



Social Worker: Veronica Ralph

Registration Number: SW80847

Fitness to Practise

Final Hearing:

Date of hearing: 5 December – 13 December 2022

Hearing Venue: Remote hearing

Hearing outcome: Removal Order

Interim order: Previous interim suspension order revoked
New interim suspension order imposed for 18 months

Introduction and attendees:

1. This was a hearing held under Part 5 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018.
2. Ms Ralph did not attend and was not represented.
3. Social Work England was represented by Ms Steels, counsel, instructed by Capsticks LLP.

Adjudicators	Role
Miriam Karp	Lay Chair
Belinda Henson	Social Work Adjudicator
Moriam Bartlett	Lay Adjudicator

Tom Stoker Hannah Granger	Hearings Officers
Wallis Crump	Hearing Support Officer
Nathan Moxon	Legal Adviser

Service of Notice:

4. Ms Ralph did not attend the hearing. The panel of adjudicators (“the panel”) had careful regard to the documents contained in the bundles, as follows:
 - (i) Extract from the Social Work England Register detailing Ms Ralph’s registered email and postal addresses;
 - (ii) Letter, dated 24 October 2022 and addressed to Ms Ralph at the email and postal addresses held for her by Social Work England, notifying her of the date of the hearing and including relevant documentation;
 - (iii) A copy of the Royal Mail Track and Trace Document showing that the letter was delivered and signed for by “V Ralph” at 09:42 on 26 October 2022;
 - (iv) Notice of hearing, dated 3 November 2022 and addressed to Ms Ralph at the email and postal addresses held for her by Social Work England;
 - (v) Copy of a signed Statement of Service, on behalf of Social Work England, confirming that on 3 November 2022 the writer sent the notice by email to Ms Ralph’s registered email and postal addresses;
 - (vi) A copy of the Royal Mail Track and Trace Document detailing that an attempt was made to deliver the letter on 4 November 2022 but nobody was at the address. It gave options for how Ms Ralph could obtain the letter;

- (vii) An image of the envelope containing the letter to show that it was returned to sender as it was never collected by Ms Ralph;
 - (viii) A copy of the 24 October 2022 and 3 November 2022 emails sent; and
 - (ix) A follow up email, dated 28 November 2022, stating the date of the hearing and requesting a response as to whether Ms Ralph would be attending.
5. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser in relation to service of notice.
 6. Having had regard to rule 14 and all of the information before it in relation to the service of notice, the panel was satisfied that notice of the hearing had been served on Ms Ralph in accordance with rules 44 and 45 of Social Work England's Fitness to Practise Rules ("the Rules").

Hearing in absence:

7. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser in relation to the factors it should take into account when considering whether to proceed with the hearing in Ms Ralph's absence. This included reference to the principles within *R v Jones [2003] UKPC* and *General Medical Council v Adeogba [2016] EWCA Civ 162*.
8. The panel had regard to all of the information before it, together with the submissions made by Ms Steels, in which she stressed that there had been no application by Ms Ralph for an adjournment. She highlighted that Ms Ralph had not engaged with proceedings. She invited the panel to exercise its discretion to proceed in Ms Ralph's absence.
9. The panel considered whether it was fair to proceed with the hearing in Ms Ralph's absence. The panel was satisfied that she had chosen to absent herself from the hearing. The panel noted that Ms Ralph had not engaged with proceedings. She had not completed and returned forms inviting her to provide a response to the regulatory concerns nor had she attended the case management hearing on 30 November 2022. The panel considered the Telephone Attendance Notes arising from conversations between Ms Ralph and Social Work England on 27 April 2022. The following was recorded:

"SW asked when all of this was going to end.....SW said it all is just very upsetting, and she wants it over with so get on with her life"
10. In a second call on the same day, the following was recorded on the Note:

"She commented that it "seems to be dragging on" and wants simply for a decision to be made. She asked why we could not "just get on with it"....The SW stated that she would rather not be contracted unless needs to be stating that she is happy to not be a social worker any more....SW reiterated that "I have made my decision" and that she didn't "want to get pulled into it. I don't want to work""
11. The panel was therefore not satisfied that an adjournment would secure Ms Ralph's attendance on a further date as she had disengaged with proceedings and voluntarily

absented herself. Several witnesses had been warned and had made themselves available to give evidence.

12. Further, the panel had regard to the fact that the regulatory concerns arise from as far back as 2017 and a referral to the Health and Care Professionals Council ("HCPC") on 31 May 2019.
13. Having weighed the interests of Ms Ralph, in regard to her attendance at the hearing, with those of Social Work England and the public interest in an expeditious disposal of the hearing, the panel determined it was fair to proceed in her absence. The panel noted that Ms Ralph had been given ample opportunity to engage with proceedings but had declined to do so.

Preliminary matters – public / private hearing

14. The panel was satisfied that, pursuant to rule 37 and 38 of the Social Work England Fitness to Practise Rules 2019, parts of the hearing should be held in private. **[PRIVATE: This was limited to those parts of the hearing in which there was discussion about Ms Ralph's health.]**

Allegation:

15. Ms Ralph faced the following Allegation:

"Whilst employed as a social worker at The Projects, Bristol:

1. In the period between February 2019 and March 2019, you completed inadequate risk assessments in respect of the Youth Housing Project.

2. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you did not communicate appropriately and/ or effectively in that you:

2.1: Behaved in a bullying and/or intimidating manner towards one or more of the Accommodation Officers you were responsible for supervising

2.2 Shouted and/or swore in your dealings with colleagues and/or young people

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.1 Responded to concerns that Service User G may be experiencing domestic violence by stating words to the effect that "she's not the kind of young woman who would put up with that"

3.2 Suggested that Service User H had spent all their money on drugs and alcohol when there was no evidence to support that assertion

3.3 did not take any further action when one of your colleagues reported concerns about drug use to you in relation to Service User K

3.4 made threats of eviction inconsistently and/or in circumstances which did not merit the threat of eviction

3.5 Suggested that Service User A would want to be rehomed in a particular area based on her ethnicity, in circumstances where the service user had no existing connection to that area and you had not sought her views

3.6 In either December 2017 or December 2018, indicated that one or more service users should not be included in an invitation to a Christmas Meal based on your assumption that they would not celebrate Christmas due to their background and/or religion

3.7 Asked one of your colleagues to ask Service User J if she wanted to go on a spa day with you

3.8 Responded to a colleague who had informed you that Service User I required collection from hospital after self-harming, by stating words to the effect that he should walk back as "that should teach him"

3.9 Communicated with them in a way which left them feeling scared and/or threatened

4. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you failed to appropriately discharge your management responsibilities in that you:

4.1 In or around summer 2018, you failed to take any or any adequate action when a member of staff, Person 1, alleged that they had been subjected to racial abuse by a service user.

4.2 Re-allocated a young person, namely Service User L, to a different member of staff without seeking input from the service user or his existing worker, and/or without properly considering the impact this might have on the service user.

The matters outlined in allegations 1, 2, 3 and 4 amount to the statutory ground of misconduct.

Your fitness to practise is impaired on the statutory grounds of misconduct."

Background:

16. At the material time, Ms Ralph worked as An Accommodation Co-Ordinator for a youth housing project ("the Project") for Bristol City Council ("the Council"). The Project consisted of three residential premises, which was home at any one time to approximately 20 service users between the ages of 16 and 21. Those young people were considered vulnerable as they had been in care, had otherwise difficult family lives or were seeking or had been granted asylum. Many had experienced past trauma and consequent mental health problems.

17. Mr Ralph was responsible for the delivery of the Project for the Council. This included management responsibly for the operation and administration of the Project which included assessments, recruitment, training, supervision and support of the team of Accommodation Officers.
18. Ms Ralph's line manager was CC until March 2019 when CC went on maternity leave. CC was replaced by JK.
19. Complaints were submitted about Ms Ralph by colleagues and service users in 2017 and 2018. The Council attempted to resolve the matters by mediation between Ms Ralph and one employee in 2018.
20. As a consequence of complaints continuing about Ms Ralph in 2019, the Council initiated an internal investigation undertaken by JK. At that point Ms Ralph was moved to another role and was managed directly by the Service Manager. During the investigation both Ms Ralph and her colleagues were interviewed.
21. An initial fact-finding report was completed on 3 April 2019. Ms Ralph was suspended by the Council as a consequence of the findings and regulatory concerns were referred to the HCPC on 31 May 2019. A final internal report was issued on 10 December 2019 and was followed by a formal disciplinary procedure, which resulted in the dismissal of Ms Ralph from the Council.

