

Social worker: Lesley Doorne
Hughes
Registration number: SW51108
Fitness to Practise
Final Order Review Meeting

Date of meeting: 01 July 2025

Meeting venue: Remote meeting

Final order being reviewed:
Suspension order (expiring 08 August 2025)

Hearing outcome:
Impose a new order namely a removal order with effect from the expiry of
the current order

Introduction and attendees:

1. This is the first review of a final suspension order originally imposed for a period of 12 months by a panel of adjudicators (hereafter ‘the panel’) on 11 July 2024.
2. Ms Hughes did not attend and was not represented.
3. Social Work England did not attend but it provided written submissions which were set out within the notice of hearing letter (hereafter ‘the notice’).

Adjudicators	Role
Alexander Coleman	Chair
Tracey Newson	Social worker adjudicator

Hearings team/Legal adviser	Role
Hannah Granger	Hearings officer
Ruby Wade	Hearings support officer
Francesca Keen	Legal adviser

Allegation –found proved which resulted in the imposition of the final order were as follows:

‘1) Whilst registered with the Health and Care Professions Council as a social worker and during the course of your employment with North Yorkshire County Council, you:

- a) Between April 2015 and 14 November 2016, did not update the Assessment and Progress Records for Service User 11.*
- b) Between 17 March 2017 and 28 July 2017, did not complete case recording in respect of a permanent placement for the following children:*
 - i. Service User 1;*
 - ii. Service User 2; and/or*
 - iii. Service User 3.*

c) *Did not complete and / or record visits in accordance with statutory timescales for:*

- i. *Service User 4, between 27 October 2016 and 17 March 2017,*
- ii. *[not proved];*
- iii. *Service User 6, between 10 May 2017 and 28 July 2017;*
- iv. *[not proved]; and/or*
- v. *[not proved].*

d) *Did not complete Personal Education Plans (“PEPs”) for:*

- i. *Service User 9, between 9 June 2017 and 28 July 2017, and/or*
- ii. *Service User 10, between 17 March 2017 and 28 July 2017.*

e) *Between 17 March 2017 and 28 July 2017, failed to complete pathway plans for the following:*

- i. *Service User 11;*
- ii. *Service User 5; and/or*
- iii. *Service User 12.*

f) *Between 5 July 2017 and 28 July 2017, failed to complete a Viability Assessment for a private law case involving Service User 6.*

g) *Between 10 February 2017 and 1 July 2017, did not complete a Placement with Parent Report for Service User 4,*

h) *On or around 24 November 2016, did not act appropriately and in a timely manner in respect of safeguarding risks to Service User 8.*

The matters set out at allegation 1 amount to misconduct.

Your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your misconduct.’

Service of notice:

4. The panel noted that notice of this hearing was sent to Ms Hughes by email to her registered email address as it appears on the Social Work England Register.
5. The panel had careful regard to the documents contained in the final order review service bundle as follows:
 - A copy of the notice of the final hearing dated 02 June 2025 and addressed to Ms Hughes at her email address which she provided to Social Work England;

- An extract from the Social Work England Register as at 02 June 2025 detailing Ms Hughes' registered email address;
 - A copy of a signed statement of service, on behalf of Social Work England, confirming that on 02 June 2025 the writer sent, by email, to Ms Hughes at the email address referred to above: the notice and related documents.
6. The panel accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser in relation to service of notice.
 7. Having had regard to Social Work England's Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended) (hereafter 'the Rules') and all of the information before it in relation to the service of the notice, the panel was satisfied that notice of this hearing had been served on Ms Hughes in accordance with Rules 14, 15, 44 and 45.

Proceeding with the final order review as a meeting and in the absence of Ms Hughes

8. The notice of final order review informed Ms Hughes that the review would take place as a meeting. The notice stated:

"If you would like to attend before the adjudicators in order to make oral submissions, please confirm your intention by no later than 4pm on 10 June 2025. Unless we hear from you to the contrary, we shall assume that you do not want to attend a hearing and Social Work England may decide to deal with the review as a meeting. If Social Work England do hold a meeting, the adjudicators will be provided with a copy of this letter setting out Social Work England's submissions and a copy of any written submissions you provide."
9. The panel noted that Ms Hughes had not responded to Social Work England, nor had she completed a hearing participation form.
10. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser with regard to Rule 16(c) of the Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended) which provides:

"Where the registered social worker does not state within the period specified by the regulator whether they intend to attend before the regulator, the regulator may determine whether to make an order by means of a meeting."
11. In view of the aforementioned, the panel was satisfied that it would be fair and appropriate to conduct the review in the form of a meeting in accordance with Rule 16(c).
12. The panel determined, on the advice of the Legal Adviser, that because the practical effect of proceeding as a meeting was to conduct the review without any oral submissions from Ms Hughes, the panel should have regard to the test for considering whether to proceed in the absence of Ms Hughes.
13. The panel also accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser in relation to the factors it should take into account when considering this application. This included reference to the

Social Work England guidance ‘Service of Notices and Proceeding in the Absence of the Social Worker’, Rule 43 of the Rules and the cases of *R v Jones [2003] UKPC*; *General Medical Council v Adeogba [2016] EWCA Civ 162*. The panel also considered all of the information before it.

14. The panel noted that Ms Hughes had been sent notice of today's hearing and was therefore satisfied that she was aware of today's hearing. The panel considered that Social Work England had made all reasonable efforts to serve the Notice on Ms Hughes and that she had been informed of the date, time and venue of the hearing. The panel determined that it was reasonable in the circumstances of this case, and that it was in the public interest, to proceed with the meeting because it was satisfied that Ms Hughes had been properly notified of the hearing.
15. The panel also noted that Ms Hughes has not engaged in the regulatory proceedings at any point, nor has she sought an adjournment of today's proceedings. In this regard the panel considered that Ms Hughes had voluntarily absented herself from the proceedings. Having regard to Ms Hughes' previous non-attendance and her lack of engagement in the regulatory proceedings, the panel was also satisfied that adjourning today's proceedings would serve no useful purpose as it would be unlikely to secure Ms Hughes' attendance at a future hearing.
16. Further, the panel also considered any disadvantage that may be caused to Ms Hughes should it determine to proceed in her absence. In doing so, the panel also balanced fairness to Social Work England in proceeding and the panel noted that Ms Hughes had been afforded an opportunity to attend the hearing and/or provide written submissions and she had not availed herself of either.
17. Additionally, the panel also considered the public interest need to deal with substantive review matters expeditiously and having weighed the interests of Ms Hughes in regard to her attendance at the hearing with those of Social Work England and the public interest in an expeditious disposal of this hearing, the panel determined to proceed in Ms Hughes' absence.

Review of the current order:

18. This final order review hearing is taking place under Paragraph 15(1) of Schedule 2 of The Social Workers Regulations 2018 (as amended) and Social Work England's Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended).
19. The current order is due to expire at the end of 08 August 2025.

The substantive hearing panel on 11 July 2025 determined the following with regard to impairment:

“...

In determining the issue as to current impairment of fitness to practise, the panel had regard to the following matters:

The extent to which Ms Hughes had the skills, knowledge and character to practise her profession safely and effectively without restriction; and

The wider public interest, which included the need to promote and maintain public confidence in social workers in England and the need to promote and maintain proper professional standards for these social workers.

At the outset, the panel considered the extent to which Ms Hughes' misconduct was capable of remedy. As a matter of principle, the panel was of the view that, with full insight and appropriate evidence demonstrating remediation, such misconduct was capable of remedy.

The panel considered whether Ms Hughes' misconduct had, in fact, been remedied. The panel first of all addressed the issue as to whether there was evidence that Ms Hughes was insightful into the seriousness of her misconduct. Ms Hughes had chosen not to engage in the hearing. The panel had no evidence from Ms Hughes reflecting on her actions, the potential for harm to others and any evidence of learning which would reduce the risk that Ms Hughes would repeat her misconduct in the future. In her last communication with Social Work England, in an email dated 27 August 2021, Ms Hughes stated:

'To be quite honest, I am past caring about the outcome of this investigation or whether I work as a Social Worker again in the future as I have no faith in the profession or it's governing body and have a life outside of work these days that never existed when I was a Social Worker working for [the Council].'

The panel was satisfied that, in the absence of evidence of insight and remediation, there remained a risk that Ms Hughes would repeat her misconduct in future. Accordingly, the panel concluded that a finding of current impairment of Ms Hughes' fitness to practise was necessary to protect the public.

The panel next considered whether it was appropriate to make a finding of current impairment of Ms Hughes' fitness to practise on public interest grounds, namely, the need to promote and maintain public confidence in social workers in England and the need to promote and maintain proper professional standards for these social workers.

Having carefully considered the matter, and the nature of the misconduct established in this case, the panel was satisfied that a finding of current impairment of Ms Hughes' fitness to practise was required on public interest grounds. Not to make such a finding, in the panel's view, would seriously undermine the public's trust and confidence in the social work profession in England and would fail to promote and maintain proper professional standards.

