

Social worker: Philip Geraci

Registration number: SW25941

Fitness to Practise

Final Hearing

Dates of hearing: 15 September 2025 to 22 September 2025

Hearing venue: Remote hearing

Hearing outcome:
Fitness to practise impaired, removal order

Interim order:
Interim suspension order (18 months)

Introduction and attendees:

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

Adjudicators	Role
Kerry McKevitt	Chair
Tracey Newson	Social worker adjudicator
Melissa Forbes-Murison	Lay adjudicator

Hearings team/Legal adviser	Role
Jo Cooper	Hearings officer
Ruby Wade	Hearings support officer
Zill-e Huma	Legal adviser

Service of notice:

5. The panel was informed by Mr Harris, that notice of this hearing was sent to Mr Geraci, by email on 1 August 2025 to the email address held by Social Work England on its register. Mr Harris submitted that the notice of this hearing had been duly served.
6. The panel of adjudicators had careful regard to the documents contained in the final hearing service bundle as follows:
 - An extract from Social Work England’s Register showing the email address for Mr Geraci held on Social Work England’s register.
 - A copy of the notice of final hearing, which was dated 29 July 2025, and addressed to Mr Geraci at his email address as it appears on the register.
 - A copy of a covering email dated 1 August 2025, which was addressed to Mr Geraci at his email address as it appears on the register, referred to an upcoming final hearing and stated that it had attached to it a copy of a notice of final hearing and related documents.
 - A copy of a signed statement of service on behalf of Social Work England, confirming that on 1 August 2025 the writer sent the notice and related documents by email to Mr Geraci at his email address as it appears on the register.

7. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser in relation to service of notice. This included reference to rules 16, 44 and 45 of Social Work England's Fitness to Practise Rules (the "FTP Rules") and paragraph 14(6) of Schedule 2 to the Social Workers Regulations 2018.
8. The panel concluded that notice of this Final Hearing had been served on Mr Geraci in accordance with the FTP Rules.

Proceeding in the absence of the social worker:

9. Mr Harris, on behalf of Social Work England, submitted that the panel has the power under the Fitness to Practise Rules to proceed in the absence of a social worker where notice has been properly served, and it is fair and in the interests of justice to do so. He reminded the panel of its discretion to continue in the social worker's absence where the non-attendance appears voluntary, and where an adjournment would serve no useful purpose.
10. Mr Harris referred to an email from Mr Geraci confirming that he would not be attending the Final Hearing. Mr Harris submitted that this communication demonstrates a deliberate and informed decision not to attend. There has been no application for an adjournment and no indication of any impediment preventing attendance or participation by alternative means. In those circumstances, Mr Harris submitted that the non-attendance is voluntary and amounts to a waiver of the right to be present.
11. Mr Harris submitted that the principle has been consistently applied in professional regulatory proceedings, he referred to *Tait v The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons* [2003] UKPC 34, where the Privy Council confirmed that disciplinary tribunals have the power to proceed in absence but must ensure that the decision is fair and proportionate.
12. He further referred to the decision in *General Medical Council v Adeogba* [2016] EWCA Civ 162, where the Court of Appeal made clear that fairness is central to the panel's consideration, but that regulatory proceedings must also be conducted efficiently and economically. The regulator has a statutory duty to protect the public, and there is a strong public interest in the timely and effective disposal of fitness to practise cases. Proceedings should not be frustrated or indefinitely delayed by a registrant's failure to engage with the regulator.
13. Mr Harris submitted that proceeding in the absence of Mr Geraci is consistent with the panel's duty under the overarching objective of Social Work England, which is to protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public; to maintain public confidence in the social work profession; and to uphold proper standards of conduct and performance. He emphasised that the case is ready to be heard, the witnesses and evidence are available, and any further delay would risk fading recollections and unnecessary prolongation of proceedings. He submitted that fairness to Mr Geraci can be safeguarded because the panel will consider all written material provided by him.

14. Mr Harris therefore invited the panel to exercise its discretion to proceed in Mr Geraci's absence, noting that proper notice has been served in accordance with the FTP Rules; that Mr Geraci has expressly stated by email that he will not be attending; that no adjournment has been sought; and that there is no reason to believe an adjournment would secure his attendance. In his submission, proceeding today accords with the FTP Rules, is fair, and best serves both the interests of justice and the expeditious disposal of this Final Hearing, while fulfilling the overarching objective.
15. The panel accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser, which included reference to the principles in *R v Jones* [2002] UKHL 5, *Tait v The Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons* [2003] UKPC 34, and *General Medical Council v Adeogba* [2016] EWCA Civ 162, together with Social Work England's guidance on service of notices and proceeding in the absence of the social worker. The panel reminded itself that the discretion to proceed in absence must be exercised with great care and caution, and that the central issue was whether it was fair and in the interests of justice to do so.
16. The panel considered all of the information before it, together with the submissions made by Mr Harris and the written submissions made by Mr Geraci.
17. The panel noted that Mr Geraci had sent an email in which he stated that he would be unable to attend the Final Hearing due to [PRIVATE] to substantiate this explanation, the panel recognised that he had engaged with the process by submitting written representations. The panel also noted that he had not requested an adjournment.
18. The panel then conducted a balancing exercise. On one side, it considered the importance of ensuring that Mr Geraci had a fair opportunity to attend, hear the evidence, and give instructions or make representations. On the other side, it weighed the strong public interest in the expeditious disposal of fitness to practise proceedings, as highlighted in *Adeogba*. The panel bore in mind the need to protect the public, maintain confidence in the profession, and avoid unnecessary delay which could impair the quality of the evidence and frustrate the regulator's ability to discharge its statutory duties.
19. Having weighed these factors, the panel concluded that Mr Geraci's absence was voluntary. Whilst it accepted that he had cited [PRIVATE] in the absence of supporting evidence and in light of his decision not to seek an adjournment, the panel determined that an adjournment would serve no useful purpose and would be unlikely to secure his attendance. The panel was satisfied that fairness to Mr Geraci could be maintained by taking full account of his written submissions and by ensuring that his absence was not held against him when assessing the evidence.
20. Balancing all of these considerations, the panel determined that it was fair, proportionate and in the interests of justice to proceed in Mr Geraci's absence. The panel was satisfied that this course of action was consistent with the overarching objective of Social Work England: to protect, promote and maintain the health, safety and wellbeing of the public; to maintain public confidence in the social work profession; and to uphold proper standards of conduct and performance.

Preliminary matters:

Part of hearing to be heard in private;

21. Mr Harris made an application under Rule 38 for parts of the hearing to be heard in private, namely those parts of the hearing when the health and related matters concerning Mr Geraci were considered.
22. Mr Harris submitted that issues relating to Mr Geraci's health arose within the material already before the panel, and while no allegation directly concerning health was being considered, such matters might properly be the subject of discussion and submissions. He further submitted that matters relating aspects of Mr Geraci's family life might also arise in the course of the hearing. Mr Harris argued that such matters were of a genuinely private nature and should appropriately be heard in private.
23. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser in relation to the factors it should take into account when considering this application. The panel was reminded that the general rule is that hearings shall be held in public, but that Rule 38 provides an exception to that approach where the health of the registered social worker is being considered. The panel was further reminded that, in addition to the narrow health exception, it also retains a wider discretion to hear matters in private where it is appropriate to do so, having regard to the matters identified within the Rules and the need to balance the public interest in open justice with the protection of the welfare and private life of those concerned.
24. Having considered Mr Harris's submissions, the panel accepted that there was material within the evidence already before it concerning Mr Geraci's health, which may properly be the subject of discussion and submissions. The panel also considered that matters relating to aspects of Mr Geraci's family life might arise in the course of the hearing. Such matters are of a genuinely private nature, and the panel was satisfied that it was appropriate for them to be heard in private.
25. Accordingly, the panel exercised its discretion under Rule 38 and directed that parts of the hearing shall be held in private.