Summary of Evidence:

22. Social Work England relied upon written statements from the following witnesses:
 - a. Ms JK, Team Manager, Ms Ralph's line manager from March 2019 and the person responsible for undertaking the Council's internal investigation concerning;
 - b. Person 1, Person 2 and Ms AG, who were, at the material time, Accommodation Officer within Ms Ralph's team; and
 - c. Ms CC, Team Manager and Ms Ralph's line manager until March 2019.
23. Social Work England also relied upon written complaints from Person D (a former Accommodation Officer), Service User A, Service User B and Service User D. A previous panel granted permission for those documents to be submitted as hearsay.
24. Social Work England relied on various documents, which included, but was not limited to:
 - a. Documents relied upon during the Council's internal investigations, including written complaints, interview notes and reports;
 - b. Various Council policy, code and guidance documents; and
 - c. Referral to the HCPC, dated 31 May 2019.
25. The panel heard oral evidence from JK, Person 1, Person 2, AG and CC.

26. Ms Ralph did not provide any written response or evidence to be considered by the panel.

Findings – Facts:

27. The panel accepted the advice from the legal adviser, which included the following:
- a. It is for Social Work England to prove the allegations upon the balance of probabilities;
 - b. Ms Ralph's non-engagement with the hearing should not be considered an indication of guilt;
 - c. Hearsay evidence must be treated with caution and consideration given to the weight, if any, that can be afforded to it;
 - d. All of the evidence should be considered before making findings of credibility, and when making such findings the panel should not rely exclusively on demeanour; and
 - e. Ms Ralph is of previous good character, which must be considered when determining the likelihood of her acting as alleged. It is one factor to consider together with all of the evidence in the round.

1. In the period between February 2019 and March 2019, you completed inadequate risk assessments in respect of the Youth Housing Project.

28. CC explained the purpose of the risk assessments:

"The project has risk assessments in place to cover over 20 areas. This includes fire, substance misuse, preventing violence and promoting safety, racially motivated attacks and drug and alcohol abuse as examples. These risk assessments are in place to ensure a safe environment for both staff and the young service users we work with"

29. The panel had sight of a risk assessment completed by Ms Ralph in February and March 2019 in which she assessed the likelihood of drugs and alcohol abuse as "*improbable*" and the level of risk as "*low*". Similarly, racially motivated attacks, including verbal assault, discrimination and prejudice was assessed as "*possible*" with a level of risk as "*low*"
30. The panel considered it highly unlikely that the risk of drug and alcohol abuse would have been improbable amongst young service users with traumatic backgrounds and this conclusion was supported by the fact that AG, within her July 2022 witness statement, outlined that some of the service users had "*ongoing substance abuse*" and her account during the Council's investigation that she had found cannabis in one of the service user's rooms. Further, the risk of harm from drug and alcohol abuse could not be properly described as "*low*" as such activity could have significant impact upon a young person's immediate and long-term health. Additionally, the use of alcohol and drugs by service users would also subject others to a risk of harm, as there would be a risk of theft to fund the

purchase of illicit substances, violence whilst under the influence alcohol and the risk arising from needles.

31. Similarly, the panel was satisfied that the risk of harm as a consequence of a racially motivated attack could not be adequately assessed as “low”. Anyone subjected to such an attack would foreseeably experience significant emotional and psychological injury, especially if they had experienced past trauma. The panel accepted CC’s assessment that Ms Ralph’s assessment of a “low” risk was inappropriate:

“This could cause a significant harm to the team as it reflects a lack of cultural awareness for individuals and the service as a whole”

32. The panel was also satisfied that inadequate time was spent by Ms Ralph to review the risk assessments. The panel took into account the editing times of the risk assessments, which were ascertained during an audit, and which showed that only a few minutes was spent on reviewing each area. The panel accepted the evidence of CC that to adequately review each area should take approximately 20 minutes each, whereas the audit showed that only three minutes was taken. The panel accepted CC’s evidence that, given the importance of the document, a thorough review was necessary and to do so would take longer than that undertaken by Ms Ralph.
33. The panel was therefore satisfied that there were inadequate risk assessments completed by Ms Ralph.
34. Whilst the panel noted the evidence of Person 2 that she would have relied upon those risk assessments, the panel did acknowledge that there would have been various other documents pertaining to each service user which would have enabled risks to be assessed, such as individual assessments undertaken by the service users’ social workers and personal advisers.
35. The panel therefore found paragraph 1 of the Allegation proved.

2. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you did not communicate appropriately and/ or effectively in that you:

2.1: Behaved in a bullying and/or intimidating manner towards one or more of the Accommodation Officers you were responsible for supervising

2.2 Shouted and/or swore in your dealings with colleagues and/or young people

36. The panel noted that Ms Ralph, during the Council’s investigation, denied acting inappropriately and that her previous good character made it less likely that she would have acted in the manner alleged. However, the panel was satisfied that these features of the evidence were far outweighed by the evidence to support the allegation.
37. Within her August 2022 witness statement, Person 2 described Ms Ralph as a “bully”. Person 1 described her as “arrogant...I got the feeling that she enjoyed humiliating people...”. He also described her as bullying the team. Within a complaint to UNISON, dated 9 February 2018, AG described feeling “bullied” by Ms Ralph’s actions towards her.

38. Within his August 2022 witness statement, Person 1 outlined that it was *“her way or the high-way”* and described a situation when a service user was re-allocated from him to another Accommodation Officer and that Ms Ralph had said to him: *“I’m the boss and you will do what I say”*. AG, within her July 2022 witness statement, detailed how Ms Ralph would *“order”* the Accommodation Officers what to do and tell them *“do this or I won’t be happy”*. She explained that in team meetings Ms Ralph would not listen to the concerns of the Accommodation Officers. In her May 2019 investigation interview she detailed that Ms Ralph *“..would dictate mostly, there was no communication”*. This was corroborated by CC who detailed in her oral evidence that she sat in on some of Ms Ralph’s team meetings with the Accommodation Officers and that her interactions with her team were *“challenging”* and would consist of Mr Ralph *“telling them what they should do...no two way....not taking other people’s opinions”*. She described how Ms Ralph would *“dominate team meetings”* and that the staff were *“so squashed that they just kept their head down”*. That was consistent with her account during her July 2019 investigation interview when she said that team meetings were *“tense”* and that *“people were quite quiet in the meeting”*.
39. Within her August 2022 witness statement, Person 2 described that her and the other Accommodation Officers were *“pitted against each other”* by Ms Ralph. Within his August 2022 witness statement, Person 1 stated that Ms Ralph would use a *“divide and rule management style”*, a comment that he reiterated in his oral evidence. Within his October 2019 investigation interview, he stated that he was told by Ms Ralph not to talk to other members of staff and that *“gave the impression that they cannot speak to colleagues”*. He said that when they did Ms Ralph would *“interject aggressively”*. AG, within her May 2019 investigation interview, detailed how after making a complaint about Ms Ralph, Ms Ralph had *“drove a wedge between me and staff”*.
40. Within her August 2022 witness statement, Person 2 said that Ms Ralph would openly criticise other Accommodation Officers. She gave an example of an Accommodation Officer who was on long-term sick and Ms Ralph criticising her work performance and stating that the member of staff could not be bothered to come to work. Ms Ralph described the property that had been allocated to that Accommodation Officer as a *“shit pit”* in an email to Person 2. A copy of that email, dated 4 February 2019, was produced to corroborate Person 2’s account. During her June 2019 investigation interview, Person 2 stated that Ms Ralph would *“make digs and inappropriate comments”* about another staff member and make comments about that staff member not doing their job properly. CC detailed in her oral evidence that she witnessed Ms Ralph criticising Accommodation Officers on numerous occasions whilst in the company of other staff members and that she should have instead taken them into a separate room.
41. Within her June 2019 investigation interview, Person 2 described Ms Ralph as using *“foul language to and in front of people”* and in her August 2022 witness statement she stated that Ms Ralph would swear. Within his August 2022 witness statement, Person 1 described how Ms Ralph *“would lose her temper often”*. He gave an example of being shouted at by Ms Ralph as a consequence of assisting a new Accommodation Officer, Person D, and also gave an example of when she had reduced Person D to tears. In oral evidence, he described

her shouting at people as *"a daily event"*. Within her July 2022 witness statement, AG described that Ms Ralph *"...was often rude and would shout and swear"* and in oral evidence clarified that Ms Ralph would often use the word *"fuck"* and would shout *"oh for fuck's sake"* when displeased. In his oral evidence, Person 1 also stated that Ms Ralph would use the word *"fuck"* when talking of third parties. Whilst CC detailed that she had not heard Ms Ralph shout or swear, she did corroborate the account of hearing her raise her voice with team members and would speak in a *"frustrated voice"* that was *"inappropriate"*. She detailed that she witnessed this behaviour *"quite regularly"* and would address it with Ms Ralph in supervision.

