

Social worker: Laura Douglas
Registration number: SW135646
Fitness to Practise Fitness to
Practise
Final Order Review Hearing

Date of Hearing: 20 November 2025

Hearing venue: Remote

Final order being reviewed:
Suspension order (expiring 11 December 2025)

Hearing outcome:
Extend the current suspension order for a further six months 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 six months by the case examiners, by way of accepted disposal on 12 June 2024.
2. The panel understood that, under paragraphs 7 and 9 of Schedule 2 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018, for a case to be concluded through accepted disposal, the social worker must consent to the proposed disposal. The panel was informed that Miss Douglas had confirmed to Social Work England as follows on 3 June 2025, following receipt of the proposal for their case to be dealt with by way of accepted disposal:

“I have read the case examiners’ decision and the accepted disposal guide. I admit the key facts set out in the case examiner decision, and that my fitness to practise is impaired. I understand the terms of the proposed disposal of my fitness to practise case and accept them in full”.

3. The panel understood that Miss Douglas had thus accepted the case examiners’ observations in relation to the key facts, including the factual limbs of the concerns giving rise to the suspension order, and accepted that their fitness to practise was, at that time, impaired by reason of those facts.
4. Miss Douglas attended and was not represented.
5. Social Work England was represented by Ms Aslam of counsel, case presenter instructed by Capsticks LLP.

Adjudicators	Role
Frank Appleyard	Chair
Liz Murphy	Social worker adjudicator

Hearings team/Legal adviser	Role
Andrew Brown	Hearings officer
Chuigo Eze	Hearings support officer
Diarmuid Bunting	Legal adviser

Service of notice:

6. The panel of adjudicators (hereafter “the panel”) understood that the notice of this hearing was sent to Miss Douglas by email to an address provided by Miss Douglas.
7. Having had regard to Rules 16, 44 and 45 of Social Work England’s Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended) (the “FTP Rules 2019”) and all of the information before it in relation to the service of notice, the panel was satisfied that notice of this hearing had been served on Miss Douglas in accordance with the Rules.

Preliminary matters:

8. There were three observers present at the hearing. However, these were not members of the public. They were staff of Social Work England, present for training purposes, albeit they were staff who did not have any direct involvement in the matter under consideration.
9. It was explained to the panel that these observers were staff who would be fulfilling the role of case presenter in the near future. They are bound by the same regulations, rules and data protection legislation as other Social Work England staff who attend hearings, such as the hearings officer, and the panel. They were not observing for anything other than professional purposes. The panel permitted these observers to remain present throughout the hearing, pursuant to the Panel's powers to regulate its own procedures under Rule 32 of the FTP Rules.
10. Miss Douglas requested that the observers enabled their cameras, as Miss Douglas was uneasy regarding having unidentified persons observing the hearing. The panel therefore asked the observers to keep their cameras enabled, pursuant to the Panel's powers to regulate its own procedures, which the observers duly did.
11. The panel heard (in private) an unopposed application by Ms Aslam that the entire hearing be held in private, on the grounds that some of the matters to be discussed related to the health of Miss Douglas and it would be difficult to extricate matters which related to health from matters which did not.
12. The panel's considerations included the circumstances of the case before it, Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, the fact that the default position was that the principle of open justice should prevail and that professional conduct proceedings would be held in public, and the guidance in *Miller v General Medical Council* [2013] EWHC 1934 (Admin).
13. The panel decided that it was not necessary to hold the entire hearing in public, and there were substantial parts of the relevant material which did not appear to relate to health. It determined that it could adequately manage the hearing by going into private session if/when health-related matters were discussed.
14. The panel held that some of the hearing should be held in private, only when the physical or mental health of the registered social worker was being discussed, pursuant to rule 38(a)(ii).

Review of the current order:

15. The purpose of the review hearing was to review the current order, which is due to expire at the end of 11 December 2025. The order subject to review was a suspension order.
16. The panel received advice upon the outcomes open to it under paragraphs 15(1) of Schedule 2 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018.