Application to find allegations proved by way of written admissions by the social worker;

26. Mr Harris submitted that, although Mr Geraci did not provide a formal response document expressly indicating which allegations he admitted or denied, he did provide a signed written statement of four pages dated 14 September 2025. That statement, while presented in narrative form rather than as direct admissions to individual allegations, contained a number of important concessions which, properly analysed, amounted to admissions of fact.
27. Mr Harris submitted that in the statement, Mr Geraci expressly accepted that he had engaged in an inappropriate personal relationship with Service User X. He acknowledged that the relationship became physical and, in context, it is clear that he

was referring to a sexual relationship. Mr Harris submitted that this amounted to admissions of Allegation 1(a) and 1(b), namely that Mr Geraci had entered into a personal relationship with Service User X and that this relationship became sexual on one or more occasions.

28. Mr Harris noted that the relationship was said by Mr Geraci to have lasted approximately ten months, during which he accepted that he had acted inappropriately. Turning to Allegation 2, which concerns whether the conduct at 1(a) and 1(b) was sexually motivated, Mr Harris submitted that while this was ultimately a matter for the panel's inference rather than direct admission, the terms of the statement, including the acknowledgment of an ongoing sexual relationship, were consistent with and supported a finding that the conduct was sexually motivated.
29. In relation to Allegation 3, concerning inaccurate records, Mr Harris acknowledged that Mr Geraci did not expressly admit to falsifying or submitting inaccurate records. However, his statement implicitly accepted that what he had previously written was not accurate, and he conceded that he had not disclosed the true extent of his relationship with Service User X to his employer. Mr Harris submitted that although Mr Geraci attempted to attribute this failure to advice he had received from a union representative, the effect of his statement was nonetheless an acknowledgment that he had withheld the truth. This, in Mr Harris's submission, could properly be treated as an admission to the factual basis of the allegation, even if not expressly framed as such.
30. Mr Harris further submitted that Allegation 4 should also be treated as admitted. This allegation is that between approximately 1 January 2018 and 31 May 2019, Mr Geraci did not disclose the true extent of his contact with Service User X to his employer. Mr Harris observed that in his statement, Mr Geraci explicitly accepted that he had failed to disclose the true nature and extent of his relationship during this period. Although he sought to explain that failure by reference to advice he said he had received from his union representative, he nonetheless conceded that he had not told the truth to his employer. Mr Harris submitted that this was a clear and unequivocal admission to Allegation 4.
31. Mr Harris submitted that, taken as a whole, the written statement contained clear admissions to several of the allegations, particularly Allegations 1(a), 1(b), and 4, with strong support for Allegation 2, and at least implicit acceptance relevant to Allegation 3. He further submitted that, in these circumstances, there was limited dispute as to the core facts. Given this, Mr Harris argued that the panel should consider whether it was strictly necessary to hear oral evidence from Service User X, who is a vulnerable witness, noting the difficulties and stress she would face in giving evidence when the essence of her account was no longer in dispute.
32. The panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal adviser. The legal adviser reminded the panel of Rule 32(c)(i) of the Social Work England Fitness to Practise Rules 2019, which requires that where facts have been admitted by the social worker, the

adjudicators shall find those facts proved. The legal adviser emphasised that the panel must carefully scrutinise the wording of any written statement or correspondence from the social worker to determine whether it contains a clear and unequivocal admission of fact.

33. Having carefully assessed the wording of that statement in its entirety, and the context provided by the submissions, the panel was satisfied that Mr Geraci understood the allegations and had made voluntary, informed concessions that plainly accepted the truth of a number of factual allegations. Where dates in the statement were expressed approximately and did not map precisely onto the allegation period, the panel noted that the particulars were themselves framed “approximately” and that the conduct admitted fell within the allegation window. The approximate dating did not create material ambiguity as to whether the conduct occurred.
34. The panel found Allegation 1(a) proved by way of admission. In his statement Mr Geraci accepted that he had entered into an inappropriate personal relationship with Service User X, departing from professional boundaries. He characterised the relationship as personal and acknowledged its impropriety, expressing shame and recognising the seriousness of his conduct. Those were clear and unqualified concessions which the panel treated as an admission of the factual allegation within the charged period.
35. The panel found Allegation 1(b) proved by way of admission. Although Mr Geraci had used the phrase “*the relationship became physical*” and referred to “*kissing*”, when read in context and as part of the narrative as a whole he was plainly acknowledging a sexual relationship with Service User X over a period of months. He did not suggest any alternative (non-sexual) meaning, and he elsewhere accepted having previously lied about the nature of the relationship. Taken together, the language was clear and unambiguous and amounted to an admission that sexual activity occurred on one or more occasions within the relevant period.
36. The panel found Allegation 2 proved by way of admission. On Mr Geraci’s own account he had pursued and maintained an ongoing sexual relationship with Service User X, prioritising his own emotional needs and acknowledging the impropriety of his conduct. He offered no benign, non-sexual motive for that conduct. In the panel’s judgment, those narrative concessions amounted to an acceptance that the conduct admitted at 1(a) and 1(b) was sexually motivated. Even if sexual motivation were viewed as requiring inference, the panel would have reached the same conclusion on the basis of Mr Geraci’s admissions; however, the panel was satisfied that, taken at face value, the statement itself admitted sexual motivation.
37. The panel found Allegation 4 proved by way of admission. In his statement Mr Geraci accepted that he had not disclosed the true nature and extent of his contact with Service User X to his employer during the relevant period. Although he sought to explain that omission by reference to advice from a union representative, the explanation did not detract from the clear factual concession that he had failed to tell his employer the

truth. The panel treated that unequivocal acknowledgment as an admission of the factual allegation.

38. In view of these admissions, the panel decided that it was not necessary to hear oral evidence from Service User X, recognising her vulnerability and the stress that would have been involved in requiring her to give live evidence where the essence of her account was no longer in dispute.

Admissions:

39. Rule 32c(i)(aa) Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended) (the ‘Rules’) states:
- “Where facts have been admitted by the social worker, the adjudicators or regulator shall find those facts proved”.*
40. The panel therefore found allegations 1(a), 1(b), 2 and 4 proved by way of Mr Geraci’s written admissions.
41. The panel was not satisfied that allegations 3 and 5 were admitted in Mr Geraci’s written statement and remained to be determined on the evidence in due course.
42. In line with Rule 32c(i)(a) of the Rules, the panel then went on to determine the disputed facts.