42. Within her August 2022 witness statement, Person 2 described that Ms Ralph *"...would constantly question my ability to do the job but would not offer me any guidance or help learning and working in the role....would put me down and make me feel that I wasn't good enough for the job and she did not give me the right tools and support to do so....She would tell me just to "google it" any time I would ask for her help or advice as to the services available for young people"*. Within her June 2019 investigation interview she said that Ms Ralph's management was *"chaotic and unsupportive"* and that Ms Ralph had called her *"silly"* and *"childish"*. She described that in monthly supervisions she did not believe that she could be open about any concerns as Ms Ralph would be dismissive. She added that she *"dreaded supervision...she criticised everything I did"*. Within his August 2022 witness statement, Person 1 detailed that monthly meetings with Ms Ralph *"felt like an interrogation and would be very unpleasant"*. Within his October 2019 investigation interview he stated that he *"dreaded"* supervision. Within her July 2022 witness statement, AG detailed that asking questions of Ms Ralph would result in Ms Ralph *"shouting and swearing"* and as a consequence she *"stopped going to her for guidance or support to avoid any clashes"*. AG detailed that in supervision she would make suggestions but that Ms Ralph would not consider or accept any changes. Within her oral evidence, CC stated that at one stage she shared a student with Ms Ralph and found that Ms Ralph *"did not do much, did not have much oversight"*.
43. In her July 2022 witness statement, AG detailed that she had been on a temporary contract and that Ms Ralph would threaten to stop her contract. This resulted on one occasion in AG becoming upset: *"I cried all weekend"*, and submitting a complaint to her trade union. Person 2 gave a similar account, in which she stated within her August 2022 witness statement that MS Ralph *"made constant comments about the nature of the job and how the Council was looking to make cuts to our jobs and hours. It made the Accommodation Officers constantly feel like our jobs were on the line..."*
44. Within his August 2022 witness statement, Person 1 detailed that Ms Ralph was reluctant to take feedback on board and would see any suggestions as an *"attack"*. Within his oral evidence, he described her as acting *"paranoid"*. Within her July 2022 witness statement, AG stated that if she ever asked Ms Ralph questions Ms Ralph would shout and swear and would threaten AG's position if she disagreed with what Ms Ralph was saying. Within her October 2022 witness statement, CC stated that Ms Ralph *"...was quite a defensive person...If I asked a question during supervision, she would become defensive and took this*

in an attacking way rather than answering it". In oral evidence, she detailed that whenever she made suggestions to Ms Ralph, she would be *"quite dismissive"*. Similarly, in her oral evidence, JK described Ms Ralph as *"quite defensive"* and that during the investigation she had presented as *"very defensive quite angry"*.

45. In her oral evidence, Person 2 described how Ms Ralph made her feel *"horrible"* and she found Ms Ralph's behaviour to be *"triggering"* and caused her anxiety.
46. Person 1 stated that he was often *"shocked"* by her behaviour. In his October 2019 investigation interview, he stated that he found Ms Ralph's behaviour *"embarrassing, humiliating and found it unprofessional"*. In his oral evidence, he detailed an occasion where she had told him that he himself had not been a care leaver, despite the fact that much of his own childhood had been in care, and he described being *"upset and dumfounded"* by her comment and *"cannot explain how painful that was to hear"*.
47. During her May 2019 investigation interview, AG described how Ms Ralph had *"shattered my confidence when I started the job"*. In her oral evidence she stated that Ms Ralph had made her feel *"scared...nervous and anxious"*.
48. The panel noted that Person 1, Person 2 and AG gave consistent evidence as to the manner in which Ms Ralph spoke to them. Whilst CC did not corroborate their account of shouting and swearing, she did describe Ms Ralph as adopting a *"raised, angry element, not full-blown screaming"*. The panel agreed with CC's assessment that it was likely that Ms Ralph would have sought to restrain her behaviour whilst in the company of a line manager, and that in any event CC described Ms Ralph's inappropriate communication and raised voice.
49. The evidence from the three Accommodation Officers was consistent in their descriptions of Ms Ralph's approach to management, supervision and challenge. They all described her as shouting and swearing and all described her behaviour as being bullying. Their evidence was, in part, corroborated by CC who witnessed her inappropriate management style and defensiveness.
50. The panel noted that Person 1, Person 2 and AG were internally consistent within their accounts during their written and oral evidence to the panel. Further, their accounts were consistent with the evidence given during the Council's investigation in 2019, which was more contemporaneous to events.
51. The account from those Accommodation Officers was also supported by the hearsay evidence of Person D, namely the transcript of her investigation interview in May 2019. Person D was an Accommodation Officer who stated that Ms Ralph made her feel like a *"burden for asking questions"*. She detailed that she attended for her job interview with Ms Ralph, on the wrong day, and was confronted by Ms Ralph saying: *"What the fuck are you doing here, can you not read"*. On an occasion Person D attended one of her shifts, Ms Ralph stated *"Can I politely ask what the fuck you are doing here?"*. On another occasion, Ms Ralph swore at her, telling her *"for fuck's sake you made me lose my train of thought"*. Person D described supervision with Ms Ralph as *"horrendous"*. When asked whether there was any guidance or support given, she replied: *"No nothing"*. The panel was satisfied that

weight could be given to that hearsay evidence given that the author was identified, there were no inconsistencies within and it was highly consistent with the account of her colleagues.

52. Further corroboration of Ms Ralph's management style was within the written evidence, particularly an email from Ms Ralph to Person 2 describing one of the project's properties as a "*shit pit*". Person 2 sent Ms Ralph an email on 22 August 2018 to detail that Ms Ralph was to be the keyworker for a new service user who had not yet met Ms Ralph. Person 2 detailed that she had told the service user that Ms Ralph was on training but would be back the following day. Ms Ralph replied with an email on the same day stating only: "*She knows this she is playing with you*".
53. Her lack of appropriate management was demonstrable in other emails, such as an email in reply to Person 2 stating that one of the bathroom doors could be unlocked from the outside and asking whether she should contact "*repairs*" to which Mr Ralph provided no guidance and instead emailed back, on 8 November 2018, with a message stating only: "*How weird*". Person 1 and Person 2 reported unhappiness amongst service users as a consequence of Ms Ralph removing the television from the front room, to which Ms Ralph emailed back, on 20 January 2019, with a message stating only: "*They will get used to it*".
54. Having stood back and considered all of the evidence in the round, the panel was satisfied that there was overwhelming evidence of Ms Ralph adopting a dysfunctional, unsupportive and aggressive management style. Supervision with her was described as "*dreaded*" and "*an interrogation*". She regularly criticised, shouted and swore at the Accommodation Officers. She sought to "*divide and rule*", "*drove a wedge*" between colleagues and "*pitted [them] against each other*". Her behaviour was described by a number of her team as bullying and the panel considered this to be an accurate characterisation of her behaviour that left her team members feeling "*horrible*", "*scared...nervous and anxious*" and "*humiliating*".
55. The panel was therefore satisfied that Ms Ralph had behaved in both a bullying and intimidating manner towards four Accommodation Officers: Person 1, Person 2, AG and Person D. This included shouting and swearing at those members of staff
56. The panel noted that there were various service users who complained to the Council about Ms Ralph being threatening to them. However, whilst the Accommodation Officers stated that Ms Ralph would shout at service users, none of them gave specific examples or stated that they had been present at the time. Within the written complaints that have been produced from three service users, there were persuasive complaints about Ms Ralph's conduct, but they did not include any specific allegations of Ms Ralph shouting or swearing. As such, the panel concluded that there was insufficient evidence to discharge the burden of proving that Ms Ralph had shouted or sworn at service users.
57. The panel therefore found paragraph 2.1 of the Allegation proved in its entirety.
58. The panel found paragraph 2.2 of the Allegation proved in its entirety in relation to Ms Ralph's communication with colleagues, but found it not proved in relation to young people.