The allegations found likely to be proved which resulted in the imposition of the final order by way of accepted disposal were as follows:

17. In relation to the facts:

- 1. On or around 15 April 2024, you were convicted of driving a motor vehicle whilst under the influence of a controlled drug (cannabis).*
- 2. You failed to disclose the police investigation and/or criminal charges relating to Regulatory Concern 1 in a timely manner to the following:*

2.1 Birmingham Children's Trust

2.2 to Social Work England

18. In relation to the statutory grounds for impairment:

The matter outlined in regulatory concern 1 amounts to the statutory ground of a conviction or caution in the United Kingdom for a criminal offence.

The matter outlined in regulatory concern 2 and/or 3 amounts to the statutory ground of misconduct.

19. The case examiners' reasoning on why the facts of the case and the statutory grounds met the 'realistic prospect test' are contained in pages 10 to 17 of the case examiner decision dated 4 June 2025.
20. Those reasons are not recited in this record of the panel's decision, but they were considered in full.

The case examiners on/around 4 June 2025 determined the following with regard to impairment:

21. The case examiners' reasoning on the appropriate sanction by way of accepted disposal, as detailed in the case examiner decision dated 4 June 2025, was as follows:

"Assessment of impairment consists of two elements:

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

2. The public element, established through consideration of whether a finding of impairment might be required to maintain public confidence in the social work profession, or in the maintenance of proper standards for social workers.

Personal element

With regards to the concerns before the regulator, the case examiners have given thought to their guidance, and they note that they should give consideration to whether the matters before the regulator are easily remediable, and whether the social worker has demonstrated insight and/or conducted remediation to the effect

that the risk of repetition is highly unlikely.

Whether the conduct can be easily remedied

The case examiners are of the view that the regulatory concerns engaged in this case are capable of remediation. This could be achieved, for example through the demonstration of clear insight into why the alleged actions from which the concerns arose occurred, evidence that the social worker understands the seriousness of the alleged breaches and impact on public confidence in the profession, and evidence that such actions are unlikely to be repeated.

Insight and remediation

The case examiners consider that the social worker has demonstrated some insight and remediation into how the offence occurred and how they could avoid a repetition, but consider it to be limited in scope. The social worker states that they take “full responsibility” and “recognises the gravity of the situation”. They admit the concerns, articulate remorse and regret, and have provided assurances that they no longer use illegal substances. [PRIVATE]

However, the case examiners are aware that insight is considered stronger when it is demonstrated at an early stage. In this case, they note that the social worker, over a period of around six weeks, failed to inform or respond to opportunities to inform their employer of the ongoing police investigation, and that this was despite having been warned in the few weeks prior to the offence of the likely adverse impact of taking drugs. Furthermore, a period of over eight months passed before the social worker advised Social Work England of the relevant offence.

In addition, the case examiners are concerned that the social worker does not address at any point why the offence they were convicted of was serious, and the potential adverse consequences of driving under the influence of cannabis. In their final submissions to the regulator, the social worker states that they were “not under the influence and was not impaired in any way. This can be confirmed by police”. The case examiners are of the view that this indicates that the social worker does not fully understand the gravity of their offending, or that by being

over the legal limit for cannabis in their blood, their ability to drive safely is likely to have been impaired; this is why there is legislation prohibiting this. While there is no evidence that the police were concerned by the manner of the social worker's driving, and stopped the social worker while driving for other reasons, this does not mean that the social worker's driving was not impaired.

The case examiners are also of the view that the social worker does not fully appreciate how the circumstances surrounding their conviction, i.e. taking cannabis, may have impacted on public confidence in them as a professional, and on the reputation of the profession. In their initial comments to the regulator, dated 30 September 2024, the social worker states that they had had "no concerns raised at work and all my families were able to receive the support that was needed to ensure that children and families were safe. I never came to work after the consumption of the baked goods". There is evidence, however, that concerns were raised in the weeks prior to their conviction about the social worker smelling of cannabis during a school visit to a child service user.

The social worker has not provided any evidence of having engaged in any training, personal development or reflective practice into issues particularly relevant in this case, such as the impact of drug use on driving, or the importance of openness, transparency and/or ethical conduct in social work.