Allegations:

“The allegations arising out of the regulatory concerns referred by the Case Examiners on 15 February 2022 are:

Whilst employed as a social worker by Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council:

1. You failed to maintain a professional relationship with Service User X in that between approximately 1 January 2018 and 31 May 2019, you:

- a. Engaged in an inappropriate personal relationship with Service User X;*
- b. Engaged in sexual activity with Service User X on one or more occasions.*

2. Your conduct at paragraph 1 (a) and/or (b) above was sexually motivated.

3. Between approximately 1 January 2018 and 31 May 2019, you:

- a. Failed to produce accurate records setting out your interactions with Service User X;*
- b. Wrote a report for a court case dated 7 January 2019 that was inaccurate and/or misleading in its content.*

4. Between approximately 1 January 2018 and 1 May 2019, you did not disclose the true extent of your contact with Service User X to your employer.

5. Your actions at paragraphs 3 and 4 above were dishonest.”

Summary of evidence:

Background;

43. On 21 January 2019, the Health Care Professions Council (HCPC) received a referral from a member of the public (who was a former partner of Service User X), concerning Mr Geraci. Similar concerns were later referred to Social Work England by Mr Geraci's employer in November 2020, following disclosures made by Service User X in October 2020.
44. At the relevant time, Mr Geraci was employed in the Adult Drug and Alcohol Service at Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council but was based within Pennine Care, which acted as the lead agency for mental health and substance misuse services. He had been employed by the Council since 2005 and, since 2010, had worked with people experiencing problems with drug and alcohol misuse. His role as a Key Worker/Case Management Worker involved carrying out risk assessments, developing plans, and providing support to service users through rehabilitation, detoxification, and harm reduction education. He also offered psycho-social support during detoxification programmes and assisted service users with issues such as parenting, debt, self-neglect, and employment.
45. The concerns raised were that Mr Geraci had engaged in an inappropriate and sexual relationship with Service User X, an adult female service user under his care.

Submissions:

Social Work England;

46. In his submissions Mr Harris submitted that he relied not only on his oral submissions but also on the written submissions filed on behalf of Social Work England.
47. Mr Harris submitted that the core of the concerns was that Mr Geraci had engaged in an inappropriate and sexual relationship with Service User X, a vulnerable service user under his care. He reminded the panel that Mr Geraci had initially denied any sexual activity or sexual intent and had suggested that his poor decisions were the result of [PRIVATE]. However, in April 2021 he provided limited admissions of boundary breaches, and on the morning of the first day of this hearing he provided a four-page signed statement in which he expressly admitted that he had engaged in an inappropriate relationship with Service User X, describing it as lasting around ten months from approximately March 2018 to January 2019. Mr Geraci also admitted that the relationship became physical.
48. Mr Harris emphasised that the allegations extended beyond the admitted relationship. They included failures to maintain accurate records of contact with Service User X, the production of an inaccurate and misleading report for the family court dated 7 January 2019, and a failure to disclose the true extent of his contact with Service User X to his employer. Mr Harris submitted that these omissions and actions were not accidental but formed part of a pattern of concealment by Mr Geraci. He referred to evidence from

Service User X, her former partner, and other witnesses showing that Mr Geraci had visited her at home late at night, used his personal phone and email to contact her, and asked her to delete messages to conceal the relationship.

49. Mr Harris highlighted the evidence of Ms Tang, who had been Mr Geraci's line manager and had previously placed him on an action plan because of concerns over the recording of lone working, diary entries and record keeping. This demonstrated that Mr Geraci was well aware of the standards expected of him. Ms Murray reviewed the family court report authored by Mr Geraci and identified that it was subjective, opinion-based, and unsupported by case notes. It also contained inaccuracies, and the Trust subsequently wrote to the court to disassociate itself from the content. Ms Bradbury undertook a local investigation and interviewed Mr Geraci in November 2020, at which time he denied any sexual relationship and gave inconsistent and incomplete accounts of his contact with Service User X.
50. Mr Harris submitted that the evidence showed Mr Geraci had acted dishonestly. He knowingly failed to make accurate records, avoided using the lone worker book, concealed the extent of his visits and communications, and misled both his employer and investigators. By doing so he maintained and concealed his inappropriate relationship with Service User X. Mr Harris reminded the panel of the legal test for dishonesty: first to consider Mr Geraci's knowledge and belief as to the facts, and then to assess, by the standards of ordinary decent people, whether his conduct was honest. He submitted that ordinary decent people would consider his deliberate concealment and misleading statements to be dishonest.
51. In conclusion, Mr Harris submitted that pursuant to Rule 32(c)(i), the panel must find the admitted facts proved. In respect of the remaining allegations, it was for Social Work England to prove them on the balance of probabilities. He urged the panel to focus on the evidence presented, both written and oral, in deciding which matters were proved.

Mr Geraci written submissions;

52. The panel received and considered written submissions from Mr Geraci.

Finding and reasons on facts:

53. The Panel heard and accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser on the approach it must take when determining findings of fact. The Legal Adviser reminded the Panel that the burden of proof rests throughout on Social Work England and that the applicable standard is the civil standard, namely the balance of probabilities. In order to find an allegation proved, the Panel must be satisfied that it is more likely than not that the conduct occurred as alleged. Suspicion, instinct, or speculation cannot form the basis of any finding. Each allegation must be considered separately and in the light of all the evidence, including oral testimony, written statements, and contemporaneous documents, with appropriate weight given to each strand of evidence. The Panel was also reminded of the limited value of demeanour when assessing credibility, and that

consistency, substance, and corroboration from contemporaneous documents are more reliable indicators of accuracy and truth.

54. The panel then proceeded to consider each allegation in turn, undertaking a fact-by-fact evaluation in accordance with the civil standard of proof, namely the balance of probabilities. In reaching its findings, the panel took into account all the evidence before it, including the oral and written testimony of the witnesses, the contemporaneous documentation, Mr Geraci's responses during earlier stages of the investigation, and his current written submissions dated 14 September 2025. Each factual element of the allegations was assessed on its own merits, with the panel weighing the credibility, consistency, and overall probative value of the evidence both in support of, and contrary to the allegations.

Allegation 3(a)

55. The panel had regard to the evidence of the witnesses, including those heard over the course of the hearing, as well as the contemporaneous documentation. The panel heard evidence that the records produced by Mr Geraci during the relevant period were incomplete, inaccurate, or absent altogether. For example, there were said to be limited records of home visits, despite Mr Geraci's admitted sexual relationship with Service User X, and the fact that visits to her home had in fact taken place. Whilst there were some discrepancies between the recollections of individual witnesses as to the precise content and extent of the records available, the panel was satisfied that any notes that did exist were wholly inadequate to reflect the reality of Mr Geraci's interactions with Service User X.
56. The panel also placed weight on the documentation reviewed during the hearing, including audit trails and reviews of the electronic records system, which demonstrated only fragmentary entries without meaningful or accurate detail of the nature or frequency of his contact with Service User X. The panel noted that record-keeping is a fundamental requirement of social work practice, encapsulated in the HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics, as well as the Pennine Care Record Management Policy. The panel further noted the relevance of the supervision note dated 1 October 2018, which recorded an action plan requiring Mr Geraci to improve his recording practices. This was in force at the material time and should have served as a clear reminder of his obligations.
57. The panel heard evidence that following Mr Geraci's return to work from suspension in 2019, discussions took place about him undertaking a home visit with Service User X. It was clear from the evidence that such a visit was not permitted, as his return was subject to restrictions preventing visits outside the office. The panel considered this evidence to be consistent with the action plan in place at the time, which specifically required him to improve his record-keeping and adhere to supervision requirements.
58. The panel also heard evidence that during the relevant period, Mr Geraci was regularly reminded of his obligation to maintain accurate case records. As part of the action plan, discussions about accurate recording were said to have taken place on a weekly

basis, with a clear expectation that records were to be made immediately after a visit or as soon as possible thereafter. The panel found this evidence compelling, as it demonstrated that Mr Geraci had been explicitly and repeatedly reminded of his professional obligations and could not have been unaware of them.

