



# Social Worker: Maria Baxter

## Registration Number: SW122500

### Fitness to Practise

### Final Order Review Meeting:

Meeting Venue: Remote meeting

Date of meeting: 18 December 2025

Final Order being reviewed:  
Suspension order – expires 13 February 2026

Meeting Outcome:  
Removal Order upon expiry of the suspension order

## Introduction and attendees

1. This was the second review of a final order.
2. Case Examiners and Ms Baxter agreed a disposal of a conditions of practice order, commencing on 15 August 2023 for a period of 18 months.
3. A review panel ordered that a suspension order commence upon expiry of the conditions of practice order, for a period of 12 months, to expire on 13 February 2026.

| Adjudicators   | Role                    |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| Carolyn Tetlow | Chair                   |
| Stella Elliott | Social Work Adjudicator |

| Hearings Team/Legal Adviser | Role                    |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Andrew Brown                | Hearings Officer        |
| Molly-Rose Brown            | Hearing Support Officer |
| Nathan Moxon                | Legal Adviser           |

### Service of Notice:

4. The panel of adjudicators (hereafter “the panel”) had careful regard to the documents contained in the substantive order review hearing service bundle as follows:
  - i. A copy of an email to Ms Baxter’s registered email address requesting that she provide any evidence that she wishes to be considered at the review by 7 November 2025;
  - ii. An email reply by Ms Baxter, dated 7 November 2025, requesting an extension of 7 days to submit evidence;
  - iii. A copy of the notice of substantive order review hearing dated 19 November 2025 and addressed to Ms Baxter at her email address as it appears on the Social Work England Register;
  - iv. An extract from the Social Work England Register detailing Ms Baxter’s registered email address;
  - v. A copy of a signed Statement of Service, on behalf of Social Work England, confirming that on 19 November 2025 the writer caused the notice of hearing to be sent by email Ms Baxter’s registered address;

- vi. A copy of the email.
- 5. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser in relation to service of notice.
- 6. Having had regard to rule 16 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 Ms Baxter in accordance with rules 44 and 45 of Social Work England's Fitness to Practise Rules (updated 9 April 2020) ('the Rules').

#### **Proceeding with the final order review as a meeting:**

- 7. The notice of final order review hearing informed Ms Baxter that the review would take place electronically.
- 8. The notice stated:

*"If you would like to attend before the adjudicators in order to make oral submissions, please confirm your intention by no later than 4pm on 3 December 2025. Unless we hear from you to the contrary, we shall assume that you do not want to attend a hearing and Social Work England may decide to deal with the review as a meeting. If Social Work England do hold a meeting, the adjudicators will be provided with a copy of this letter setting out Social Work England's submissions and a copy of any written submissions you provide."*
- 9. The panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal adviser with regard to rule 16(d) of the Rules which provides:

*"Where the registered social worker does not state within the period specified by the regulator whether they intend to attend before the regulator, the regulator may determine whether to make an order by means of a meeting."*
- 10. The panel was satisfied that it would be fair and appropriate to conduct the review in the form of a meeting in accordance with Rule 16(d). The panel was satisfied that Ms Baxter had intentionally absented herself. She had not replied to the notice of hearing and has not provided any evidence for the review despite her email requesting an extension of time to do so on 7 November 2025 due to [PRIVATE] Social Work England had replied confirming that she could submit evidence at any time. The panel therefore concluded that adjourning the review would not secure her participation on a future occasion as, although she was clearly aware of it, Ms Baxter had chosen not to attend the hearing. The panel was also conscious of the need to consider the review within statutory timescales.

#### **Review of the current order:**

- 11. The final order review was determined in accordance with Part 5 of the Regulations, Schedule 2 paragraph 15 of the Regulations and Social Work England's Fitness to Practise Rules.

## The allegations:

12. The regulatory concerns that were subject to the final order, are as follows:

“While registered as a social worker, you:

1. ...

2. ...