Risk of repetition

Having found insight and remediation to be limited, including in relation to why it is illegal to drive under the influence of drugs, and the importance of openness and transparency in social work, the case examiners are of the view that a risk of repetition of the concerns remains.

Public element

The case examiners have next considered whether the social worker's actions have the potential to undermine public confidence in the social work profession, or the maintenance of proper standards for social workers.

Having carefully considered all of the information presented to them, the case examiners are of the view that a fully informed and reasonable member of the public would be concerned by evidence that a social worker had driven under the influence of cannabis, particularly when already having been warned about such drug use following an incident of smelling of cannabis while visiting a child service user at school. Evidence that the social worker then failed to inform their employer and regulator of criminal proceedings, despite a duty and specific opportunities to do so, is also likely to exacerbate such concern. The case examiners consider that a finding of impairment and an appropriate sanction would be expected by the public to maintain public confidence in the profession and maintaining professional standards.

The case examiners are therefore satisfied that there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators finding the social worker to be currently impaired.”

The case examiners on/around 4 June 2025 determined the following with regard to sanction:

22. The case examiners’ reasoning on why the case met the ‘realistic prospect test’ in relation to impairment in fitness to practice, as detailed in the case examiner decision dated 4 June 2025, was as follows:

“In considering the appropriate outcome in this case, the case examiners had regard to Social Work England’s impairment and sanctions guidance (December 2022) and reminded themselves that the purpose of sanction is not to punish the social worker but to protect the public and the wider public interest.

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

The case examiners determined that taking no further action was not appropriate in a case where it has been alleged that the social worker has a criminal conviction for a drug related driving offence and failed to disclose this to their employer and regulator. Taking no further action is not sufficient to mark the seriousness with which the case examiners view the social worker’s alleged conduct, and fails to safeguard the wider public interest.

The case examiners have considered offering advice or a warning to the social worker, but they note the sanctions guidance which states these outcomes do not directly restrict practice, and are thus unlikely to be appropriate where a risk of repetition has been identified. While Social Work England’s drink and drug driving policy does indicate that a warning may be appropriate in some circumstances, the case examiners note a number of aggravating factors in this case. These include evidence that the social worker, while under the influence of drugs, had transported a passenger in their vehicle, and a lack of transparency and openness by the social worker with both their employer and regulator in relation to the on-going criminal proceedings. This, together with the identified risk of repetition due to limited insight and remediation, in the opinion of the case examiners, makes a warning inappropriate in all the circumstances of this case.

Next, the case examiners turned their minds to conditions of practice. The primary purpose of a conditions of practice order is to protect the public whilst the social worker takes any necessary steps to remediate their fitness to practise. Conditions are most commonly applied in cases of lack of competence or ill health. The sanctions guidance states that conditions are less likely to be appropriate in cases of character, attitudinal or behavioural failings. The case

examiners carefully considered whether conditions of practice may be appropriate in this case. However, the case examiners note that any conditions must be appropriate, proportionate and workable. In this case, the social worker's actions took place outside of social work practise, and in addition, the social worker is not currently practising as a social worker, and has not indicated that they wish to do so. The case examiners therefore conclude that conditions are unworkable.

As such, the case examiners went on to consider suspension. The sanctions guidance states that suspension is appropriate where no workable conditions can be formulated that can protect the public or the wider public interest, but where the case falls short of requiring removal from the register. In this case, while the case examiners consider the concerns to be serious, they do not consider that they are so serious as to be incompatible with the social worker returning to the profession in the future. The case examiners consider therefore that suspension is the most appropriate sanction to reflect the seriousness with which they view this case, and is the minimum necessary to protect the public. The case examiners are of the view that the social worker could use a period of suspension to reflect, develop insight, and remediate the concerns that have been raised, and to mitigate the risk of repetition identified by the case examiners.

Whilst suspension risks de-skilling the social worker, the case examiners note that the social worker is not currently practising, and also consider that the current risk to the public and public confidence outweighs any detriment to the social worker by not permitting them to engage in a social worker role at this time.

