



# Social worker: Harriet Cornish

## Registration number: SW128010

### Fitness to Practise

### Final Hearing

Dates of hearing: 09 March 2026 to 11 March 2026

Hearing venue: Remote hearing

Hearing outcome: Fitness to practise impaired, removal order

Interim order:

Interim suspension order (paragraph 8 of Schedule 2), revoked

Interim suspension order (paragraph 11 of Schedule 2), (18 months)

## Introduction and attendees:

1. This is a hearing held under Part 5 of the Social Workers Regulations 2018 (the Regulations) and in accordance with the Social Work England (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2019 (the Rules).
2. Ms Harriet Cornish (Ms Cornish) attended and was not represented.
3. Social Work England was represented by Ms Sophie Sharpe (Ms Sharpe), case presenter from Capsticks LLP.
4. The panel of adjudicators conducting this hearing (the panel) and the other people involved in it were as follows:

<b>Adjudicators</b>	<b>Role</b>
Andrew Skelton	Chair
Ian Vinall	Social worker adjudicator
Jenny Childs	Lay adjudicator

<b>Hearings team/Legal adviser</b>	<b>Role</b>
Lauryn Green	Hearings officer
Ellie Roberts	Hearings support officer
Jane Kilgannon	Legal adviser

5. The panel had been provided and read in advance the following documents: Hearing Timetable (3 pages); Identification key (1 page); Social Work England's Statement of Case (17 pages); Witness Statement Hearing Bundle (7 pages); Exhibits Hearing Bundle (121 pages); Social Worker Responses Bundle (61 pages); Final Hearing Service & Supplementary Bundle (28 pages); and a bundle of recent email correspondence (7 pages).

## Preliminary matters:

6. Ms Sharpe made an application that any parts of the hearing that refer to a sensitive personal matter relating to Ms Cornish be heard in private, **[PRIVATE]**. Ms Cornish supported that application.
7. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser that Rule 37 of the Rules provides that the default position is that fitness to practise hearings are held in public, and that Rule 38(a)(ii) of the Rules provides that all matters relating to the physical or mental health of the social worker must be held in private. In relation to this application, Rule 38(b)(i) of the Rules provides that the panel has a discretion to hold all or parts of the hearing in private where it considers it appropriate to do so having regard to the vulnerability, interests or welfare of any participant in the proceedings.
8. The panel decided that, having regard to Ms Cornish's interests, in particular in relation to confidentiality and Ms Cornish's right to privacy, it would be appropriate and proportionate to hear any evidence and submissions relating to the sensitive personal

matter in private. The panel considered that Ms Cornish's interests and right to privacy in relation to this sensitive personal matter outweighed the public interest in the hearing being held fully in public.

### Allegations:

9. The allegations referred by the Case Examiners on 10 January 2024 were as follows:

*Whilst registered as a social worker:*

1. *On or around 6 April 2022, you failed to safeguard Child 1 in that you:*
  - I. *Did not investigate a safeguarding concern in relation to Child 1*
  - II. *Falsified records in relation to Child 1*
2. *You failed to safeguard Child 2 in that you:*
  - I. *Did not complete statutory visits to Child 2 on one or more of the following dates:*
    - a. *1 February 2022;*
    - b. *5 April 2022*
  - II. *Falsified records in relation to Child 2*
3. *During Somerset County Council's investigation of paragraphs 1 and 2, you knowingly provided falsified evidence to the investigator in relation to:*
  - i. *Child 1 and / or;*
  - ii. *Child 2.*
4. *Your actions at paragraphs 1(ii) and / or 2(ii) and / or 3 were dishonest.*

*The matters outlined in paragraphs 1 – 4 above amount to the statutory ground of misconduct.*

*Your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of misconduct.*

### Admissions:

10. Rule 32(c)(i)(aa) of the Rules states: '*Where facts have been admitted by the social worker, the adjudicators or regulator shall find those facts proved*'.
11. Following the reading of the allegations, Ms Cornish stated that she admitted each of the factual allegations.
12. The panel noted that Ms Cornish had the benefit of trade union representation when making written admissions at an earlier stage of the regulatory process, and that at today's hearing Ms Cornish made oral admissions that were clear, unqualified and unequivocal. It therefore found that it was appropriate and fair to accept Ms Cornish's admissions.