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.1 Responded to concerns that Service User G may be experiencing domestic violence by stating words to the effect that “she’s not the kind of young woman who would put up with that

59. The panel accepted the evidence of Person 2 and noted that she had given a consistent account of the incident both within her June 2019 investigation interview, August 2022 witness statement and her oral evidence to the panel. In summary, she detailed how she had reported a concern to Ms Ralph of a resident potentially being a victim of domestic violence from her boyfriend and that Ms Ralph was dismissive and stated that “*she was not the kind of young woman who would put up with that*”.
60. The panel noted and agreed with Person 2’s description of Ms Ralph as revealing “*..a complete lack of understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence*”. Ms Ralph should have taken on board Person 2’s concerns and undertaken appropriate risk assessment and intervention activities to protect the service user from abuse and harm.
61. The panel therefore found paragraph 3.1 proved and found Ms Ralph behaved unprofessionally.

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.2 Suggested that Service User H had spent all their money on drugs and alcohol when there was no evidence to support that assertion

62. The panel had the benefit of the emails that were sent in relation to Service User H. In response to an email in which it was outlined by a colleague that Service User H had received funds from various sources, but was stating that she had no money, Ms Ralph replied on 22 November 2018 to say: “*Is she spending money on drugs or alcohol?? She seems to have had a lot of money over the last few weeks*”.
63. The panel rejected the argument that this was a suggestion or an assertion, but considered it to be a question arising from reasonable professional curiosity as to why a service user with access to funds was saying that they had no money. The panel considered it to be appropriate for Ms Ralph, in her coordination role, to have asked the question of colleagues who knew the service user.
64. The panel therefore found paragraph 3.2 of the Allegation not proved.

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.3 did not take any further action when one of your colleagues reported concerns about drug use to you in relation to Service User K

65. AG detailed that she had found drug paraphernalia in the bedroom of a service user and notified Ms Ralph. She stated that she would have expected Ms Ralph to issue a warning, but that no action was taken.
66. However, the panel was not satisfied that no action had been taken. Ms Ralph may have undertaken action or forwarded the concern to others who could impose a sanction upon the service user. Whilst AG may not have been aware of any action, that did not equate to no action being taken. Social Work England could have sought to produce Service K's case records to detail any action, or inaction, taken at that time, but none have been forthcoming. As such, the panel was not satisfied that Ms Ralph did not take appropriate action. Whilst it accepted that any action taken was not communicated to AG, the panel considered this to be consistent with Ms Ralph's poor communication and collegiality with her team.
67. The panel therefore found paragraph 3.3 of the Allegation not proved.

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.4 made threats of eviction inconsistently and/or in circumstances which did not merit the threat of eviction

68. The panel considered that there may have been occasions that the sanction of eviction would be inappropriate, given a service user's particular circumstances or vulnerabilities. The panel was therefore satisfied that there may have been some apparent inconsistency between the treatment of service users who were, for example, in arrears, but that this may have been the appropriate use of discretion.
69. Further, the panel did not accept that there would be a stringent process of verbal warning, first written warning, final written warning and eviction. The panel was satisfied that it was far more likely than not that all of these steps would not be required to sanction particularly egregious behaviour. The panel would have been assisted by a copy of any policy and guidance documents about the process of sanctioning and evicting service users.
70. The panel considered it to be consistent with Ms Ralph's management style that she did not explain her rationale to the Accommodation Officers for her actions towards each service user, and that this had resulted in Officers suspecting that there were inappropriate inconsistencies.
71. The panel accepted that service users felt threatened by the risk of eviction, but noted that any warning as to behaviour etc may have felt like a threat, rather than an appropriate warning, particularly given Ms Ralph's poor communication skills. In any event, the panel heard oral evidence from CC that formal warnings were only issued upon agreement with a

Housing Officer who attended the Project on a weekly basis and had meetings with Ms Ralph.

72. Without access to the case notes for the service users referred to by Social Work England, the panel did not consider that it was able to adequately assess whether there had been inappropriate or inconsistent use of warnings, even if the service users themselves thought that they were being treated unfairly. Without direct evidence from service users, rather than Accommodation Officers recounting what they had been told, it was not clear whether the warnings were being issued in a manner that would be unprofessionally threatening or in circumstances when they were inappropriate. The written evidence provided by service users was insufficient as it would have been necessary to explore with them their particular circumstances and the reasons for any warnings of eviction.
73. The panel therefore found paragraph 3.4 of the Allegation not proved.

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.5 Suggested that Service User A would want to be rehomed in a particular area based on her ethnicity, in circumstances where the service user had no existing connection to that area and you had not sought her views

74. The panel accepted the evidence from Person 2 that Ms Ralph had suggested that Service User A, who was black British, would want to be rehomed in the Easton area of Bristol, which has a large ethnic minority population, and that Service User A had no connection with that area.
75. The panel agreed with Person 2's conclusion that Ms Ralph had made an assumption based on a person's ethnicity, rather than asking the person's opinion.
76. Person 2's account was corroborated by a letter from Service User A herself who recounted the incident and detailed that:

"she had disrespected the fact that I am a young black woman by immediately assuming that I want to be in a majority black community"

77. Whilst the letter was hearsay evidence, the panel gave it weight given that the author was identifiable, it was an account close to events and one that there would have been no benefit for seeking to mislead.
78. The panel considered that, not only were Ms Ralph's comments regarding the housing of Service User A unprofessional, but they were discriminatory, for the reasons articulated by Service User A within her letter of complaint.
79. Whilst findings of discrimination should not be made lightly, the panel carefully scrutinised all of the evidence and was satisfied that Ms Ralph's actions had been discriminatory as she made assumptions about the area a person would wish to live based on no reason other than the colour of their skin.

80. The panel therefore found paragraph 3.5 proved and found Ms Ralph behaved unprofessionally and discriminatory.

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.6 In either December 2017 or December 2018, indicated that one or more service users should not be included in an invitation to a Christmas Meal based on your assumption that they would not celebrate Christmas due to their background and/or religion

81. The panel accepted the evidence of Person 2 within her August 2022 witness statement in which she detailed that there was to be a Christmas dinner at the main property within the Project and that she had suggested to Ms Ralph that the service users in the other two homes should be invited. The panel accepted Person 2's account that Ms Ralph had refused this suggestion and stated that the other service users were asylum seekers and Muslim and so would not wish to celebrate.
82. Person 2 detailed that Ms Ralph's actions were "...particularly insensitive as we had a lot of asylum seekers and refugees who were far away from their home countries and had lost close family members. They might have found the Christmas period very challenging..."
83. The account was corroborated by Person D who, within her May 2019 investigation interview, stated that Ms Ralph had told her that she did not invite service users to Christmas dinner as they were not Christian.
84. The panel considered Ms Ralph's approach to be unacceptable. Whilst Christmas is a religious celebration, it does not follow that those of no religion or a different religious background cannot enjoy the festivities. A person does not have to be of a particular religion to mark a religious festival. Welcoming people from different backgrounds and cultures is pursuant to inclusivity, demonstrates a celebration of diversity and provides opportunities for young people to develop cultural understanding. To exclude people, who may have had no other source of company over a period expressly promoted as one for family and togetherness, was wholly inappropriate. To exclude people simply because of their religion or imputed religious opinion was discriminatory.
85. The panel therefore found paragraph 3.6 proved and concluded that Ms Ralph behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and discriminatory.