59. The panel further heard evidence regarding the Pennine Care Lone Worker Policy and the requirement to maintain the lone worker book. The evidence confirmed that Mr Geraci was familiar with the policy, which had been reinforced whenever he failed to comply with it. The panel accepted evidence that record-keeping was described to him as a fundamental tenet of practice, encapsulated in the phrase, *“if it is not written down, it did not happen.”*
60. The panel also considered clarification given in evidence regarding case notes. It was explained that whilst some case notes on Service User X’s file were read in relation to an earlier court report in 2019, there were no notes recording the later visits which were the subject of the allegations. The panel accepted this distinction as credible and found that it confirmed the absence of adequate records of the relevant interactions.
61. The panel further considered Mr Geraci’s own explanation, including his acknowledgment during interview that he was aware of the record-keeping requirements but did not comply with them, suggesting instead that he was attempting to improve matters. He admitted that he knew notes were required to be up-to-date, accessible, and maintained in a timely fashion, yet he failed to meet those requirements. The panel carefully considered his mitigation but did not find it persuasive. It concluded that his failure was not due to lack of knowledge, but rather a conscious disregard of professional standards, particularly given the repeated reminders and supervision requirements in place.
62. In all the circumstances, the panel was satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that Mr Geraci failed to produce accurate records setting out his interactions with Service User X during the period in question. This failure was particularly serious because it obscured the true nature of his interactions, including home visits and a sexual relationship, from proper professional oversight.
63. Accordingly, the panel finds allegation 3(a) proved.

Allegation 3(b)

64. The Panel had regard to the evidence of witnesses, together with the documentary exhibits, including the court report dated 7 January 2019 and the contemporaneous case notes available at the time. The Panel noted that the report in question was presented as a professional document prepared for court and was signed by Mr Geraci under the title “Senior Social Worker, Stockport Community Drug and Alcohol Team.”
65. The Panel first considered whether that description of his role was accurate. The evidence established that Mr Geraci was employed as a social worker, not a senior social worker. Whilst the Panel accepted that some colleagues may have referred to him as a senior member of staff, the Panel was satisfied that his formal job title was not

that of senior social worker. The Panel considered that this inaccuracy, though not determinative of the substantive allegation, reflected a lack of care and precision in a document of significant importance.

66. The Panel then considered the substantive content of the report. It heard evidence that the report contained numerous assertions that were not supported by the contemporaneous case notes. For example, the report referred to an agreed plan between Mr Geraci and Service User X regarding urine and breath testing. However, there was no evidence in the case records that such testing had been undertaken. The report also referred to conversations with Cafcass and other professionals who he stated did not have any concerns about Service User X's ability to care for her child but there was no record of these discussions in the contemporaneous notes.
67. The Panel further heard evidence that the report described the behaviour of Service User X's former partner in terms of abuse, harassment, and gaslighting, yet there was no evidence of contemporaneous discussions or case notes supporting those allegations. The report also referred to regular home visits, but there was no record of such visits within the case file.
68. The Panel found this evidence compelling. It demonstrated a pattern in which the content of the report was not corroborated by the records available. The panel heard oral evidence at least seven instances were identified where the report was inaccurate or unsubstantiated. The Panel accepted that evidence, noting that the report appeared to mix factual assertions with unverified personal opinion, without clear explanation or supporting documentation.
69. The Panel considered that a professional court report must be factual in nature, with any professional opinion clearly distinguished and supported by evidence. The 7 January 2019 report did not meet that standard. It contained subjective commentary presented as fact, and material assertions which were not underpinned by the case records. In the Panel's judgment, this rendered the report fundamentally flawed and wholly unreliable as a professional document.
70. The Panel was also mindful that the report gave no indication of Mr Geraci's personal relationship with Service User X, which was material to the context in which it was written. This omission further undermined the accuracy and objectivity of the report.
71. In light of all the evidence, the Panel was satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the court report dated 7 January 2019 was inaccurate and misleading in its content.
72. The Panel therefore finds allegation 3(b) proved.

Allegation 5

Dishonesty in relation to allegation 3(a) and 3(b)

73. The Panel reminded itself of the test for dishonesty set out in *Ivey v Genting Casinos (UK) Ltd* [2017] UKSC 67. That test requires the Panel first to determine the registrant's actual state of knowledge or belief as to the facts at the relevant time. This is a

subjective question and does not require the belief to have been reasonable, only genuinely held. Once that state of mind has been established, the Panel must then consider whether, in the light of that knowledge or belief, the registrant's conduct would be regarded as dishonest by the objective standards of ordinary decent people. The registrant's own opinion on whether they acted honestly is not determinative.

74. The Panel first considered Mr Geraci's actual state of knowledge and belief. The evidence demonstrated that he was fully aware of his obligations to maintain accurate and contemporaneous case records. The Panel noted that he had been subject to an action plan from 1 October 2018 which required improvement in his recording practices. The Panel also accepted evidence that, during the relevant period, Mr Geraci was reminded on a weekly basis of the need to make records immediately after a visit, and that these expectations were reinforced in supervision. The Panel further accepted that he was familiar with the Pennine Care Lone Worker Policy and knew of the requirement to document his visits in the lone worker book. In his own interview, Mr Geraci admitted that he knew records had to be up-to-date, accurate, and accessible, but accepted that he had not complied with these requirements.
75. Against that background, the Panel was satisfied that Mr Geraci knew he was required to produce accurate records of his interactions with Service User X, including home visits. The Panel found that he deliberately chose not to record those visits and the sexual relationship he was pursuing with her. The Panel rejected any suggestion that this was due to oversight, error, or lack of knowledge. The evidence demonstrated a conscious decision to omit information which should properly have been recorded.
76. Having established Mr Geraci's knowledge and belief, the Panel turned to consider the objective limb of the test. The Panel asked whether, in the light of that knowledge, his conduct would be regarded as dishonest by the objective standards of ordinary decent people. The Panel considered that ordinary decent people would regard the deliberate failure to record professional interactions, including home visits to a vulnerable service user, as dishonest. His conduct had the effect of concealing the true nature and extent of his relationship with Service User X from professional oversight.
77. The Panel also took into account that dishonesty in a regulatory context is not limited to explicit falsehoods, but may include concealment or omission of material facts. In this case, Mr Geraci's omissions deprived his employer and professional colleagues of the opportunity to monitor and supervise his practice appropriately. This concealment undermined the integrity of the records and the safeguarding framework within which he was required to operate.
78. The Panel further considered Mr Geraci's explanation that he was "*trying to improve things*." The Panel did not find this credible. It was inconsistent with the repeated and explicit reminders he had received about record-keeping and with his own acknowledgment that he knew what was required. The Panel was satisfied that his conduct was not a product of misunderstanding or inadvertence, but was a deliberate

course of action to avoid recording matters that would have exposed the reality of his interactions with Service User X.