3. Failed to maintain appropriate professional boundaries with Young Person A:

3.2. In a phone call to Young Person A in April 2022

4. ...

5. ...

6. Concluded a section 47 enquiry relating to Family C without having seen the children

7. Failed to carry out essential tasks required of you in relation to Family C

The matters set out at regulatory concerns 3, 6 and 7 amount to the statutory grounds of misconduct.”

## Case Examiners' determinations:

13. In concluding that Ms Baxter's fitness to practise was impaired by reason of misconduct, the Case Examiners made the following observations:

“Regulatory concern 3.2

The case examiners are satisfied that adjudicators may consider the social worker's conduct in respect of regulatory concern 3.2 to represent a significant departure from the standards. The case examiners acknowledge that, at the time the social worker made the call to Young Person A, there were concerns about their wellbeing. However, they nevertheless consider that it is wholly inappropriate for a social worker to make contact with a young person in the early hours of the morning. It is evident that that Young Person A was affected by this call, sufficiently so that they opted to question why it had happened in a complaint.

Regulatory concerns 6 and 7

The case examiners are satisfied that adjudicators may consider the social worker's conduct in respect of regulatory concerns 6 and 7 to represent a significant departure from the standards.

Section 47 enquiries are implemented when there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm. It is of paramount importance that social workers undertake a detailed analysis of the situation, and gather all relevant information. This includes meeting with the children concerned, and obtaining their views, wishes, feelings and concerns. In this case, it is alleged that the social worker did not do so, and that they failed to complete actions arising from significant information referred to children's services by the police. The case examiners are satisfied that, as a result, the risks to the children could not have been properly understood or assessed, thereby leaving them at risk of harm.

... [T]he case examiners have received evidence of early insight from the social worker, but would have welcomed further reflection on the concerns now before the regulator. The case examiners have also received evidence of health conditions, that affected the social worker at the time, and for which the social worker has outlined their plans to access appropriate support in future roles. The case examiners are mindful, however, that the social worker has not practiced social work in some time, and therefore the steps they would take to prevent repetition are as yet untested.

Accordingly, the case examiners can only conclude that a risk of repetition remains.

The case examiners are satisfied that the concerns in this case are sufficiently serious that the public may expect to see a finding of impairment made. ... The case examiners consider that a well-informed member of the public would expect that the regulator utilise such outcomes, to ensure that the social worker is able to return to practice in a structured way, with appropriate oversight by the regulator.

The case examiners have also considered the risk of harm associated with the social worker's conduct. Whilst there is no indication that service users were harmed as a direct result of the social workers actions, the case examiner guidance is clear that the risk of harm is equally serious. ...

In such circumstances, the public might reasonably expect a finding of impairment to be made, and accordingly, there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators determining that the social worker's fitness to practise is currently impaired."

14. In concluding that a conditions of practice order was necessary and appropriate, the Case Examiners observed the following:

"The case examiners are satisfied that a conditions of practice order is the minimum necessary outcome, to protect the public and to safeguard public confidence. The case examiners considered that all of the following criteria, as outlined in their guidance, apply:

- the social worker has demonstrated insight
- the failure or deficiency in practice is capable of being remedied
- appropriate, proportionate, and workable conditions can be put in place
- decision makers are confident the social worker can and will comply with the conditions
- the social worker does not pose a risk of harm to the public by being in restricted Practice

The case examiners are also satisfied that the conduct before them is not so serious that a more serious sanction, such as a suspension order, would be necessary to safeguard public confidence. [PRIVATE]

### First review panel's determination:

15. Ms Baxter attended the first review. Social Work England submitted that the review panel should impose a suspension order as Ms Baxter had failed to demonstrate engagement with the conditions. It was noted that there were new and ongoing regulatory investigations concerning Ms Baxter.
16. In concluding that her fitness to practise remained impaired, the first review panel made the following observations:

“The panel noted that the Case Examiners had noted that Ms Baxter had shown evidence of early insight and would have welcomed further reflections on the concerns before the regulator. It had taken into account that Ms Baxter initially had denied that her fitness to practise was impaired but the Case Examiners had offered her the opportunity to reflect on their findings. Subsequently, as Ms Baxter had informed the panel in her oral evidence, there had been an acceptance of impairment.