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.7 Asked one of your colleagues to ask Service User J if she wanted to go on a spa day with you

86. Person 2 detailed that Ms Ralph had asked her to enquire with Service User J whether she wanted to go to a spa with Ms Ralph on Christmas day. Person 2 had followed the instructions but Service User J refused and described the suggestion as “gross”.
87. There is no dispute as to the factual narrative as Ms Ralph, in her September 2019 investigation interview accepted that she had invited the service user to a spa as the service user was “feeling bad”. She went on to say “...I didn’t think there was anything awful about it. It is a public place. A swimming pool that has a sauna at the side...”.
88. The panel accepted that it was not appropriate to show preferential treatment to one service user and accepted the evidence from Person 2 that when a day trip or activity was arranged it was open to all of the service users.
89. Further, the panel accepted that it was wholly inappropriate to invite a young service user to attend, alone with Ms Ralph, a spa, which would involve a degree of undressing and wearing towels and / or swimming costumes.
90. The panel therefore found paragraph 3.7 proved and found Ms Ralph behaved unprofessionally and inconsistently.

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.8 Responded to a colleague who had informed you that Service User I required collection from hospital after self-harming, by stating words to the effect that he should walk back as “that should teach him”

91. Service User I was admitted to a psychiatric ward upon self-harming and the hospital contacted the Project to ask them to collect him. Person 1 received the call but was unable to drive so raised the matter with Ms Ralph. He explained to her that Service User I was only in a dressing gown and so could not walk back to the Project and would need collecting. It was winter at the time. He recalled Ms Ralph responding that Service User I should walk back as “that should teach him”
92. The account was corroborated by AG who said that Service User I had no money or clothes and so was unable to return to the Project. AG spoke to Ms Ralph who suggested that they be given £5 and told to get the bus.
93. Person 1 outlined that Ms Ralph’s comment “horried” him as it “...made me feel she wanted to punish him for self-harming”. He described Service User as “extremely vulnerable at the time” and within his October 2022 witness statement detailed that the young person was transitioning from male to female. AG described that it was not safe to suggest that Service User I, who was vulnerable and had just been assessed by a psychiatric team, make his own way home. As a consequence, AG went to collect him after her shift.
94. The panel also noted that the attitude towards Service User I from Ms Ralph was further supported by the account from another service user, within a written complaint dated 9

March 2019, in which she stated that after an occasion Service User I had *“been suicidal and been in serious mental distress”* Ms Ralph had described them as *“discombobulated”*.

95. The panel was satisfied that the incident occurred upon consideration of the consistent and compelling evidence from Person 1 and AG. It concluded that the attitude towards a vulnerable service user who had been hospitalised upon self-harming was wholly inappropriate. It was callous to suggest that they make their own way home at a time when they would have been particularly vulnerable and had no clothes. The panel considered that Ms Ralph’s actions were discriminatory as she had expressed a view that she was teaching a lesson to them for self-harming. Their injurious behaviour was a consequence of their poor mental health which resulted in an admission overnight in hospital and an assessment by mental health professionals. The panel considered it highly unlikely that she would have taken a similar approach to someone who had been injured in an accident and this view was supported by Ms Ralph’s assertion of *“that will teach him”*. This betrayed a discriminatory attitude towards poor mental health.
96. The panel therefore found paragraph 3.8 proved and found Ms Ralph behaved unprofessionally and discriminatory.

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

3.9 Communicated with them in a way which left them feeling scared and/or threatened

97. The panel considered the purpose of the Project for which Ms Ralph was responsible for coordinating, which was to support young people who had either left the care system, were asylum seekers or had otherwise difficult upbringings.
98. Whilst the panel was not satisfied that Ms Ralph swore or shouted at service users, it was nevertheless satisfied, upon consideration of the evidence, that she had otherwise communicated in a way that left them feeling scared and threatened.
99. The panel firstly had regard to its findings as to Ms Ralph’s poor communication skills and also the disdain that she had treated service users on account of their religion, ethnicity and mental health. Her lack of respect and regard for service users was also evidenced by the emails upon her removing the television from the front room of one of the properties and when notified that a number of service users were unhappy sent an email that simply stated: *“they will get used to it”*.
100. The panel also took into account the evidence of the Accommodation Officers, who it considered to be credible and consistent witness, and who recounted complaints made to them from service users, which were supported by written complaints from those service users.
101. Person 2, within her August 2022 witness statement, detailed that Service User D, a young asylum seeker, had reported that he felt *“scared”* and *“threatened”* by Ms Ralph. He

submitted written feedback in which he stated that he liked the staff, but when asked what could be better replied: *“Choosing better behaved [young persons] manager to speak more respectfully to me”*. Person 2 detailed that she would seek to limit contact between the service users and Ms Ralph *“to prevent them being treated badly”* and explained that this was because Ms Ralph was *“hostile and unpredictable”*.

102. Within his August 2022 witness statement, Person 1 detailed that Ms Ralph was sometimes angry with the service users and would lose her temper. He described that she was *“rude”* and that some of the service users were *“terrified of her”*. He detailed that one service user had approached him to say that Ms Ralph had made him feel scared.
103. The panel also had regard to the letters of complaints from two service users. Service User A detailed that Ms Ralph *“keeps...threatening residence including myself with being kicked out...”*. Whilst the panel was not satisfied that the decision to threaten eviction was inappropriate, it did accept that, in light of the overwhelming evidence of Ms Ralph’s communication style, it was unlikely that any warnings or threats were delivered in a measured and conciliatory manner.
104. Service User B’s letter of complaint stated that Ms Ralph *“...isn’t treating us fairly”*.
105. The panel had regard to the fact that much of the evidence to support paragraph 3.9 of the Allegation was hearsay and that there were few practical examples of incidents. However, it took into account that the authors of the written hearsay evidence could be identified and that they gave accounts that were consistent and corroborated by the evidence provided by the Accommodation Officers. Further, the account of Ms Ralph communicating with service users in a manner that left them intimidated and scared was consistent with the general approach of managing through fear, threats and criticism.
106. As such, having considered all of the evidence in the round, and having approached the hearsay evidence with particular caution, the panel was nevertheless satisfied that Ms Ralph had communicated with young people in a way which left them feeling scared and threatened.
107. The panel therefore found paragraph 3.8 proved and found Ms Ralph behaved unprofessionally.

4. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you failed to appropriately discharge your management responsibilities in that you:

4.1 In or around summer 2018, you failed to take any or any adequate action when a member of staff, Person 1, alleged that they had been subjected to racial abuse by a service user.

108. Person 1 described how he heard one service user describe him to another as a *“fucking black bastard”*. He reported this to Ms Ralph and asserted that she took no action. The panel was satisfied that had adequate action been taken, Person 1 would have been notified by Ms Ralph and the service user would have been required to apologise to him.

109. Within his oral evidence, Person 1 stated that Ms Ralph's inaction made him feel "*worried, fearful upset, unsupported [and] invalidated*".
110. The panel accepted Person 1's account, which he provided within his investigation interview, witness statement and oral evidence. The panel considered that any incident of racial abuse should have been addressed with the person accused and that Ms Ralph not doing so constituted a failure to appropriately discharge her management responsibilities.
111. It was common sense that such behaviour be addressed robustly, and that was reinforced within the February / March 2019 risk assessment that stated that precautions taken against racial attacks includes "*address use of language....positive challenge*" which would then reduce the risk of repetition. It was clear that those actions were not taken. Within her November 2022 witness statement, CC outlined how such a scenario should be managed:

"We would speak to the young person and try and understand the situation and whether some learning could be implemented to help the young person understand why their behaviour is inappropriate. It is about educating them as to what is appropriate."

112. The panel therefore found paragraph 4.1 proved.

4. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you failed to appropriately discharge your management responsibilities in that you:

4.2 Re-allocated a young person, namely Service User L, to a different member of staff without seeking input from the service user or his existing worker, and/or without properly considering the impact this might have on the service user.