To test the appropriateness of their sanction, the case examiners next turned their minds to removal. While they consider that a removal order could be required, given the risk of repetition and the serious nature of the allegations, the case examiners are of the view that adjudicators may consider, in all the circumstances of this case, that the social worker's conduct may fall short of requiring removal from the register. In particular they have noted:

- The social worker has accepted the key facts in this case.*
- The social worker has previously been of good character.*

The case examiners have carefully considered the appropriate length of the proposed suspension order. While they consider that the allegations are serious enough to warrant a suspension, the case examiners have balanced this against the amount of time likely to be required for the social worker to develop fuller insight and remediation. The case examiners have concluded that a 6-month suspension is the minimum necessary to meet the wider public interest, and to provide sufficient time for the social worker to reflect on their alleged conduct and to demonstrate that they are no longer impaired.

To conclude, the case examiners have decided to propose to the social worker a suspension order of 6 month's duration. They request that the social worker is notified of their proposal, and seek the social worker's agreement to dispose of the matter accordingly. The social worker will be offered 28 days to respond. If the social worker does not agree, or if the case examiners revise their decision regarding the public interest in this case, the matter will proceed to a final hearing."

23. The case examiners did not seek to fetter the discretion of a future reviewing panel, who would look at whether the social worker is ready to resume work as a social worker, but they did consider, and recorded in their decision on accepted disposal on 4 June 2025, that a future panel may be assisted as follows:

"The case examiners are aware that in cases of suspension, they are able to recommend to the social worker actions which they may wish to take ahead of a future review of the order. As such, the case examiners recommend that the social worker focusses on actions which demonstrate insight and remediation into the breaches of professional standards that they have highlighted in this case. This is likely to include, but is not limited to, evidence of personal development and reflection on:

how driving under the influence of cannabis places members of the public at risk of harm;

the value of ethics and a duty of candour in social work;

how their conduct inside and outside the workplace can impact on public trust and confidence and the maintenance of professional standards."

Social Work England submissions:

24. It was confirmed at the outset that all attendees had the 62-page bundle and the 31-page service and supplementary bundle.
25. The panel heard opening submissions from Ms Aslam as to the background and the case examiners' observations in relation to facts, impairment and sanction.
26. Capsticks had provided a written submission, which was sent to Miss Douglas within the Notice of Hearing dated 22 October 2025. It proposed, on behalf of Social Work England, a six-month continuation of the suspension order, saying:

"Subject to further evidence of insight or remediation being received prior to, or at, the review Social Work England invite the Review Panel to find that the Social Worker's fitness to practise remains impaired and to consider extending the Suspension Order for a further 6 months.

Social Work England submit that the response to the recommendations of the Case Examiners is very brief and lacks evidence of significant development of insight. It is

submitted that the Case Examiners imposed the Suspension Order with the expectation that the Social Worker would engage with their recommendations more fully than they have.

The limited engagement with the recommendations fails to demonstrate the necessary evidence of insight or remediation. The Social worker has not taken any action to remediate the conduct.

The Reviewing Panel are invited to find that the Social Worker's fitness to practise remains impaired by reason of a conviction or caution in the United Kingdom for a criminal offence and/or misconduct. An extension of the current Suspension Order is sought for a further 6 months to enable the Social Worker to demonstrate the insight and remediation necessary for her to be able to return to safe and effective practice and reassure the Panel that the conduct will not be repeated.

Should the Social Worker provide further evidence of reflection or targeted remediation prior to the review, Social Work England will review their position."

27. Since then, Miss Douglas provided written submissions on 6 November 2025, as detailed in pages 28 to 30 of the service and supplementary bundle.
28. In addition, Miss Douglas made oral submissions at the present review hearing.
29. Social Work England's position, as conveyed by Ms Aslam, was that the regulator still advocated for a six-month continuation of the suspension order.

Social worker submissions:

30. Miss Douglas' written submissions of 6 November 2025 were as follows:

[PRIVATE]

I have realised that I need to ensure that I am [PRIVATE] to fully support children and families. [PRIVATE] being under the influence could have impaired judgments made whilst working with children and families. I have no prior incident or recent.