13. The panel therefore found allegations 1, 2, 3 and 4 proved in their entirety by way of admission.

### Summary of evidence:

#### Ms King – Lead Investigator, Social Work England

14. Ms Jo King (Ms King), a Lead Investigator at Social Work England, provided a witness statement dated 20 March 2025. Ms Cornish returned a Response Form to Social Work England on 30 October 2025 confirming that she agreed the content of Ms King’s witness statement.
15. In outline, Ms King stated that:
  - a. Social Work England received a referral from Somerset County Council (the Council) on 14 September 2022 raising concerns about Ms Cornish following a local investigation undertaken by the Council;
  - b. Social Work England contacted Ms Cornish about these concerns on 8 December 2022. A few days later, on 12 December 2022, Ms Cornish responded to Social Work England stating that she took full responsibility for the allegations against her; and
  - c. Social Work England contacted Ms Cornish again on 31 July 2023 providing a copy of Social Work England’s Case Investigation Report and Evidence Bundle. On 22 August 2023 submissions were provided on behalf of Ms Cornish. She admitted the regulatory concerns raised, provided context in relation to personal difficulties that Ms Cornish had been experiencing at the relevant times, and provided an update as to Ms Cornish’s conduct since the matters in question.

#### Ms Davis – Independent Social Worker, Somerset County Council

16. Ms Alison Davis (Ms Davis), Independent Social Worker at the Council, provided a witness statement dated 10 April 2025. Ms Cornish returned a Response Form to Social Work England on 30 October 2025 confirming that she agreed the content of Ms Davis’ witness statement.
17. In outline, Ms Davis stated that:
  - a. She was commissioned by the Council in May 2022 to investigate concerns raised about Ms Cornish;
  - b. As part of her investigation, she had access to the case records of Child 1 and Child 2, and she interviewed a number of individuals including Ms Cornish and Ms Cornish’s line manager; and
  - c. Her investigation report was submitted to the Council on 30 May 2022.

18. Ms Davis provided a copy of her investigation report, together with the underlying material collected and produced during her investigation, including interview records and relevant service user case records.

#### Ms Cornish

19. On 26 August 2025 Ms Cornish signed a Statement of Agreed Facts.
20. By way of background, it was confirmed that:
  - a. Ms Cornish was employed by the Council in the South Somerset Wider Safeguarding Team as a social worker from approximately September 2019;
  - b. Concerns were raised in relation to Ms Cornish's social work practice around April 2022;
  - c. Ms Cornish was suspended from her social work role on 2 May 2022 while the Council undertook a local investigation, following which a referral was made to Social Work England.
21. In relation to allegation 1, the agreed facts included the following:
  - a. Safeguarding concerns were raised in respect of Child 1, relating to potentially sexualised behaviours exhibited by Child 1 towards their sibling;
  - b. Ms Cornish prepared an assessment report on 6 April 2022 recording conversations with the mother of Child 1, the safeguarding lead and deputy safeguarding lead at Child 1's school, and an individual from 'Safe Families', and concluded that there was no need for "*Children's Social Care Intervention at this stage*";
  - c. Ms Cornish had not investigated the safeguarding concern. In particular, she had not had any of the recorded discussions with Child 1's mother or the identified professionals; and
  - d. As a result of Ms Cornish's falsified assessment record, no further action was taken in relation to the safeguarding concern.
22. In relation to allegation 2, the agreed facts included the following:
  - a. Ms Cornish recorded a statutory visit to Child 2, undertaken by video, on 1 February 2022. However, that visit did not take place.
  - b. Ms Cornish recorded a statutory visit to Child 2, in person, on 5 April 2022. However, that visit did not take place.
23. In relation to allegation 3, the agreed facts included the following:
  - a. Ms Cornish provided to the Council's investigation a call log that recorded telephone calls to the mother of Child 1, and to the safeguarding lead and deputy safeguarding lead at Child 1's school on 6 April 2022. However, those telephone calls did not take place;

b. Ms Cornish had provided to the Council’s investigation a photograph together with data indicating that the photograph had been taken whilst at Child 2’s foster carer’s address at 16:20 on 5 April 2022. However, the photograph had not been taken at that time or location.