79. Accordingly, the Panel concluded that Mr Geraci's failure to produce accurate records amounted to dishonesty. He knew that he was required to keep such records, he deliberately chose not to do so, and ordinary decent people would regard that conduct as dishonest.
80. The Panel considered Mr Geraci's state of knowledge and belief at the time he wrote the 7 January 2019 report. He knew the report was for court proceedings and would be relied upon in decisions about a vulnerable child. He knew the importance of accuracy and objectivity. The Panel was satisfied he was aware that much of the content he included, such as testing, concerns expressed by professionals, allegations about a parent's behaviour, and references to home visits, was not supported by contemporaneous case records. He also knew he had not disclosed his personal relationship with Service User X.
81. The Panel considered the possibility that the inaccuracies were due to carelessness. It rejected this explanation. The volume and significance of the inaccuracies, combined with the presentation of subjective assertions as fact, showed that this was not oversight. The Panel concluded that Mr Geraci deliberately presented the report in a way that concealed the lack of evidence and obscured his personal involvement with Service User X.
82. Having established Mr Geraci's knowledge and belief, the Panel turned to the objective test. Ordinary decent people would regard it as dishonest to submit a report for court proceedings that contained unsubstantiated claims, omitted material facts, and was presented as an objective professional assessment when it was not. The Panel considered this particularly serious given the context of care proceedings and the direct impact on a child.
83. The Panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Geraci's preparation of the 7 January 2019 report was dishonest. He knew the content was inaccurate, he deliberately failed to disclose material information, and ordinary decent people would regard this as dishonest.

Dishonesty in relation to Allegation 4

84. The Panel considered Mr Geraci's knowledge and belief during the period 1 January 2018 to 1 May 2019. By his own admission, he was aware of the true extent and nature of his contact with Service User X, including home visits and the existence of a personal and sexual relationship. He also knew that his employer was entitled to be told the truth so that his practice could be supervised and safeguarding measures put in place. The Panel was satisfied that he deliberately chose not to disclose this information.

85. The Panel considered the explanation that his omission was based on advice from a union representative. Even if such advice was given, it did not alter his actual knowledge of the facts or his decision not to disclose them. The Panel concluded that the omission was a deliberate choice by Mr Geraci to conceal his relationship with Service User X from his employer.
86. Having established Mr Geraci's knowledge and belief, the Panel turned to the objective test. Ordinary decent people would regard it as dishonest for a social worker to withhold from their employer the true extent of contact with a vulnerable service user, particularly when that contact included a sexual relationship. The effect of that omission was to prevent appropriate oversight and to conceal conduct that was plainly relevant to his professional role.
87. The Panel was therefore satisfied that Mr Geraci's failure to disclose the true extent of his contact with Service User X was dishonest.
88. Accordingly, the panel finds allegation 5 to be proven.

Submissions and legal advice on grounds and impairment:

Submissions on misconduct;

89. Mr Harris submitted that although Mr Geraci has not engaged in these proceedings, the panel should nevertheless take account of what limited engagement there has been. In February 2023, by way of a case management questionnaire, he admitted in one line that he had failed to maintain professional boundaries, failed to keep accurate records, and failed to disclose his relationship to his employer. However, he denied dishonesty and sexual motivation. Beyond that, there has been no further meaningful engagement, insight, or remediation.
90. Mr Harris reminded the panel that in order to amount to misconduct, the conduct must represent a sufficiently serious departure from professional standards, whether inside or outside professional practice. In support of this, he cited authorities which emphasise that professional misconduct must be morally culpable, disgraceful, and a serious departure from the standards expected of the profession, rather than a trivial or temporary lapse. He referred to the HCPC standards as set out in the written statement of case by Social Work England.
91. Turning to dishonesty, Mr Harris referred the panel to Social Work England's guidance which identifies the most serious forms as those that cause, or have the potential to cause, harm to service users, and which include falsification of records. The panel should consider aggravating features such as duration, repetition, concealment, lack of early admission, and motivation for personal gain. He submitted that all of those features are present here.
92. In relation to sexual misconduct, he drew attention to the regulator's guidance that any sexual or intimate relationship with a service user constitutes an abuse of trust and is

inherently serious. That seriousness is heightened when, as here, the service user was particularly vulnerable, and the professional status of the social worker acted as a coercive factor. Mr Harris submitted that Mr Geraci deliberately exploited the service user's vulnerabilities for his own purposes, thereby undermining the trust which the public must be able to place in social workers.

93. He added that the deliberate production of a misleading court report aggravated the misconduct, and the long-term secrecy surrounding these matters demonstrated attitudinal failings rather than isolated poor judgment.
94. Mr Harris invited the panel to find that each of the proven allegations, individually and collectively, amount to serious professional misconduct. He submitted that the conduct represented a fundamental abuse of trust, sustained attitudinal failings, and breaches of core professional standards, such that the high threshold for misconduct is clearly crossed.

Submissions on impairment;

95. Mr Harris submitted that the panel should consider both components of impairment: the personal element, which focuses on risk of repetition, and the public element, which addresses confidence in the profession and the need to uphold proper standards. He reminded the panel that the assessment of impairment is a matter of judgment, supported by established authority, which makes clear that dishonesty and sexual misconduct will almost always raise serious issues as to ongoing fitness to practise.
96. In relation to the personal component, he submitted that all elements of concern are present. There has been a breach of fundamental tenets of the profession, dishonest conduct, and serious misconduct involving a vulnerable service user. The behaviour was sustained over a long period, indicating attitudinal failings rather than isolated mistakes. In those circumstances, the risk of repetition remains significant.
97. He argued that there is no evidence of remediation or meaningful insight. Mr Geraci has provided no testimonials, no evidence of steps taken to reflect or to change his behaviour, and has not engaged with the regulatory process in any meaningful way. The limited material provided minimises his behaviour and attempts to shift responsibility, even while offering an apology. Mr Harris submitted that this falls far short of demonstrating genuine insight or sustained remediation. Given the nature of the misconduct, he argued that remediation is in any event particularly difficult, if not impossible, to achieve.
98. Turning to the public component, Mr Harris reminded the panel that public confidence would be seriously undermined if conduct of this kind were not found to impair fitness to practise. Members of the public would rightly be shocked to learn that a social worker could engage in a sexual and dishonest relationship with a vulnerable service user, conceal it, and then continue to practise without restriction. Upholding standards

and marking the seriousness of the behaviour is therefore essential in the wider public interest.

99. In conclusion, Mr Harris invited the panel to find that Mr Geraci's fitness to practise is currently impaired on both the personal and public components. He submitted that the conduct caused real harm, demonstrated entrenched attitudinal failings, and involved both dishonesty and sexual misconduct. These are matters which strike at the very heart of trust and integrity in the profession, and require a clear finding of impairment.