I have completed my reading into the area many years ago. From the affects of my actions but also the impact that minimal support can have on workers in a demanding field.

Driving under the influence of cannabis (DUIC) presents a significant risk to public safety.

Cannabis impairs cognitive and motor functions, including reaction time, coordination, attention, and decision-making abilities—all of which are essential for safe driving.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) highlights that THC, the psychoactive compound in cannabis, alters perception and reduces the ability to respond to unexpected events on the road.

According to the UK Department for Transport (DfT, 2022), drivers who test positive for cannabis are twice as likely to be involved in road traffic collisions compared to sober drivers. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2022) reports that cannabis use leads to increased lane weaving, poor speed control, and delayed braking, even in experienced users. Ethics form the cornerstone of professional social work practice. The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) Code of Ethics (2021) emphasises the values of integrity, accountability, and respect for the dignity and rights of others. A duty of candour—being open and honest when things go wrong—is essential for maintaining trust between professionals, service users, and the public.

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2023) states that registered social workers must be transparent about errors, incidents, or misconduct that could impact service users or public confidence. Adhering to this principle demonstrates responsibility, self-awareness, and commitment to professional integrity.

For example, if a social worker were involved in an incident such as driving under the influence, applying the duty of candour would involve promptly reporting the incident to the employer or regulator and reflecting on its implications for practice. Upholding ethical standards ensures that social workers act in the best interests of the public and Social workers are representatives of their profession both inside and outside the workplace.

The HCPC (2023) makes clear that personal conduct, including behaviour in private life, can affect public trust and confidence in social work. Engaging in illegal or unsafe behaviour—such as driving under the influence—can call into question a practitioner’s judgment and fitness to practise.

Professional standards require social workers to model lawful, responsible behaviour. Misconduct outside the workplace can lead to disciplinary action, loss of registration, and reputational damage not only to the individual but also to the wider profession (Furness, 2018).

Maintaining public trust relies on social workers demonstrating personal integrity, self-regulation, and an understanding that their actions reflect the values of the profession at all times. Continuous reflection, supervision, and engagement with ethical guidance help ensure that conduct aligns with the expectations of both the regulator and the community.

maintain the credibility of the profession

I am asking that the review be the final because I have ongoing commitments and am at a great place in my life. I am also going to be working on a personal

project and would like that opportunity to focus my energy on this. I do not feel it is beneficial to [PRIVATE] repeatedly after a number of years. [PRIVATE] I am aware of the concerns of the group however I feel as though the review is not taking consideration that the offence occurred over 2 years ago when I was going through an extremely difficult time. I have had no prior or recent incident. I have been [PRIVATE] to learn to forgive myself and move on. With these current proceedings it feels as if I am not being allowed to move on despite going years without incident and recognising the concerns. [PRIVATE] I have been told I have not met panels recommendations but I disagree with this. It seems as though the panel are expecting something specific but I am showing the progress I've made with support appropriate for myself. I have written about the effects it can have on others and recognised the impact on the profession (added in the box above for clarity).

31. Miss Douglas chose not to give evidence but they made the following oral submissions:

- a. [PRIVATE]
- b. They had responded to each of Social Work England's questions;
- c. Social Work England had not made clear what they wanted from her;
- d. They did not have social work colleagues with whom to reflect;
- e. They were not in a position to pay for training;
- f. They had done what they could to remediate, given the resources available to her.

Panel decision and reasons on current impairment:

32. In considering the question of current impairment, the panel undertook a comprehensive review of the final order in light of the current circumstances. It took into account the decision of the case examiners. However, it has exercised its own judgement in relation to the question of current impairment. The panel also took into account Social Work England's 'Impairment and sanctions guidance'.

33. The panel had regard to all of the documentation before it, including the decision and reasons of the case examiners and the submissions of Miss Douglas and Social Work England. It also considered all the new documentation provided by Miss Douglas including their responses to Social Work England on 21 August 2025 (which the panel considered, with respect, to be somewhat generic) and the written submissions referred to above. The panel did not have any references or training certificates.