The panel considered that the misconduct behind the Case Examiners' decision was potentially remediable. However, it was of the view that Ms Baxter had not demonstrated that she had taken any significant steps towards remediation of the past concerns. She had accepted responsibility for the past errors and therefore shown some insight. Although Ms Baxter had demonstrated having responded to Social Work England on enquiry with her current work status, she had not brought to the review any demonstration of reflections, other gaining of insight or evidence of having undertaken any relevant CPD in the areas of concern. The panel accepted that there may have been difficulties in obtaining employment, however, there was no evidence of Ms Baxter having engaged with Social Work England to explore other ways in which she might undertake remediation, absent the opportunity for employment. Even though there may be other reasons, [PRIVATE], underlying this, the panel felt that there was a lack of engagement with Social Work England to explain Ms Baxter's difficulties.

Accordingly, the panel concluded that there had been no advancement of remediation, or development of further insight. As a result, it considered that there remained a risk of repetition of the failures which Ms Baxter admitted.

Further, the panel considered that the original concerns related to fundamental areas of social work practice and that the failures, which were not disputed, had been serious. Therefore, it decided, public confidence in the profession and the maintenance of proper professional standards would be prejudiced unless the panel concluded that there remained a realistic prospect of a finding of impairment.”

17. In concluding that the appropriate sanction was a 12 months suspension order, the first review panel made the following observations:

“The panel was aware that it had the option of taking no action and allowing the current conditions of practice order to lapse on expiry. However, in light of its finding that there was a risk of repetition, the panel decided that this was not appropriate and would fail to protect the public.

The panel noted that this sanction would not restrict Ms Baxter’s ability to practise and was therefore not appropriate where there is a current risk to public safety. In any event, the deficiencies identified with Ms Baxter’s practice had the potential to have adverse consequences and therefore some restriction on their practice is required. Therefore, the panel concluded that issuing a warning would be inappropriate and insufficient to meet the public interest.

The panel took the view that the deficiencies identified with Ms Baxter’s practice are potentially capable of being remedied. The panel considered that the imposition of conditions of practice had been done with a view to providing a period for a resumption of practice and demonstration of the ability to practise safely, subject to restriction.

Even if the reasons behind a failure to resume practise were not Ms Baxter’s fault, the panel considered that the obligation had been on her to use the opportunity to engage with the regulator towards addressing the concerns in other ways. A period of over a year had now elapsed, in respect of which there had been no real demonstration of efforts towards remediation.

The panel was also mindful that this period also led to the potential for some de-skilling to have occurred [PRIVATE].

In the circumstances, the panel considered that it no longer met the needs of public protection to allow for the potential resumption of practice subject to conditions of practice.

The panel considered paragraphs 136 and 137 of Social Work England’s Impairment and Sanctions guidance. These state as follows:

“136. Suspension is appropriate where (both of the following apply):

- the decision makers cannot formulate workable conditions to protect the public or the wider public interest
- the case falls short of requiring removal from the register (or where removal is not an option)

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

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

The panel considered that this is now a case where it could not formulate workable conditions. However, the concerns remained potentially remediable, if Ms Baxter decided to engage with Social Work England over ways in which to demonstrate remediation. The concerns had been serious, but Ms Baxter had shown some insight, by acceptance of responsibility for the concerns.

The panel concluded that the appropriate sanction is a suspension order. A suspension order will prevent Ms Baxter from practising during the suspension period, which will therefore protect the public and the wider public interest.