113. Within his August 2022 witness statement, Person 1 outlined that Service User L was a vulnerable service user, who had lost his parents at a young age, and who found it hard to build relationships. Person 1 detailed that it had taken time to build a rapport with Service User L and "*..it took a bit of time for him to stop being suspicious of me and to trust me*". He detailed that after a few months they developed a good relationship. However, at that point, Ms Ralph reallocated Service User L to a different Accommodation Officer. Person 1 described that Service User L was very upset and would not speak to him thereafter.
114. The panel noted that the evidence of Person 1 was consistent with other Accommodation Officers who also said that service users were abruptly reallocated.
115. The panel was therefore satisfied that the account relating to Service User L had been proved. Whilst Ms Ralph may have had good reason to reallocate service users, and may not have had a discretion as CC detailed that this was necessary when staff were moved between properties within the Project, the panel considered it to be consistent with her general poor management and communication style that she had failed to take the time to explain her reasoning to Person 1 and Service User L.
116. For the reasons outlined by Person 1, it was fundamental that any decisions to reallocate a service user be approached with caution and upon consultation with both the service user and the Accommodation Officer, including an explanation for the reasons. This would have

ensured that the service user did not consequently feel rejected by their allocated Accommodation Officer, with whom he had built a relationship. The fact that Service User L refused to speak to Person 1 after the reallocation indicates that the reasons for the reallocations were not adequately communicated by Ms Ralph. By failing to do so, the panel was satisfied that Ms Ralph had failed to appropriately discharge her management responsibilities, albeit the panel accepted that Ms Ralph had the unenviable job of having to reallocate service users in light of staff being moved amongst the properties in the Project. The panel heard evidence from CC that Ms Ralph had been directed to reallocate service users as a consequence of an Accommodation Officer submitting a grievance which resulted in them being moved to a different property.

117. The panel therefore found paragraph 4.2 proved.

Summary of findings of fact:

118. The Allegation was determined as follows:

“Whilst employed as a social worker at The Projects, Bristol:

*1. In the period between February 2019 and March 2019, you completed inadequate risk assessments in respect of the Youth Housing Project. **FOUND PROVED***

2. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you did not communicate appropriately and/ or effectively in that you:

*2.1: Behaved in a bullying and/or intimidating manner towards one or more of the Accommodation Officers you were responsible for supervising **FOUND PROVED***

*2.2 Shouted and/or swore in your dealings with colleagues and/or young people **FOUND PROVED IN RELATION TO COLLEAGUES. FOUND NOT PROVED IN RELATION TO YOUNG PEOPLE***

3. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you behaved unprofessionally, inconsistently and/ or in a discriminatory manner with respect to one or more service users in that you

*3.1 Responded to concerns that Service User G may be experiencing domestic violence by stating words to the effect that “she’s not the kind of young woman who would put up with that” **FOUND PROVED***

*3.2 Suggested that Service User H had spent all their money on drugs and alcohol when there was no evidence to support that assertion **FOUND NOT PROVED***

*3.3 did not take any further action when one of your colleagues reported concerns about drug use to you in relation to Service User K **FOUND NOT PROVED***

3.4 made threats of eviction inconsistently and/or in circumstances which did not merit the threat of eviction **FOUND NOT PROVED**

3.5 Suggested that Service User A would want to be rehomed in a particular area based on her ethnicity, in circumstances where the service user had no existing connection to that area and you had not sought her views **FOUND PROVED**

3.6 In either December 2017 or December 2018, indicated that one or more service users should not be included in an invitation to a Christmas Meal based on your assumption that they would not celebrate Christmas due to their background and/or religion **FOUND PROVED**

3.7 Asked one of your colleagues to ask Service User J if she wanted to go on a spa day with you **FOUND PROVED**

3.8 Responded to a colleague who had informed you that Service User I required collection from hospital after self-harming, by stating words to the effect that he should walk back as “that should teach him” **FOUND PROVED**

3.9 Communicated with them in a way which left them feeling scared and/or threatened **FOUND PROVED**

4. On one or more occasions between 2017 and 2019, you failed to appropriately discharge your management responsibilities in that you:

4.1 In or around summer 2018, you failed to take any or any adequate action when a member of staff, Person 1, alleged that they had been subjected to racial abuse by a service user. **FOUND PROVED**

4.2 Re-allocated a young person, namely Service User L, to a different member of staff without seeking input from the service user or his existing worker, and/or without properly considering the impact this might have on the service user. **FOUND PROVED**

The matters outlined in allegations 1, 2, 3 and 4 amount to the statutory ground of misconduct. **TO BE DETERMINED**

Your fitness to practise is impaired on the statutory grounds of misconduct. **TO BE DETERMINED”**

Summary Submissions – Grounds and Impairment:

119. Ms Steels, on behalf of Social Work England, argued that the facts found proved amounted to significant departures from professional standards and therefore amount to serious misconduct. She argued that bullying and discriminatory behaviour breaches fundamental tenets of the social work profession. She highlighted the evidence of the witnesses who had stated that that Ms Ralph’s actions were incompatible with what would be expected of a social worker.

120. Ms Steels referenced the panel's determination on facts and highlighted that Ms Ralph had caused harm and behaved in a manner that put others at risk of harm. She acted in a bullying and discriminatory manner. Ms Steels argued that the behaviour of Ms Ralph also brought the social work profession into disrepute and would foreseeably undermine the confidence that the public has in the profession.
121. She highlighted the lack of any evidence of remediation or insight and argued that risk of repetition was therefore high, particularly given that the facts proved demonstrate a protracted period of misconduct and ingrained attitudinal deficits.
122. Ms Steels concluded by submitting that Ms Ralph's fitness to practise is impaired as a result of her misconduct and that a finding of current impairment is necessary to protect the public and wider public interest.

Determination and Reasons - Grounds and Impairment:

123. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser that it must pursue the three overarching objectives when exercising its functions. It must consider whether Ms Ralph's fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of misconduct. To do so, it must first consider whether the proved allegations amounted to misconduct, whether that misconduct was serious and, if so, whether that leads to a finding of current impairment. Neither party bears the burden of proof. When considering impairment, the panel should consider whether the misconduct is remediable and, if so, whether it has been remedied and what insight has been demonstrated by Ms Ralph. The panel must also determine whether the need to uphold proper professional standards and public confidence in the profession would be undermined if a finding of current impairment were not made.
124. The panel noted that "*misconduct*" in regulatory proceedings is defined as follows:

".....some act or omission which falls short of what would be proper in the circumstances. The standard of propriety may often be found by reference to the rules and standards ordinarily required to be followed by a practitioner in the particular circumstances."
125. The panel considered that the proved facts at paragraph 1 of the Allegation amounted to a breach of Ms Ralph's job description, which detailed, under 'Key job outcomes / accountabilities':

"Ensure all health and safety requirements for the scheme are met and provide reports to demonstrate this, including risk assessments, mitigation and improvement plans where required."
126. Ms Ralph's poor management of the Accommodation Officers breached the following 'Key job outcomes / accountabilities':

"To provide regular guidance, supervision and support to the Accommodation Officers. Prioritising safeguarding and modelling positive engagement and best practices."

127. Ms Ralph's discriminatory actions, and her failure to adequately address an incident of racist language by a service user, breached the following 'General Accountabilities':

"C. To model and promote good equalities practice and value diversity across the service."

128. The panel also noted that the 'General Accountabilities' included the requirement to work in compliance with the Council's Code of Conduct. Whilst a full copy of that document was not provided to the panel, sections were replicated in some of the investigation documents.

129. The panel considered that the failure to maintain adequate risk assessments constituted a breach of the Code:

"4.1 You have a duty of care as prescribed in the corporate Health and Safety policy, and must not act wilfully or intentionally in a manner liable to place the public, your colleagues, or yourself at risk"

130. The proved behaviour by Ms Ralph towards the Accommodation Officers breached the following Code:

"23.1 – you must treat colleagues with courtesy and respect, and must not abuse them verbally or physically. You must not harass or bully colleagues."

131. Her behaviour towards service users breached the following Code:

"2. You should ensure courteous, efficient and impartial service to all within the community. Antagonistic or aggressive behaviour, is not acceptable...."

132. Her discriminatory behaviour, and failure to address the discriminatory behaviour of others, breached the following Codes:

"3.1. Your commitment to implement equalities in all aspects of your work is fundamental to effective service and working relationships."

3.2 All members of the local community, customers and colleagues have a right to be treated with fairness and equity."

3.3 The Public Sector Equality duty applies to all decisions made by the Council. The duty includes the need to promote equality for persons with "protected characteristics" i.e. age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, and have due regard to the need to i) eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation; ii) advance equality of opportunity; and iii) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it."

133. The panel then considered the national Standards and found that Ms Ralph's actions breached the following HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (2016):

"1.1 You must treat service users and carers as individuals, respecting their privacy and dignity."

