Ms Hands performance of her work or her abilities generally. For this reason, the panel considered that the testimonials were of little assistance in evidencing the extent to which Ms Hands had developed insight into, or remedied, the failings in her practice which had led to the finding of misconduct against her.

Conclusion

67. Given its findings regarding Ms Hand’s training, work and insight, the panel was satisfied that Ms Hands had developed sufficient insight into, and remedied, the failings in her practice which had led to the finding of misconduct against her and that it was unlikely that those failings would be repeated, if she were to return to practicing as a social worker. As a result, the panel was satisfied that Ms Hands was capable of safe and effective practice as required by condition (b) of reg. 11(2) and that she therefore satisfied condition (a) of reg. 15(4) in that she satisfied all four conditions in reg. 11(2). Accordingly, as Ms Hands satisfied all three conditions in reg.15(4), she was eligible to be restored to the Register.

The test in GMC v Chandra: application of the overarching objective

68. Having considered the extent to which Ms Hands had developed insight into, and remedied, the failings in her practice which had led to the finding of misconduct against her in the context of the findings at the substantive hearing, the panel, in accordance with the second stage of the test in GMC v Chandra, balanced those findings against each of the three limbs of Social Work England’s overarching objective of ‘protection of the public’. As defined in s.37(2) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, that overarching objective comprised (i) protecting the health, safety and well-being of the

public, (ii) maintaining public confidence in social workers and (iii) maintaining proper professional standards for social workers. In that regard, the panel concluded that:

- As the panel had determined that she was now capable of safe and effective practice Ms Hands' return to practice would not pose a risk to the health, safety and well-being of any service users whose cases might be allocated to her.
- Given the length of time for which she has been suspended or removed from the register, and given the panel's findings regarding her insight and remediation, informed and reasonable members of the public would not be concerned by Ms Hands' return to unrestricted practice. Accordingly, granting Ms Hands' restoration application would not adversely affect public confidence in social workers.
- For the same reasons, the panel did not consider that granting Ms Hands' restoration application would be detrimental to professional standards.

69. Accordingly, for the reasons given above, the panel found that:

- All of the conditions in reg. 15(4) had been satisfied in respect of Ms Hands and, in consequence, she was eligible to be restored to the Register.
- Restoring Ms Hands to the Register would be consistent with the pursuit of each of the three limbs of Social Work England's overarching objective of 'protection of the public' as defined in s.37(2) of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Whether to make a conditions of practice order

70. The panel noted that, under reg. 15(6) of the Regulations, it was able to make a condition of practice order when granting a restoration application. However, the panel considered that such an order would not be appropriate in the present case. This was because the panel had found that she was capable of safe and effective practice and because such conditions as it might impose would mirror those (such as induction training and additional supervision) which an employer would implement in respect of a new employee who was returning to social work after a considerable time away from the profession.

Outcome:

71. For the reasons given above, the panel found that Ms Hands was eligible to be restored to the Register.