The panel had regard to the formulation provided by Dame Janet Smith in her Fifth Report to the Shipman Inquiry, which was cited with approval by Cox J in Grant:

‘Do our findings of fact in respect of the [the Social Worker’s] misconduct, ... show that her fitness to practise is impaired in the sense that she:

Has in the past acted and/or is liable in the future to act so as to put a [service user] or [service users] at unwarranted risk of harm; and/or

Has in the past brought and/or is liable in the future to bring the [social work] profession into disrepute; and/or

Has in the past breached and/or is liable in the future to breach one of the fundamental tenets of the [social work] profession; and/or

[...].’

The panel was satisfied that, looking backwards, all of the above applicable limbs of the formulation in Grant were engaged. The panel was also satisfied that all of the limbs were engaged in respect of its assessment of Ms Hughes’ likely actions in the future.

Accordingly, the panel has decided, on public protection and public interest grounds, that Ms Hughes’ fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of her misconduct. ’

The final hearing panel on 11 July 2025 determined the following with regard to sanction:

‘At the outset, the panel considered the aggravating and mitigating factors.

The panel identified the following mitigating factors:

No previous regulatory findings;

Positive evidence from witnesses about some aspects of Ms Hughes’ practice as a social worker;

Some limited evidence that Ms Hughes’ had issues with her health at the material time although no basis to find that her health had been a factor in Ms Hughes’ misconduct;

With the exception of the Final Hearing, Ms Hughes had engaged to some degree in the regulatory proceedings.

The panel identified the following aggravating factors:

Misconduct was wide ranging and prolonged;

Lack of insight/remorse;

Lack of remediation; and

Risk of harm to a vulnerable service user group – Looked After Children.

The panel then considered, in turn, the range of available sanctions, starting with the least restrictive.

No Further Action/ Advice

Having regard to its findings, the panel was of the view that concluding the case by taking no further action or issuing Ms Hughes with advice as to her future conduct would be contrary to its findings and insufficient to protect the public and uphold the public interest.

Warning

The panel noted that imposing a Warning on Ms Hughes' registration would not restrict her ability to practise as a social worker. The panel carefully considered the circumstances in respect of which it would be appropriate to impose a Warning. The panel's judgement was that Ms Hughes' misconduct was too serious and decided that a Warning would be contrary to its findings and insufficient to protect the public and uphold the public interest.

Conditions of Practice Order

The panel noted that the primary purpose of a Conditions of Practice Order was to protect the public while the social worker took any necessary steps to remediate their fitness to practise. The panel considered that in a case like this, which addressed practice concerns, a Conditions of Practice Order might be appropriate and proportionate. Set against this, however, was Ms Hughes' clear indication, as set out in her email dated 27 August 2021, that she had no intention of returning to social work and had since disengaged with her regulator. Ms Hughes had not worked in social work practice since November 2017. During her time with the Council, the evidence was that, even with a great deal of support, there had not been a sustained improvement in her practice. As a result, in these circumstances, the panel concluded that a Conditions of Practice Order would not be practicable nor workable.

In addition, given the serious nature of its findings and the assessment of the risk of harm created to service users as a result of Ms Hughes' actions, the panel concluded that a Conditions of Practice Order would be contrary to its findings and insufficient to protect to protect the public and uphold the public interest.

Suspension Order

The panel noted that a Suspension Order was appropriate where no workable conditions could be devised which would uphold the public interest, but where the case fell short of requiring removal from the Register or where removal was not an option.

The panel noted its findings in relation to the aggravating and mitigating factors, referred to above, and reminded itself that a Suspension Order is appropriate in cases where a registrant's misconduct, while serious, was not such as to be fundamentally incompatible with remaining on the Register.

The panel had in mind the evidence of Ms McLaren and Ms Sheader. It was plain to the panel that although there were many aspects of Ms Hughes' practice which gave her employer serious and justified cause for concern, there were other aspects of Ms Hughes' practice which were more positive. Ms McLaren, in that regard, noted Ms Hughes, 'was very good at building relationships with her foster families, children and other stakeholders.' For her part, Ms Sheader stated that Ms Hughes was a 'kind and committed social worker who wanted to do her best for the children she worked with.'

On balance, the panel considered that a period of temporary removal from the Register by way of a Suspension Order was appropriate and proportionate. A Suspension Order would be sufficient to protect the public and uphold the public interest while, at the same time, would afford Ms Hughes an opportunity, if she chose to take it up, to provide Social Work England with evidence of insight and remediation.