34. The panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal adviser. 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 maintaining public confidence in the profession.

35. The panel first considered whether Miss Douglas' fitness to practise remains impaired, focusing on the private element of impairment in fitness to practise.

36. The panel noted that the case examiners found that Miss Douglas had limited insight and had demonstrated insufficient remediation in particular in relation to the seriousness of their actions which gave rise to the regulatory concerns.

37. This panel noted the extent to which Miss Douglas has acted upon the recommendations of the previous of panel as to what might assist a future reviewing panel. i.e.:

“how driving under the influence of cannabis places members of the public at risk of harm;

the value of ethics and a duty of candour in social work;

how their conduct inside and outside the workplace can impact on public trust and confidence and the maintenance of professional standards.”

38. The panel did not form the view that Miss Douglas has demonstrated fully or adequately developed insight into the regulatory concerns.

39. Although they had provided responses to Social Work England's recommendations, with a view to satisfying them, the panel determined that these were lacking in detail, and they did not address what went wrong (in relation to each allegation), why that was wrong (in relation to each allegation), what had changed now to prevent these issues recurring (in relation to each allegation) and what Miss Douglas would do if they found themselves in a similar situation or situations (in relation to each allegation) in the future.

40. The panel shared the case examiners' view that the regulatory concerns were capable of remediation, including by the *‘demonstration of clear insight into alleged actions from which the concerns arose occurred, evidence that the social worker understands the seriousness of the alleged breaches and impact on public confidence in the profession, and evidence that such actions are unlikely to be repeated’*.

41. Miss Douglas has clearly demonstrated some insight, but this remains limited, particularly – but not solely – in relation to allegation 2.

42. Having found insight and remediation to still be limited, including in relation to the importance of openness and transparency in social work, the panel are of the view that a risk of repetition of the concerns remains.

43. Therefore, Miss Douglas' fitness to practice remains impaired on the basis of the private element of assessing fitness to practise.

44. Regarding the public element of assessing fitness to practise, the panel were of the view that a fully informed and reasonable member of the public would be concerned by evidence that a social worker had drove under the influence of cannabis, particularly when already having been warned about such drug use following an incident of smelling of cannabis while visiting a child service user at school. Evidence that the social worker then failed to inform their employer and regulator of criminal proceedings, despite a duty and specific opportunities to do so, is also likely to exacerbate such concern.
45. The panel considered that, even after a six-month suspension by consent, the public would be concerned by the fact that the offence had occurred, the fact that Miss Douglas had chosen not to inform relevant parties of the true position and the fact that they had shown limited insight.
46. Therefore, Miss Douglas' fitness to practice remains impaired on the basis of the public element of assessing fitness to practise.

Panel decision and reasons on sanction:

47. Having found Miss Douglas' fitness to practise is currently impaired, the panel then considered what, if any, sanction it should impose in this case. The panel had regard to the submissions made along with all the information and accepted the advice of the legal adviser.
48. The panel considered the submissions made at the hearing and the evidence presented. Miss Douglas sought an order for no further sanction. Social Work England sought an order for a further six-month suspension.
49. The panel also took into account the 'Impairment and sanctions guidance' published by Social Work England.
50. The panel was mindful that the purpose of any sanction is not to punish Miss Douglas, but to protect the public and the wider public interest. The public interest includes maintaining public confidence in the profession and Social Work England as its regulator and by upholding proper standards of conduct and behaviour. The panel applied the principle of proportionality by weighing Miss Douglas interests with the public interest.
51. The panel determined that taking no further action was not appropriate in a case where it has been alleged that the social worker has a criminal conviction for a drug related driving offence and failed to disclose this to their employer and regulator, and after a six-month suspension their insight was limited. Taking no further action is not sufficient to mark the seriousness with which the panel view the conduct in light of the present position regarding insight, and it fails to safeguard the wider public interest.
52. Advice and/or a warning were deemed inappropriate as there remains a risk of repetition. In particular, the lack of transparency and openness by the social worker

with both their employer and regulator in relation to the on-going criminal proceedings – and the lack of insight into this issue – led to a risk of repetition which rendered advice and/or a warning insufficient and inappropriate in all the circumstances of this case.