The panel determined that the suspension order should be imposed for a period of twelve months. The panel was satisfied that this period was appropriate because it would allow Ms Baxter time, if she wished to return to practice, in which to demonstrate her remediation of fitness to practise as a social worker. The panel concluded that this would take a minimum of 12 months to achieve. Therefore, the suspension period reflects the amount of time that Ms Baxter may need to reflect on the panel’s findings and devise a plan of action targeted towards an unrestricted return to the register...

The panel was satisfied that, had it been appropriate, a removal order was available to the panel because the concerns relating to Ms Baxter’s fitness to practise were on the basis of one or more grounds as set out in regulation 25(2)(a), (c), (d), (f) or (g). However, the panel noted that a removal order is a sanction of last resort where there is no other means of protecting the public or the wider public interest. The panel took the view that a removal order would not be appropriate because the sanction of suspension adequately protected the public.”

18. The first review panel indicated that a future review panel would be assisted by Ms Baxter’s attendance and evidence that she has undertaken significant steps that would facilitate a safe and effective return to the social work register without restrictions, which may include:

- i. Written reflections on the concerns involved in the fitness to practise case;
- ii. Evidence that Ms Baxter has kept her social work skills and knowledge up to date, targeted towards the particular concerns in the case;
- iii. Any current relevant references and testimonials, which can testify as to Ms Baxter's character and performance in any roles undertaken.

### **Submissions:**

19. Within the notice of hearing, dated 19 November 2025, Social Work England submitted that the panel should impose a removal order:

“Subject to any evidence of remediation received prior to the review, Social Work England invite the panel to find that the Social Worker’s fitness to practise remains impaired for the same reasons given by the Case Examiners, and by the panel at the review on 3 January 2025. Social Work England invite the Panel to consider replacing the Suspension Order with a Removal Order.

To date no evidence has been received to demonstrate that the concerns raised by the Case Examiners and the previous panel have been addressed. The recommendations of the last Review Panel have not been followed, and the Social Worker has not engaged with the Case Review Team since the last review.

There has been no evidence of remediation to undermine the finding that the Social Worker’s fitness to practise remains impaired. The Social Worker has provided no evidence that they are now safe to return to practice, or that any of the concerns have been addressed.

In light of the continued failure to demonstrate remediation by the Social Worker the Panel are invited to consider replacing the existing Suspension Order with a Removal Order. In spite of a previous indication that the Social Worker may seek voluntary removal, no application has been received. If the Social Worker is unwilling or unable to remediate, then it is submitted that a Removal Order is now the appropriate sanction.”

20. Ms Baxter did not provide any submissions. She did not provide any of the information recommended by the first review panel.

### **Decision and reasons on current impairment:**

21. 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 final hearing and review panels. However, it exercised its own judgement in relation to the question of current impairment.

22. The panel had regard to all of the documentation before it, including the decision and reasons of the case examiners and the first review panel. The panel also took account of the written submissions.
23. 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 maintain public confidence in the profession.
24. The burden is upon Ms Baxter to provide evidence and information to show that she no longer poses a risk of harm to the public.
25. The panel noted reference in first review panel's determination to further regulatory concerns, to which Ms Baxter had responded on 19 November 2024 and had submitted documentary evidence. The panel has had sight of that response. It noted that there is no update from Social Work England in the papers about those concerns, such as whether they remain under investigation, and so the panel decided to proceed upon the basis that the only regulatory concerns faced by Ms Baxter are those for which she was issued the final order of suspension which is now subject to review.
26. The panel noted that Ms Baxter has engaged with Social Work England to the extent of providing a response to the further allegations in November 2024 and providing evidence in relation to those allegations in December 2024. However, she has not provided evidence, particularly evidence of remediation and insight, in relation to the regulatory concerns for which final orders of conditions, and then suspension, have been imposed. She has provided no evidence in respect of these allegations since the first review hearing.
27. The panel noted that, since the last review, Ms Baxter has not provided any evidence to demonstrate the development of insight or remediation. She has not provided any of the information recommended by the first review panel. This is upon the backdrop of the first review panel noting a lack of progress in those areas.
28. Ms Baxter has therefore not demonstrated an understanding of the proved misconduct; how she should have acted differently; and how her actions will have impacted upon service users and public confidence in the social work profession.
29. The panel concluded that Ms Baxter had not shown any development of insight or remediation since the last review. In light of that, and the failure of Ms Baxter to adequately engage with these continuing regulatory proceedings, the panel found that there remains a real risk of repetition of the regulatory concerns and that a finding that her fitness to practise is impaired remains necessary to protect the public.
30. Further, in light of the lack of insight and remediation, together with Ms Baxter's lack of adequate engagement in these proceedings, the panel concluded that members of the public would be concerned if her fitness to practise was not found to be