1.2 You must work in partnership with service users and carers, involving them, where appropriate, in decisions about the care, treatment or other services to be provided.

...

1.5 You must not discriminate against service users, carers or colleagues by allowing your personal views to affect your professional relationships or the care, treatment or other services that you provide.

...

1.7 You must keep your relationships with service users and carers professional.

...

2.1 You must be polite and considerate.

2.2 You must listen to service users and carers and take account of their needs and wishes

...

6.1 You must take all reasonable steps to reduce the risk of harm to service users, carers and colleagues as far as possible.

6.2 You must not do anything, or allow someone else to do anything, which could put the health or safety of a service user, carer or colleague at unacceptable risk."

134. Her actions also breached the HCPC Standards of Proficiency (2017):

5.1 be able to reflect on and take account of the impact of inequality, disadvantage and discrimination on those who use social work services and their communities

5.2 understand the need to adapt practice to respond appropriately to different groups and individuals

5.3 be aware of the impact of their own values on practice with different groups of service users and carers

5.4 understand the impact of different cultures and communities and how this affects the role of the social worker in supporting service users and carers

.....

6.1 be able to work with others to promote social justice, equality and inclusion

6.2 be able to use practice to challenge and address the impact of discrimination, disadvantage and oppression.

...

8.1 be able to use interpersonal skills and appropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication with service users, carers and others

8.2 be able to demonstrate effective and appropriate skills in communicating advice, instruction, information and professional opinion to colleagues, service users and carers

...

8.6 be aware of the characteristics and consequences of verbal and non-verbal communication and how this can be affected by a range of factors including age, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs and socio-economic status

...

9.1 understand the need to build and sustain professional relationships with service users, carers and colleagues as both an autonomous practitioner and collaboratively with others

...

9.6 be able to work in partnership with others, including service users and carers, and those working in other agencies and roles

9.7 be able to contribute effectively to work undertaken as part of a multi-disciplinary team

...

9.10 be able to understand the emotional dynamics of interactions with service users and carers"

135. The panel was therefore satisfied that the proved regulatory concerns each individually amount to misconduct as they were significant failures to adhere to the standards expected of a social worker and someone in Ms Ralph's professional position.
136. Further, the panel was satisfied that the misconduct was serious as it constituted bullying and discriminatory behaviour. The effect on her colleagues was outlined at paragraphs 45 to 47, above. Similarly, it made vulnerable young service users feel intimidated and not respected. Further, by not adequately complete risk assessments, Ms Ralph failed to ensure that staff and service users were adequately safeguarded.
137. The panel was therefore satisfied that each of the proved allegations, both individually and cumulatively, amount to serious misconduct.
138. Having determined that the proved facts amount to serious misconduct, the panel considered whether Ms Ralph's fitness to practise is currently impaired.
139. The serious misconduct is difficult, but not impossible, to remediate as the evidence before the panel was of attitudinal deficits, particularly in relation to management style, communication and discriminatory attitudes. Ms Ralph has not evidenced any remediation, such as regret, remorse or efforts to retrain and address the failings.
140. Similarly, the panel noted that Ms Ralph has not provided any evidence of insight. In fact, she demonstrated a significant lack of insight in relation to paragraph 3.7 of the Allegation

and disputed that her actions were inappropriate, as outlined in paragraph 87, above. She has not demonstrated any insight or reflection of the discriminatory behaviour and instead stated in her June 2019 investigation interview that “...*anyone who knows me will confirm that I don’t treat people differently*”. The panel noted that this was in stark contrast with the views of the Accommodation Officers who worked with her and the service users under her care. JK outlined that, during the Council’s investigation, Ms Ralph was “*defensive*” and “*dismissive*”. That is consistent with the evidence of the Accommodation Officers of Ms Ralph’s reaction whenever they sought to raise questions or suggestions.

141. The panel therefore considered that Ms Ralph has not demonstrated remediation or insight. She had the opportunity to do so within investigation interviews with the Council in 2019 but did not take those opportunities. Similarly, she did not engage with the regulatory proceedings, during which she had ample opportunity to provide details of any insight and remediation within a written response or during the hearing.
142. Ms Ralph’s misconduct spanned a prolonged period of time. Her serious misconduct related to and detrimentally affected several Accommodation Officers and service users. She demonstrated a pattern of unprofessional, intimidatory and discriminatory behaviours. As a consequence of those features, together with the absence of evidenced remediation and insight, the panel concluded that there was a high risk of repetition of the misconduct.
143. Person 1 queried whether service users who had a traumatic experience with Ms Ralph would engage or trust social workers in the future and described that her actions had “...*undermined the system...we do not know the long term repercussions...I would have thought that the consequences are very negative and with others as they will pass on their experiences*”. The panel noted that it is imperative that vulnerable service users have trust in social workers otherwise they may not fully engage and this may result in their needs not being adequately assessed or met. This is all the more important where those young service users had adverse childhood experiences and consequently may have difficulties building relationships of trust.
144. The fact that many staff and various service users felt that they could not approach Ms Ralph had a foreseeable negative impact upon the effectiveness of the service provided by the Project. The service was designed to support some of the most vulnerable young people in society and enable them to develop life skills and independence.
145. The panel was therefore satisfied that a finding of impaired fitness to practise was necessary to protect the public, particularly colleagues and vulnerable service users.
146. Further, the panel considered that reasonable, well informed, members of the public would be appalled by Ms Ralph’s misconduct, particularly her repeated bullying and discriminatory behaviour. She had breached the authority and power that she had over staff members and vulnerable young service users. She demonstrated wide-ranging discriminatory attitudes and biases towards people based on their ethnicity, religion and mental health.
147. The panel accepted the comments made by JK, within her oral evidence, that Ms Ralph’s actions “*flies in the face of what social work is about*”. Person 2 stated that Ms Ralph’s

actions would affect the reputation of the profession if they knew her to be a social worker. AG stated that Ms Ralph's behaviour would affect people's views of the Council and "...will just think that they don't help". CC said that many people had not appreciated that Ms Ralph was a social worker and were shocked when they found out given the manner in which she behaved.

148. The panel took into account the seriousness of discriminatory behaviours and had regard to paragraph 40 of the Sanctions Guidance:

"Some concerns are so serious that action is required even if the social worker poses no current risk to the public. This is because a failure to sanction a social worker in such cases may undermine public confidence in social workers generally or may fail to maintain the professional standards expected of social workers.....discrimination involving a protected characteristic are examples of cases that are likely to be viewed particularly seriously....."

149. The panel concluded that a finding of impaired fitness to practise was necessary to maintain and promote public confidence in the social work profession.
150. Given that the serious misconduct related to bullying colleagues and discriminatory behaviour, the panel was satisfied that professional standards would not be promoted and maintained by a finding that Ms Ralph's fitness to practise is not currently impaired.
151. The panel therefore concluded that, as a consequence of Ms Ralph's serious misconduct, a finding of impaired fitness to practise was necessary to protect the public and to promote and maintain public confidence in the social work profession and proper professional standards.

Summary of Submissions – Sanction:

152. Ms Steels, on behalf of Social Work England, submitted that, in light of the nature of the misconduct, the appropriate sanction was one of removal from the social work register. She argued that no other sanction would adequately protect the public and wider public interest in light of the severity of the misconduct.
153. Ms Steels outlined that the aggravating features of the case included the fact that there were numerous complaints of Ms Ralph's bullying and discriminatory behaviour and that her actions were repeated over a prolonged period of time. The service users affected by the misconduct were from marginalised backgrounds and were vulnerable and in need of support. Further, her behaviour towards her team would have foreseeably impacted upon their productivity and therefore the effectiveness of the service. She reminded the panel of its conclusions as to remediation, insight and risk of repetition.
154. Ms Steels stated that there were no identifiable mitigating factors.
155. Ms Steels submitted that it was necessary to impose a sanction that restricted Ms Ralph's practice, as nothing else would protect the public. She argued that, in light of the assessed lack of insight, conditions would not protect the public and, given the nature of the

misconduct, would not maintain public confidence in the social work profession. Workable and proportionate conditions could not be formulated to address the attitudinal deficiencies that the panel had found proved, including innate discriminatory attitudes.

156. Ms Steels argued that, in light of the lack of evidenced remediation and insight, a suspension would neither be appropriate nor proportionate to protect the public and wider public interest.