Legal advice on misconduct;

100. The panel heard and accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser that it is for the panel, applying its own independent judgment, to determine whether the proven facts amount to misconduct (*Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals v GMC and Biswas* [2006] EWHC 464). Misconduct has no statutory definition, but in *Roylance v GMC (No.2)* [2001] 1 AC 311 it was described as conduct falling short of what would be proper in the circumstances. The panel was reminded that not every breach of professional rules amounts to misconduct; only conduct that is serious, culpable, and regarded by responsible practitioners as reprehensible will suffice (*Solicitors Regulation Authority v Day & Others* [2018] EWHC 2726 (Admin); *Khan v Bar Standards Board* [2018] EWHC 2184 (Admin)).
101. The panel was further advised that the threshold is a high one. It must ask whether the registrant's conduct fell below the standards expected of a social worker and whether that shortfall was sufficiently serious to undermine public confidence or the reputation of the profession. Trivial or inconsequential lapses will not normally cross the misconduct threshold.

Legal advice on impairment;

102. The panel heard and accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser that the issue of current impairment is a matter of judgment for the panel, applying the principles in *CHRE v NMC and Grant* [2011] EWHC 927 (Admin). Impairment has both a personal component, focusing on insight, remediation, and risk of repetition, and a public component, concerned with maintaining confidence in the profession and upholding proper standards. The panel was reminded that it should consider whether the registrant's conduct demonstrates a risk of harm, brings the profession into disrepute, breaches fundamental tenets, or involves dishonesty.
103. The panel was further advised, following *Cohen v GMC* [2008] EWHC 581 (Admin), to take a forward-looking approach and consider whether the concerns are easily remediable, whether they have been remedied, and whether repetition is highly unlikely. Relevant factors include the seriousness of the misconduct, the registrant's level of insight and responsibility, the extent of remediation, the likelihood of repetition, and the impact on public confidence. If the panel concludes the registrant cannot safely practise unrestricted, their fitness to practise is impaired.

The panel's decision on grounds:

104. The panel reminded itself that whether the facts found proved amount to misconduct is a matter for its judgment, not further proof, consistent with *Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals v GMC and Biswas [2006] EWHC 464*. The panel adopted the description in *Roylance v GMC (No.2) [2001] 1 AC 311* that “misconduct” denotes conduct which falls short of what would be proper in the circumstances. The panel also took account of the analysis in *R (Remedy UK Ltd) v GMC [2010] EWHC 1245 (Admin)*, that misconduct may consist either of serious failings in professional practice going to fitness to practise or of morally culpable conduct which brings the profession into disrepute. The panel further noted that not every breach of professional standards crosses the threshold.
105. The panel evaluated each allegation individually and collectively, assessing the nature, gravity, frequency, and impact of the conduct, as well as the duties and expectations of a registered social worker.
106. The panel applied the legal principles from *Roylance v GMC (No. 2)* and *Rylands v GMC*, which require that misconduct must amount to a serious departure from the standards expected of a registered professional. The panel also had regard to the regulatory frameworks in place during the material period.
107. The panel was satisfied that factual allegations admitted and found proved involved repeated and egregious breaches of the following:

“HCPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (January 2016)

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

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.

9.1 You must make sure that your conduct justifies the public’s trust and confidence in you and your profession.

9.4 You must declare issues that might create conflicts of interest and make sure that they do not influence your judgement.

9.6 You must co-operate with any investigation into your conduct or competence, the conduct or competence of others, or the care, treatment or other services provided to service users.

10.1 You must keep full, clear, and accurate records for everyone you care for, treat, or provide other services to.

10.2 You must complete all records promptly and as soon as possible after providing care, treatment or other services.”

HCPC Standards of Proficiency for Social Workers (2017)

2.3 understand the need to protect, safeguard, promote and prioritise the wellbeing of children, young people and vulnerable adults

2.8 recognise that relationships with service users and carers should be based on respect and honesty

3.1 understand the need to maintain high standards of personal and professional conduct

3.4 be able to establish and maintain personal and professional boundaries

9.1 You must make sure that your conduct justifies the public’s trust and confidence in you and your profession

10.1 be able to keep accurate, comprehensive and comprehensible records in accordance with applicable legislation, protocols and guidance

108. In reaching its decision the Panel considered the limited engagement by Mr Geraci during the course of these proceedings. It noted that in February 2023 he had completed a case management questionnaire in which he briefly admitted to failing to maintain professional boundaries, failing to keep accurate records, and failing to inform his employer. He had, however, denied dishonesty, a sexual relationship and sexual motivation. Apart from those brief admissions, there had been no meaningful engagement, reflection, or evidence of remediation. The Panel further noted that on 14 September 2025 he made additional written admissions, but these came at a very late stage in the proceedings and lacked evidence of genuine reflection. The Panel therefore concluded that it could attach only very limited weight to either set of admissions.
109. The Panel determined that Mr Geraci’s conduct represented a profound departure from the standards expected of a registered social worker. His pursuit of an improper personal and sexual relationship with a service user was wholly incompatible with the requirement to maintain professional boundaries and to ensure that those receiving care and support are not placed at risk. The service user was particularly vulnerable, and the relationship arose directly from the professional context. The evidence demonstrated that the service user experienced difficulties engaging with subsequent professionals as a consequence, indicating actual and lasting harm.
110. The Panel was also troubled by a paternalistic “saviour” narrative, expressing admiration for the service user’s [PRIVATE] work and a desire to “*show her a better life.*” Taken together, this suggested grooming dynamics and a failure to appreciate professional boundaries.

111. The Panel determined that the relationship bore clear hallmarks of exploitation within a pronounced power imbalance for personal gratification, which was a serious abuse of trust. On the evidence in the bundle, Mr Geraci gave the service user money on occasions, for example £100, creating a quasi-transactional dynamic and risking the relegation of the service user to a sexualised role.
112. The Panel further determined that Mr Geraci's failure to disclose the relationship to his employer represented a serious breach of the expectation that conflicts of interest must be declared and appropriately managed. By concealing this information, he prevented oversight, compromised safeguarding arrangements, and exposed the service user to further risk.
113. The Panel also considered that Mr Geraci authored and submitted a misleading court report. It concluded that this was dishonest conduct which struck at the integrity of the proper administration of justice. Courts rely on social work reports to assess risk, determine threshold, and make decisions about care planning, contact, and safeguarding. A misleading report risked the court acting on an inaccurate factual basis, with potential consequences including flawed orders, unfairness to the parties, and avoidable delay through adjournments, corrections, and the recall of witnesses. The Panel regarded this as a serious aggravating feature because the report formed part of the evidential record on which judicial decisions were expected to be made.
114. The Panel further concluded that the dishonesty had concrete ramifications for those involved. For the child, it created a risk that safeguarding measures might be weakened or delayed or, conversely, that unnecessarily restrictive arrangements might be imposed thereby jeopardising welfare and stability. The Panel noted that colleagues and partner agencies also depend on the accuracy of such reports; dishonesty in formal documentation therefore compromised multi-agency practice and public confidence in the profession.
115. The Panel was satisfied that Mr Geraci's failings in relation to record-keeping were not minor oversights but part of a sustained pattern of concealment. Inaccurate and incomplete records further obscured the reality of the situation and allowed the improper relationship to continue undetected.
116. The Panel considered the relevant aggravating features identified in regulatory guidance, namely that the misconduct had continued over a prolonged period, involved repeated actions, was deliberately concealed, and was motivated by personal interest. These features were all present in this case. The Panel concluded that the behaviour could not be characterised as an isolated lapse of judgment but instead reflected serious attitudinal failings.
117. In light of its findings, the Panel determined that the threshold for misconduct was clearly crossed. The conduct was dishonest, exploitative, and fundamentally inconsistent with the values of the profession. Its gravity, duration, and attitudinal nature placed it well beyond a mere error or lapse, and competent and responsible

practitioners would regard it as serious and reprehensible. Applying the established tests and exercising its own independent judgment, the Panel concluded that the facts found proved, taken individually or collectively, amounted to serious professional misconduct.