This panel considered that, at the mandatory review of this Order, a future reviewing panel would be assisted by the following:

- 1. Ms Hughes' attendance at the review;*
- 2. A reflective piece from Ms Hughes setting out evidence of her insight and remediation. Such a piece could include but was not limited to: Ms Hughes' current understanding of how things went wrong in her practice; the impact which her misconduct had on service users and colleagues and evidence of current training to strengthen her practice; and*
- 3. References/testimonials from employers in any paid or unpaid roles.*

The panel considered that a Suspension Order for a period of 12 months was appropriate and sufficient to enable Ms Hughes to reflect on the panel's findings and collate evidence of insight and remediation.

The panel recognised the impact which a Suspension Order would have on Ms Hughes and took this into account. However, it considered the need to protect the public and uphold the public interest outweighed Ms Hughes' interests.

Removal Order

The panel considered whether a Removal Order was the only appropriate response to its findings. The panel concluded that, in light of its reasons for the making of a Suspension Order, a Removal Order would be a disproportionate step to take at this stage.'

Social Work England submissions:

20. The panel had regard to Social Work England's written submissions to it, which it noted were outlined within the Notice, as follows:

'Subject to any evidence (or a willingness to engage), insight and remediation received after this Notice of Hearing is served, Social Work England invite the panel to impose a Removal Order. This submission is made on the grounds that such an Order is necessary for the protection of the public and is in the wider public interest.

The Social Worker has not engaged with the Case Review Team since the Final Order was made. It is noted that the Final Hearing proceeded in her absence. The Social Worker has not followed the recommendations of the previous Panel and has not provided any confirmation of her intention to return to social work practice.

There is no evidence before the regulator and this reviewing Panel that the Social Worker has reflected on her practice following the findings made at the Final Hearing Panel, and that she is willing or able to provide references or testimonials from employers in either paid or unpaired roles for consideration.

The Panel are therefore invited to find that the Social Worker's fitness to practise remains impaired, and to impose a Removal Order.'

Social worker submissions:

21. Ms Hughes did not provide any submissions for the panel's consideration.

Panel decision and reasons on current impairment:

22. The panel took account of all of the documents provided to it by Social Work England, which included: a 53 page final review bundle; and a service and supplementary bundle of 10 pages. The panel also had regard to Social Work England's written submissions, as set out in the Notice. The panel also took into account the final hearing panel's determination and reasons. However, it exercised its own independent judgement in relation to the question of current impairment.
23. The panel considered the relevant Social Work England Guidance and accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser, which had drawn its attention to Schedule 2 paragraph 15 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018 and to the proper approach to be adopted when considering current impairment. In reaching its decision, the panel was mindful of the

need to protect the public and the wider public interest in declaring and upholding proper standards of behaviour and maintain public confidence in the profession.

24. In making its decision, the panel had regard to both the personal and public elements of impairment. In considering the question of current impairment, the panel undertook a comprehensive review of the substantive order in light of the current circumstances.
25. The panel first considered whether Ms Hughes' fitness to practise remains impaired. It bore in mind that in deciding whether Ms Hughes' fitness to practise is still impaired it should have regard to the approach of Dame Janet Smith endorsed in the High Court in *CHRE v NMC and Grant [2011] EWHC 927 (Admin)*. For the reasons set out, the panel considered that the first three limbs of Grant were engaged.
26. The panel noted that the failings found proved against Ms Hughes related to tasks which could be considered to be fundamental and basic to the role of a social worker and had the potential to place service users at risk of harm. The panel also had regard to the reasons outlined by the final hearing panel as to why Ms Hughes' fitness to practice was considered to be impaired at the final hearing (set out above) and in doing so, the panel noted that since the final hearing Ms Hughes has not: provided any evidence of remedial action or steps taken to address the failings found proved by the final hearing panel; has not provided any evidence of insight; has not provided any evidence of continuing professional development ('CPD'), or steps taken to keep her social work knowledge and skills up-to-date; has not provided any testimonials or references from her current employer; has not provided any information in respect of any transferrable learning which she may have obtained; and has failed to engage with Social Work England or these proceedings. The panel therefore considered that Ms Hughes had failed to satisfy it that she had remedied her failings and conduct, nor had she satisfied it that her failings and conduct would not be repeated again in the future.
27. The panel reminded itself that the persuasive burden lay with Ms Hughes and for the reasons set out above, the panel was not persuaded that Ms Hughes does not continue to pose an ongoing risk to the public. Consequently, the panel determined that Ms Hughes' fitness to practise remains currently impaired on the personal component.
28. The panel next considered the public component of impairment. The panel reminded itself that part of its role was to maintain professional standards and uphold confidence in the social work profession. The panel considered that in view of the aforementioned, there remained a risk of harm due to Ms Hughes' conduct. Having regard to this, and the fact that Ms Hughes has failed to remedy her identified failings, the panel was satisfied that a member of the public appraised of all of the circumstances of this case, would have their confidence in the profession, and the regulator, undermined if a finding of current impairment was not made on public interest grounds. The panel therefore determined that Ms Hughes' fitness to practise is also currently impaired on the public interest component.