Determination and reasons – Sanction:

157. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser, that it must again pursue the overarching objective when exercising its functions. The panel must apply the principle of proportionality, balancing Ms Ralph's interests with the public interest. The purpose of a sanction is not to be punitive, although a sanction imposed may have a punitive effect. The panel considered the least restrictive sanction first and then moved up the sanctions ladder as appropriate. The panel had regard to the Social Work England Sanctions Guidance, published in July 2022, together with its determination of grounds and impairment.
158. The panel reminded itself that it had concluded that Ms Ralph's fitness to practise was found to be impaired, due to serious misconduct, in order to protect the public and maintain and promote public confidence in social workers and proper professional standards.
159. In relation to mitigating features, the panel noted the evidence from CC that Ms Ralph had a series of supervisors in quick succession before CC took the role in September 2017. That would have mitigated impaired competence but provided no mitigation for Ms Ralph's attitudinal deficiencies, which had included bullying and discriminatory behaviours. Therefore, the only mitigation that the panel could identify was the fact that there had been no previous Social Work England regulatory findings against her.
160. In relation to aggravating features, the panel reminded itself of its findings at paragraph 154, above, that Ms Ralph:
- "....had breached the authority and power that she had over staff members and vulnerable young service users. She demonstrated wide-ranging discriminatory attitudes and biases towards people based on their ethnicity, religion and mental health."*
161. Her bullying and discriminatory behaviours had been repeated and persistent and affected numerous colleagues and vulnerable young service users, resulting in people feeling scared and intimidated.
162. The panel reminded itself of its findings at paragraph 54 that Ms Ralph adopted "...a dysfunctional, unsupportive and aggressive management style". It also reminded itself of the effect of her behaviour on the Accommodation Officers, as outlined at paragraphs 45-47, above. Her actions had a profound affect upon vulnerable young service users, and the panel noted its findings at paragraph 95 in relation to Ms Ralph's "callous" behaviour

towards Service User I, a particularly vulnerable young person with poor mental health and a history of self-harm.

163. The panel noted that Ms Ralph was a social worker with substantial experience, and had attained a senior role. It considered the absence of insight and remediation, despite the length of time since the misconduct, to be an aggravating feature. It had assessed there being a high risk of repetition of the serious misconduct.
164. The panel considered that taking no action, or issuing advice or a warning, would not adequately reflect the serious nature of Ms Ralph's misconduct. They would not adequately protect the public as they would not restrict her practice. The panel had assessed there to be a high risk of repetition, and so considered that the public could not currently be adequately protected unless Ms Ralph's practice is restricted. Further, taking no action, or issuing advice or a warning, would not maintain public confidence in the profession or promote proper professional standards in light of the particularly serious nature of the misconduct.
165. The panel next considered whether a conditions of practice order would be sufficient to protect the public and wider public interest. The panel noted paragraph 85 of the Sanctions Guidance, which stated:

"Conditions are most commonly applied in cases of lack of competence or ill health. They're less likely to be appropriate in cases of character, attitudinal or behavioural failings, or in cases raising wider public interest issues. For example, conditions would almost certainly be insufficient in cases of....abuses of trust and discrimination involving a protected characteristic"
166. The panel also considered, again, paragraph 40 of the Sanctions Guidance, in relation to discrimination:

"....discrimination involving a protected characteristic are examples of cases that are likely to be viewed particularly seriously"
167. Given that many of the failures were attitudinal, and in light of the absence of adequate insight and remediation, the panel was satisfied that workable conditions could not be formulated to adequately protect the public. The panel also noted that Ms Ralph stated in her telephone conversation with Social Work England in April 2022 that she no longer wanted to work. The panel considered this, together with her lack of engagement in the regulatory proceedings, to be a clear indication that she does not intend to return to social work practise. Further, in light of the particularly serious nature of the misconduct, together with consideration of the above paragraphs of the Sanctions Guidance, the panel was satisfied that conditions would not be sufficient to maintain public confidence or to promote proper professional standards.
168. The panel then considered whether a suspension order would be appropriate in all of the circumstances. It concluded that, given the particularly serious nature of the misconduct, together with the lack of remediation and insight, suspension was not appropriate.

169. There had been a lack of evidenced development of remediation and insight since the Council's internal investigation in 2019. The panel was therefore not satisfied that there was a reasonable prospect of development of remediation and insight and, in any event, a significant time would need to be given in light of the lack of progress already made.

170. The panel considered paragraph 97 of the Sanctions Guidance:

"Given the risk of deskilling, decision makers should consider whether a case warranting a period of suspension longer than one year on the grounds of public confidence might be more appropriately disposed of by means of a removal order."

171. The panel concluded that any suspension would have to be for significantly longer than one year in light of the lack of current development of remediation and insight. Any shorter period would fail to protect the public and would also result in a deterioration of public confidence in the profession, in light of the seriousness of the misconduct.

172. The panel noted that Ms Ralph had already been absent from registered social work for over two years. It therefore concluded that it was unlikely that she would now develop remediation and insight so as to reduce the risk of repetition and maintain public confidence in the social work profession. In any event, the length of time that would be necessary to do so would result in her becoming deskilled.

173. The panel noted that paragraph 98 of the Sanctions Guidance covered the present circumstances:

"A removal order must be made where the adjudicators conclude that no other outcome would be enough to protect the public, maintain confidence in the profession or maintain proper professional standards for social workers in England...."

174. The panel therefore concluded that the only appropriate and proportionate sanction was one of removal from the social work register.

Determination and Reasons - Interim Order:

175. Ms Steels invited the panel to impose an interim order of suspension for a period of 18 months to cover any appeal period. She reminded the panel of its assessment of risk of repetition and the finding of impaired fitness to practice.

176. The panel noted that rule 13(b) requires a social worker be given 7 days notice of a proposal to make an interim order *"...unless in the opinion of the adjudicators a shorter period is necessary to protect the public..."*.

177. The panel considered that it would be wholly incompatible with its earlier findings to conclude that an interim suspension order was not necessary to protect the public and the wider public interest, or that there should be a 7-day period without imposing the interim order.

178. Accordingly, the panel concluded that an interim suspension order was necessary to protect the public and wider public interest. It determined that it was appropriate that the interim suspension order be for a period of 18 months in the event that Ms Ralph seeks to appeal. However, when the 28-day appeal period expires, the interim suspension order will come to an end unless there has been an application to appeal.
179. The panel therefore revoked the previous interim suspension order. The panel was satisfied that it was in the public interest to revoke it today, rather than upon giving Ms Ralph 7 days' notice. That is because it is unlikely that Ms Ralph will attend any future review, given her non-attendance at this substantive hearing. It is not in the public interest for funds to be spent on a hearing that is unlikely to be attended and within which the previous order would undoubtedly be revoked given the implementation of the new interim suspension order.
180. That concluded the case.

Right of Appeal

1. Under paragraph 16 (1) (a) of schedule 2, part 5 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018, the social worker may appeal to the High Court against the decision of adjudicators:
 - i. to make an interim order, other than an interim order made at the same time as a final order under paragraph 11(1)(b),
 - ii. not to revoke or vary such an order,
 - iii. to make a final order.
2. Under paragraph 16 (2) schedule 2, part 5 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018 an appeal must be made within 28 days of the day on which the social worker is notified of the decision complained of.
3. Under regulation 9(4), part 3 (Registration of social workers) of the Social Workers Regulations 2018, this order can only be recorded on the register 28 days after the Social Worker was informed of the decision or, if the social worker appeals within 28 days, when that appeal is exhausted.
4. This notice is served in accordance with rules 44 and 45 of the Social Work England Fitness to Practice Rules 2019.

Review of final orders

5. Under paragraph 15 (2) and 15 (3) of schedule 2, part 4 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018:
 - 15 (2) – The regulator may review a final order where new evidence relevant to the order has become available after the making of the order, or when requested to do so by the social worker.

15 (3) A request by the social worker under sub-paragraph (2) must be made within such period as the regulator determines in rules made under regulation 25(5), and a final order does not have effect until after the expiry of that period.

6. Under rule 16 (aa) of Social Work England's fitness to practise rules, a registered social worker requesting a review of a final order under paragraph 15 of Schedule 2 must make the request within 28 days of the day on which they are notified of the order.