The panel's decision impairment;

118. After finding that the facts proved amounted to serious misconduct, the Panel went on to consider whether Mr Geraci's fitness to practise was currently impaired. In doing so, it reminded itself of the need to assess both the personal component, which addresses the risk of repetition and protection of the public, and the wider public component, which concerns the maintenance of confidence in the profession and the upholding of proper standards.
119. In relation to the personal component, the Panel determined that the misconduct demonstrated entrenched attitudinal failings rather than isolated mistakes. The improper sexual relationship, the deliberate concealment, the dishonesty in official documentation, and the failure to declare conflicts of interest all pointed to a pattern of behaviour in which personal needs were placed above professional duty.
120. The Panel also noted that Mr Geraci had sought to shift responsibility for his actions onto others. He suggested, for example, that Service User X had invited or encouraged the relationship, and he referred to advice from his trade union as a reason for not admitting the full extent of his misconduct at an earlier stage. The Panel considered that such attempts to deflect blame were inconsistent with genuine acceptance of responsibility and further demonstrated a lack of meaningful insight.
121. The Panel also placed particular weight on the element of dishonesty that ran through Mr Geraci's misconduct. Dishonesty is regarded as especially serious because it undermines the trust placed in social workers by service users, colleagues, courts, and the public. In this case, his dishonest production of a misleading court report, his concealment of the relationship, and his failure to declare a clear conflict of interest demonstrated a willingness to mislead in order to protect his own position. Such behaviour not only placed service users at risk but also threatened the integrity of the judicial process and multi-agency safeguarding. The Panel considered that this sustained dishonesty compounded the gravity of the case and was itself a significant factor in its finding on impairment.
122. In addition, the Panel noted there was no genuine reflection, no objective remediation, no structured work, and no independent testimonials demonstrating change. The written account minimised responsibility and did not engage with the seriousness of the misconduct. While his written submissions included an apology, it carried very limited weight in light of the overall minimisation and blame-shifting and did not demonstrate meaningful insight or mitigate the seriousness. Taken together, these factors led the Panel to conclude that the risk of repetition remained significant.

123. Turning to the public component, the Panel considered that social workers hold a position of significant trust, particularly when working with vulnerable service users. Misconduct of this nature undermined that trust and damaged the reputation of the profession. The Panel also noted that by authoring and submitting a flawed and misleading report to the court, Mr Geraci risked misleading the administration of justice. Courts rely on the accuracy of such reports in making critical decisions affecting children and families, and any dishonesty in this context threatens the integrity of the judicial process.
124. The Panel considered that this had the potential to affect not only the service user and the child involved, but also the wider system of multi-agency safeguarding, since inaccurate information distorts the work of professionals across agencies who depend on reliable records to make informed decisions. The Panel determined that public confidence would be seriously compromised if such conduct were not marked by a finding of impairment. It concluded that it was essential to declare and uphold the standards of professional practice, including maintaining appropriate boundaries, protecting service users from harm, being open and honest, declaring conflicts of interest, and keeping clear and accurate records.
125. Having regard to both the personal and public elements, the Panel concluded that Mr Geraci's fitness to practise was currently impaired. The seriousness and persistence of the misconduct, the central role of dishonesty, the absence of evidence of remediation or genuine insight, and the importance of maintaining confidence in the profession made a finding of impairment both necessary and proportionate.

Submissions and legal advice on sanction:

Submissions:

126. Mr Harris submitted that in determining the appropriate sanction the Panel must keep at the forefront of its mind the two elements that underpin this exercise: the need to protect the public, both by preventing repetition of the conduct, and by maintaining confidence in the profession and upholding proper standards. Mr Harris reminded the Panel that the purpose is not punitive, though any order may have a punitive effect.
127. Mr Harris submitted that mitigation carries little weight. The conduct was long-term, entrenched, and lies at the very top end of seriousness. The Panel has already made extensive findings about the sustained nature of the behaviour, its impact, and the grave risk posed.
128. Mr Harris reminded the Panel that it must identify and weigh any aggravating and mitigating features. While the guidance provides a non-exhaustive list, there is very limited mitigation available here. The only factors of potential relevance are the absence of any previous adverse fitness to practise history, and some reference by Mr

Geraci to [PRIVATE]. That reference, however, is unsupported by evidence and no clear causal link has been established between it and the misconduct.

129. Mr Harris submitted that the aggravating factors are clear and weighty. They include repetition and pattern of behaviour over time, lack of insight and remorse, absence of any meaningful remediation, and the harm, or risk of harm, caused to people using social work services. He pointed out that the Panel has already found an absence of genuine reflection, conduct wholly incompatible with safe practice, and elements of grooming dynamics within an abuse of power. The Panel has also referred to the striking impact on the integrity of the administration of justice and to a sustained pattern of concealment. These features mark this case firmly at the highest level of seriousness.
130. Mr Harris submitted that in turning to sanction the Panel must begin with the least restrictive order and move upwards. Conditions are manifestly unsuitable. They are designed to address competence and health issues, and are specifically stated in the guidance to be almost certainly insufficient in cases involving attitudinal or behavioural failings, dishonesty, or sexual misconduct.
131. Mr Harris submitted that suspension is likewise inappropriate. The guidance is plain that suspension may only be imposed where a case falls short of requiring removal, and where there is evidence of genuine insight and a willingness and ability to remediate. Here, neither requirement is met. The Panel has already found there to be no meaningful insight and no real prospect of remediation.
132. Mr Harris submitted that in these circumstances removal is the only sanction that will suffice. He drew the Panel's attention to paragraph 163 of the Impairment and Sanctions Guidance (the guidance), which states that in cases of serious sexual misconduct it will be highly likely that the only proportionate sanction is removal. That principle applies with full force here, reinforced by the presence of dishonesty, abuse of trust, and persistent lack of insight.
133. Mr Harris concluded that when all the circumstances are brought together the entrenched and exploitative nature of the conduct, the dishonesty, the abuse of position, the absence of insight, and the absence of remediation, the conclusion is inescapable. Nothing short of removal would protect the public, uphold public confidence, and maintain proper professional standards. Mr Harris therefore invited the Panel to impose a removal order.

Legal advice:

134. The Panel heard and accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. The Legal Adviser reminded the Panel that its overarching objective when determining sanction is to protect the health, safety and well-being of the public, to maintain public confidence in the profession, and to uphold proper professional standards. The Legal Adviser advised that sanctions are not intended to be punitive, though they may have that effect, and must be directed to protecting the public and the wider public interest. The Panel was further advised that it must apply the principle of proportionality, weighing the interests

of the social worker against the public interest, and that any sanction imposed must be the minimum necessary to achieve the regulatory objectives and consistent with the Panel's earlier findings on impairment.