impaired and that such a finding would undermine public confidence in the profession. Such a finding would similarly fail to uphold professional standards.

#### Decision and reasons on sanction:

31. Having found that Ms Baxter's fitness to practise is currently impaired, the panel then considered what, if any, sanction it should impose in this case.
32. The panel considered the submissions made on behalf of Social Work England. The panel also took into account the Impairment and Sanctions Guidance published by Social Work England.
33. The panel was mindful that the purpose of any sanction was not to punish Ms Baxter, 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 upholding proper standards of conduct and behaviour.
34. The panel applied the principle of proportionality by weighing Ms Baxter's interests with the public interest and by considering each available sanction in ascending order of severity.
35. The panel considered that taking no action, or issuing advice or a warning, would not adequately reflect the serious nature of the regulatory concerns. They would not adequately protect the public as they would not restrict Ms Baxter's practice. The panel had assessed there to be a real and present risk of repetition, and so considered that the public cannot currently be adequately protected unless Ms Baxter's practice is restricted.
36. The panel took into account paragraph 76 of the Guidance, which states:

"In some cases, the decision makers may determine that the social worker's impairment poses a current risk to public safety. If so, it may be reasonable to move beyond the lower sanctions (no action, advice or a warning) on this basis alone. This is because these outcomes will not address the risk to the public as they do not restrict the social worker's practice."
37. Further, taking no action, or issuing advice or a warning, would not maintain public confidence in the profession.
38. The panel next considered whether a conditions of practice order would be sufficient to protect the public and wider public interest.
39. The panel acknowledged that the regulatory concerns were remediable but that would require engagement from Ms Baxter, which has been lacking now over a prolonged period of time.
40. It therefore considered that conditions remain unworkable and would not protect the public or wider public interest. This was particularly the case given the lack of

evidence of adequate insight and remediation and the fact that Ms Baxter has not adequately engaged with the regulator.

41. The panel concluded that suspension would not be appropriate or proportionate in all of the circumstances. Ms Baxter has been subject to a final order for over two years and has failed, in that time, to demonstrate adequate insight and remediation. The panel therefore concluded that, having failed to take advantage of the opportunities given by the case examiners and first review hearing panel, there was little prospect of her utilising any subsequent opportunities.
42. Further, the panel concluded that it would not maintain public confidence in the profession or professional standards to impose a further period of suspension upon a social worker who had failed to utilise the previous periods of conditions and suspension to demonstrate sufficiently reduced risk of repetition.
43. The panel noted that a removal order was a sanction of last resort where there was no other means of protecting the public or the wider public interest. The panel took the view that, regrettably, a removal order was necessary, appropriate and proportionate in this matter in all of the circumstances, including the seriousness of the misconduct and the lack of adequate insight or remediation during over two years of restricted practice.

#### Right of appeal:

44. 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:
  - i. the decision of adjudicators:
    - a. to make an interim order, other than an interim order made at the same time as a final order under paragraph 11(1)(b),
    - b. not to revoke or vary such an order,
    - c. to make a final order,
  - ii. the decision of the regulator on review of an interim order, or a final order, other than a decision to revoke the order.
45. 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.
46. 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.

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

### **The Professional Standards Authority**

48. 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>