53. Next, the panel considered conditions of practice. The primary purpose of a conditions of practice order is to protect the public whilst the social worker takes any necessary steps to remediate their fitness to practise. Conditions are commonly applied in cases of lack of competence or ill health. The sanctions guidance states that conditions are less likely to be appropriate in cases of character, attitudinal or behavioural failings. The panel carefully considered whether conditions of practice may be appropriate in this case. However, it noted that any conditions must be appropriate, proportionate and workable. In this case, the social worker's actions took place outside of social work practice, and in addition, the social worker is not currently practising as a social worker and they have not put forward any current plans to do so.
54. In addition, the outstanding risk in relation to all three limbs of the protection of the public, particularly those relating to the reputation of the profession and the maintenance of proper standards, would not be capable of remediation by way of workable conditions.
55. The panel therefore concluded that appropriate conditions are not possible.
56. As such, the panel went on to consider suspension. The sanctions guidance states that suspension is appropriate where no workable conditions can be formulated that can protect the public or the wider public interest, but where the case falls short of requiring removal from the register.
57. In this case, while the panel considered the concerns to be serious, they do not consider that they are so serious as to be incompatible with the social worker returning to the profession in the future. The panel considered therefore that suspension was the most appropriate sanction to reflect the seriousness with which they view this case, and is the minimum necessary to protect the public. The panel are of the view that the social worker could use a period of suspension to reflect, develop insight, and remediate the concerns that have been raised, and to mitigate the risk of repetition identified by the case examiners and the panel.
58. To test the appropriateness of their sanction, the panel turned their minds to removal. While they consider that a removal order could be required, given the risk of repetition and the serious nature of the allegations, they considered that, in all the circumstances of this case, the relevant conduct fell short of that requiring removal from the register.
59. The panel considered the appropriate length of the proposed suspension order. While they consider that the allegations are serious enough to warrant a suspension, the panel have sought to balance this against the amount of time likely to be required for the social worker to develop fuller insight and remediation. They concluded that a six-month suspension is the minimum necessary to meet the wider public interest, and to

provide sufficient time for the social worker to reflect on their alleged conduct and to demonstrate that they are no longer impaired.

Extend the current suspension order for a further six months with effect from the expiry of the current order:

60. The panel determined that the suspension order should be extended for a period of six months. The panel was satisfied that this period was appropriate because this would adequately protect the public and the wider public interest.
61. The suspension period should enable Miss Douglas to reflect on the panel's findings and devise a plan of action targeted towards an unrestricted return to the register, if they desire such a return.
62. This panel cannot bind a future panel. However, a future reviewing panel would expect Miss Douglas to attend the review hearing and it would be of assistance to that panel if they were able to provide evidence that they had undertaken significant steps that would facilitate a safe and effective return to the register without restriction. This may include:
 - a. A detailed account of what went wrong (in relation to each allegation),
 - b. Why that was wrong (in relation to each allegation),
 - c. What has changed now to prevent these issues recurring (in relation to each allegation),
 - d. What Miss Douglas would do if they found themselves in a similar situation or situations (in relation to each allegation) in the future,
 - e. Evidence of CPD – particularly CPD relevant to the regulatory concerns,
 - f. Testimonials or references, particularly from persons who are aware of the specific details of the regulatory concerns;
 - g. Evidence that they have kept their social work skills and knowledge up to date.
63. Social Work England's 'Guidance for suspended social workers' may provide assistance to Miss Douglas, in terms of where to focus their efforts. The panel has included below, as an appendix, some *potentially* helpful extracts from that Guidance.

Right of appeal:

64. 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.

65. 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.

66. 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.

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

Review of final orders:

68. Under regulation 15(1), 15(2) and 15(3) of Schedule 2 of The Social Workers Regulations 2018 (as amended):

- 15(1) The regulator must review a suspension order, or a conditions of practice order, before its expiry.
- 15(2) The regulator may review a final order where new evidence relevant to the order has become available after the making of the order, or when requested to do so by the social worker.
- 15(3) A request by the social worker under sub-paragraph (2) must be made within such period as the regulator determines in rules made under Regulation 25(5).