29. Accordingly, the panel concluded that Ms Hughes' fitness to practise remains impaired on both the personal and public components.

Decision and reasons on sanction:

30. Having found Ms Hughes' fitness to practise currently impaired, the panel then considered what, if any, sanction it should impose in this case. The panel accepted the Legal Adviser's advice and had regard to Social Work England's Sanction Guidance.

31. The panel bore in mind that sanction is a matter for its own independent judgment and that the purpose of a sanction is not to punish Ms Hughes but to protect the public. Further, that any sanction must be proportionate, so that any order must be the least restrictive order that would protect the public interest, including public protection.

32. The panel first considered taking no action. The panel concluded that, in view of the nature of the concerns, which remain unaddressed, it would be inappropriate to take no action, as it would be insufficient to protect the public. Further, due to the continuing concerns about Ms Hughes' practice, the panel also concluded that a caution or warning would be inappropriate and insufficient to protect the public. Neither sanction would be subject to a review nor would either adequately address the concerns that have been identified in this case.

33. The panel next considered the option of imposing a conditions of practice order. However, for the same reasons expressed by the final hearing panel (outlined above), the panel considered that this sanction was not appropriate. Further, in the panel's view, Ms Hughes has expressed a clear and settled intention not to engage in the proceedings and/or to return to the social work profession, meaning that a conditions of practice order would not be engaged. Therefore, for these reasons the panel considered that a conditions of practice order was not appropriate, workable or proportionate.

34. The panel next considered the option of imposing a further period of suspension versus imposing a removal order. The panel had regard to Social Work England's sanctions guidance and noted that it stated:

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

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

138. Suspension is likely to be unsuitable in circumstances where (both of the following):

- *the social worker has not demonstrated any insight and remediation*

- *there is limited evidence to suggest they are willing (or able) to resolve or remediate their failings ’*

35. Having done so, the panel noted the contents of paragraph 138 of the sanctions guidance and it considered that both points were engaged. Namely, that Ms Hughes has not demonstrated any insight or remediation and further, there is no evidence before the panel to suggest they she is willing or able to resolve or remediate her failings.

36. The panel next considered paragraphs 148 and 149 of the sanctions guidance and noted that they stated the following:

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

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

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

- *...*
- *Persistent lack of insight into the seriousness of their actions or consequences*
- *Social workers who are unwilling and/or unable to remediate (for example, where there is clear evidence that they do not wish to practice as a social worker in the future).’*

37. Having done so, the panel determined that a removal off order was the appropriate order. In forming this view, the panel had regard to the lack of insight and remediation together with a real risk that the behaviour would be repeated. These features, combined with Ms Hughes’ clear expression that she no longer wishes to practice as a social worker, led the panel to conclude that the only appropriate sanction in this case was to make a removal order. In doing so, the panel took into account the impact this would have on the Registrant however, it concluded that the need to protect the public outweighed Ms Hughes’ interests and that no other sanction would adequately protect the public or uphold public confidence in the social work profession or in the regulatory process.

38. Accordingly, the panel directs that a removal order be made to take effect from the expiry of the current order.

Right of appeal:

39. Under Paragraph 16(1)(b) of Schedule 2 of The Social Workers Regulations 2018 (as amended), the social worker may appeal to the High Court against:

- a. 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,
- b. the decision of the regulator on review of an interim order, or a final order, other than a decision to revoke the order.

40. Under Paragraph 16(2) of Schedule 2 of The Social Workers Regulations 2018 (as amended) an appeal must be filed before the end of the period of 28 days beginning with the day after the day on which the social worker is notified of the decision complained of.

41. Under Paragraph 15(1A) of Schedule 2 of The Social Workers Regulations 2018 (as amended), where a social worker appeals against a decision made under sub-paragraph (1), the decision being appealed takes effect from the date specified in that sub-paragraph notwithstanding any appeal against that decision.

42. This notice is served in accordance with Rules 44 and 45 of the Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended).

The Professional Standards Authority

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

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