135. In addition, the Panel was advised that it should identify aggravating and mitigating factors at each stage of the process and consider each available sanction in ascending order of seriousness, having regard to the guidance. The Legal Adviser explained the range of outcomes available under the Social Workers Regulations 2018, including advice, warnings, conditions of practice, suspension, and removal. It was further advised that conditions of practice are generally suitable for cases involving competence or health, but are unlikely to be appropriate where the concerns relate to attitudinal, behavioural, or serious public interest issues. The Panel was also advised that suspension may only be appropriate where there is evidence of insight and a willingness to remediate, and that where no lesser sanction would suffice to protect the public or to maintain public confidence and standards, it should consider imposing a removal order.

Finding and reasons on Sanctions:

136. Having found the facts proved amounted to serious misconduct and that Mr Geraci's fitness to practise was currently impaired, the Panel turned to consider sanction. It applied the guidance and approached the decision incrementally, identifying the least restrictive outcome that would sufficiently protect the public and uphold confidence in the profession. The Panel took account of the overarching objectives of public protection, the maintenance of public confidence, and the declaration and upholding of proper standards. It also had regard to proportionality, weighing the impact of any sanction on Mr Geraci against the need to protect the public and the wider public interest.
137. The Panel began by identifying and weighing relevant aggravating and mitigating factors. It noted that paragraphs 81 and 82 of the guidance provide non-exhaustive lists of potential mitigating and aggravating features. Mr Harris drew attention to a reference to [PRIVATE] on the part of Mr Geraci; however, there was no evidence before the Panel to support that reference or to establish any causal link to the misconduct. The Panel was therefore unwilling to attach weight to it. The panel noted the absence of any prior adverse regulatory history and that there were limited admissions at certain stages together with a brief apology. However, these were late, narrow in scope, and carried very limited weight given the continued denial of the most serious aspects for much of the proceedings, the lack of genuine reflection, and the tendency to minimise or deflect responsibility. The Panel was unable to identify any other mitigating features.
138. In contrast, the aggravating features were numerous and serious. The misconduct involved an improper sexual relationship with a service user for whom Mr Geraci had professional responsibility, constituting an abuse of trust within a context of clear

power imbalance. The service user was vulnerable. The conduct was sustained over a significant period and accompanied by deliberate concealment. Dishonesty featured prominently, including the authorship and submission of a misleading court report, with the attendant risk of misleading the administration of justice and distorting multi-agency safeguarding. There were serious failings in record-keeping and an undisclosed conflict of interest. The misconduct reflected attitudinal failings rather than an isolated lapse. The aggravating features therefore included repetition and pattern of behaviour, a lack of insight or remorse, a lack of remediation, and the harm or risk of harm to people using social work services.

139. The Panel considered and rejected lesser sanctions in ascending order of seriousness. No further action, or an advice or warning order, would be manifestly insufficient in light of the gravity and attitudinal nature of the misconduct and would fail to address the ongoing risk and the strong public interest in marking the seriousness of the behaviour. Conditions of practice were considered inappropriate and unworkable. The concerns were not discrete competence or health issues amenable to supervision or retraining, but arose from fundamental breaches of professional boundaries, dishonesty, concealment, and misuse of professional position. In the absence of engagement, insight, or a credible remediation plan, the Panel could not frame conditions that would be effective, measurable, or sufficient to protect the public and maintain confidence.
140. The Panel then considered suspension. Suspension is a serious and restrictive sanction but is ordinarily reserved for cases where there is a realistic prospect of remediation within a defined period and where insight is developing. In this case, the misconduct lay at the most serious end, involving serious sexual misconduct with a service user, abuse of position and trust, and sustained dishonesty, including misleading the court. There was no reliable evidence of developing insight, no objective remediation, and a material risk of repetition. The Panel concluded that a period of suspension would not be sufficient to protect the public or to maintain public confidence, and would not adequately mark the gravity of the misconduct or the attitudinal failings identified.
141. Having rejected all lesser options, the Panel determined that a removal order was necessary and proportionate. Removal was required to protect the public, to uphold and declare proper standards, and to maintain confidence in the profession, particularly given the combination of abuse of trust, vulnerability of the service user, sustained concealment, and dishonesty impacting the court process and multi-agency safeguarding. The Panel recognised the significant impact that removal would have on Mr Geraci; however, the seriousness and attitudinal nature of the misconduct, the absence of insight or remediation, and the ongoing risk meant that no lesser sanction would suffice.
142. In light of the seriousness of the misconduct and the ongoing risk he presents, the Panel determined that removal was the only sanction capable of fulfilling the regulatory objectives. Subject to any appeal, the effect of this order is that Mr Geraci will no longer be entitled to practise as a social worker.

143. The Panel therefore directed that Mr Geraci's name, registration number [SW25941], be removed from the register of social workers in England.

Interim Order:

144. The panel next considered an application by Mr Harris for an interim suspension order for 18 months to cover the appeal period before the final order of removal becomes effective.
145. The panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal adviser on its power to make an interim order under paragraph 11(1)(b) of Schedule 2 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018.
146. The panel was mindful of its earlier findings and considered that it would be wholly incompatible with the seriousness of those findings not to impose an interim order. The panel had found Mr Geraci's misconduct to be serious, sustained, and involving dishonesty, with an ongoing risk of repetition. In those circumstances, allowing him to practise unrestricted during the appeal period would present an unacceptable risk to the public and would undermine public confidence in the profession and the regulatory process.
147. The panel considered paragraph 207 of the guidance, which states: "*An interim order may be necessary where the adjudicators have decided that a final order is required, which restricts or removes the ability for the social worker to practise... without an interim order, the social worker will be able to practise unrestricted until the order takes effect. This goes against our overarching objective of public protection.*"
148. The panel concluded that an interim suspension order is necessary and proportionate in order to protect the public, to maintain confidence in the profession, and to uphold proper standards of conduct and behaviour. This order will come to an end upon the expiry of the appeal period, unless an appeal is lodged with the High Court. If no appeal is filed, the final order of removal from the register will take effect at that point.
149. The panel therefore made an interim suspension order for a period of 18 months.
150. In line with Mr Harris's submissions and the advice of the legal adviser, the panel decided not to make any order in relation to the existing interim order.

Right of appeal:

151. Under Paragraph 16(1)(a) of Schedule 2 of the regulations, the social worker may appeal to the High Court against the decision of adjudicators:
- 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.
152. Under Paragraph 16(2) of Schedule 2 of the regulations 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.
153. Under Regulation 9(4) of the regulations this order may not be recorded until the expiry of the period within which an appeal against the order could be made, or where an appeal against the order has been made, before the appeal is withdrawn or otherwise finally disposed of.
154. This notice is served in accordance with Rules 44 and 45 of the Social Work England Fitness to Practice Rules 2019 (as amended).

The Professional Standards Authority:

155. Please note that in accordance with section 29 of the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002, a final decision made by Social Work England's panel of adjudicators can be referred by the Professional Standards Authority ("the PSA") to the High Court. The PSA can refer this decision to the High Court if it considers that the decision is not sufficient for the protection of the public. Further information about PSA appeals can be found on their website at:
<https://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/what-we-do/our-work-with-regulators/decisions-about-practitioners>.