69. Under Rule 16(aa) of the Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended), a social worker requesting a review of a final order under paragraph 15 of Schedule 2 must make the request within 28 days of the day on which they are notified of the order.

The Professional Standards Authority

70. 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>

Appendix: Extracts from ‘Guidance for suspended social workers’ (16 December 2022)

What can you do while you're suspended?

There are number of activities that may be recommended while you’re suspended. Even if our decision makers have not recommended any of the activities below, it may still be helpful to do some or all of them (depending on the issues relevant to your case).

Reflective writing to show insight

One of the most important factors in assessing impairment is insight. Insight means having an understanding of (all of the following):

- what happened
- why it happened
- the risks to service users (either potential harm or actual harm)
- the impact on the service user, colleagues
- the impact on the reputation of social work
- how it could and should have been avoided

The best way to demonstrate insight is with reflective writing.

How to write a reflective writing piece

A good starting point is to thoroughly read the decision given to you by the decision maker so you can understand what their concerns and considerations were. Then, review the [professional standards](#).

When you’re writing, some useful questions you may wish to focus on are (all or any or the following):

- where did your conduct fall short of what was expected of you as a social worker?
- why did it fall short?
- what were the risks to service users?
- what should you have done?
- what will you do differently in the future?
- how do you feel about your conduct on reflection?
- what was the impact or potential impact on the service user, any colleagues or the reputation of social work as a whole?

You may be able to ask for help from colleagues or other social workers if you’re struggling with this. Sometimes a different perspective can be really helpful.

Continuing professional development (CPD)

What is CPD?

CPD is an essential reflection and learning activity.

You do CPD throughout your social work career to maintain and improve your practice. CPD is standard 4 of Social Work England's 6 professional standards which set out what you must know, understand and be able to do.

Why undertake CPD?

Evidencing CPD is an essential part of demonstrating your fitness to practice.

If there was a particular practice issue relevant to your case, or maybe several, you could focus on undertaking relevant CPD to try to update your knowledge and skill in that particular area.

For example, if the issue in question was that you were offensive to a service user, you might want to consider CPD around communication. CPD can be a whole range of different activities including (but not limited to the following):

- reading
- attending seminars or lectures
- online or face-to-face courses

You should then reflect on your CPD and consider:

- how it will affect your practice in the future
- what you will now do differently

We recommend you keep a log of your CPD activity including evidence of attendance at seminars, lectures or courses and notes of your reflections. You can then submit this evidence for your review.

You may need to inform some course providers that you are currently suspended. If you're not sure, it is better to disclose your suspension to be on the safe side.

Testimonials or references

Testimonials or references from people who know you can be helpful for demonstrating your current fitness to practise at a review hearing or meeting. They can be written by (any of the following):

- your employer
- previous employers
- other social workers you have previously worked with

If you've taken up non-social work employment or voluntary work during your suspension, testimonials from your new employer or work colleagues may still be helpful providing they are relevant to the fitness to practise concerns. For example, if the fitness to practise concerns related to issues with professionalism, communication and record keeping, a testimonial from a new employer talking about how you have demonstrated good communication, professionalism and administration skills in your new or voluntary role could be helpful.

Testimonials must be signed and dated by the author and ideally on headed paper where appropriate. The author should explain what their relationship is to you. A testimonial or reference will hold more weight with a decision maker where it is clear the author was aware of the fitness to practise concerns.

Retraining or further training

You may want to use the period of your suspension to carry out some retraining on a specific area of social work or carry out advanced courses. Provided the course is relevant to the fitness to practise concerns, this may be helpful evidence of remediation.

Be aware that you're likely to have to disclose your suspension to course providers or higher education institutions. They may decide (under their own processes) that they're unable to offer you a place at that time.

You must always be honest about your suspension to those that ask about it. Even if people do not directly ask, it might still be relevant for you to tell them about it.