24. In relation to allegation 4, the agreed facts were that Ms Cornish acted dishonestly:

- a. by falsifying records of a safeguarding investigation into Child 1 in April 2022 which she had not undertaken;
- b. by falsifying the visit record to Child 2 of 1 February 2022;
- c. by falsifying the visit record to Child 2 of 5 April 2022; and
- d. in knowingly providing false evidence to the Council’s investigator.

25. Ms Cornish provided two reflective statements. The most recent statement, dated 11 October 2025, included the following:

*“I recognise that my behaviour during the period in question included dishonesty, fabrication of evidence and failure to act with integrity. These actions represented a serious breach of professional standards, put children who I was trusted to protect and keep safe, at risk and, through the dishonesty, intentionally tried to disregard the professional statement of colleagues. I take full responsibility of my actions and their impact on others”.*

*“At the time of my misconduct, I was experiencing significant personal and professional pressures. I was working under and intense workload while also [PRIVATE] I felt isolated, overwhelmed and exhausted, yet I continued to push myself to meet expectations rather than seeking help or acknowledging my difficulties. This resulted in me acting in ways that do not align with my character nor my inherent values [...] In hindsight, I can see that my actions were heavily influenced by a deep-rooted need to be “perfect” in my professional role [...] I now recognise that this behaviour was entirely wrong [...]”.*

*“I deeply regret that instead of admitting my mistakes I chose to compound them through dishonesty and the submission of fabricated evidence. I understand that these choices caused significant harm – to my colleagues, my employer, the children and families I worked with, and to the reputation of the social work profession as a whole. I take full responsibility for those consequences and make no attempt to minimise them”.*

*“I have worked intensively to understand why I acted as I did and how I can ensure such behaviour will never happen again. Through [PRIVATE], reflective writing and continued professional development, I have explored the connection between my perfectionism, [PRIVATE] and fear of failure. I now recognise that my need for control and fear of vulnerability were key factors that contributed to my dishonesty”.*

*“I am deeply remorseful for the damage my actions caused to all who I worked with and who had trust in me”.*

**“[PRIVATE]”.**

*“I am asking the [panel] to allow me the opportunity to return to practice – not because I feel entitled to it, but because I know that I can do so safely, responsibly and with integrity [...] Social work is where I belong, and I am ready to return with the honesty, humility and compassion that the role – and those we work with – deserve”.*

26. Ms Cornish provided a letter from **[PRIVATE]**.
27. Ms Cornish provided a training log, listing training undertaken whilst employed by the Council and since leaving that role.
28. Ms Cornish provided three references as follows:
  - a. A personal reference dated 13 August 2023 from Mr Chris Hale, a registered social worker, who was previously Ms Cornish’s Practice Supervisor and then later her colleague at the Council. It was a positive reference, complimenting Ms Cornish’s quality of work and stating that she had demonstrated a *“clear understanding of the Ethics and Values of Social Work”*;
  - b. An undated and anonymous reference giving details of Ms Cornish’s employment in a non-social work role, in a restaurant, since 2022. It was a positive reference, complimenting Ms Cornish as *“reliable, organised, friendly”*; and
  - c. A reference dated 29 April 2023 from Ms Laura Neil, a registered social worker and a former colleague of Ms Cornish at the Council. It was a positive reference, describing Ms Cornish as *“a fantastic social worker”*.
29. At the beginning of the statutory grounds stage of the hearing, the panel had been provided with and read additional documents as follows: an updated Statement of Case (now 19 pages); and a Stage 2 bundle of relevant material (68 pages).
30. The Stage 2 bundle included the following:
  - a. Social Work England documentation indicating that an interim suspension order had been imposed on Ms Cornish on 20 January 2023, confirmed and continued at regular reviews since then, and is currently due to expire on 17 May 2026;
  - b. An email from the University of the West of England to Social Work England dated February 2026 stating *“We have a placement with Bristol City Council for one of our Step Up PGDip students. The Practice Educator they’ve provided for the placement is [Ms Cornish]. The register shows her registration is on an interim suspension until 17<sup>th</sup> May 2026 [...] She assured*

*us that this is an IT error and she currently is registered. She has sent a letter of assurance from SWE (attached); but this is dated from April 2025”;*

- c. A letter dated 24 April 2025 purportedly from Social Work England to Ms Cornish stating *“As discussed on the telephone on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2025 I am writing to provide a letter of assurance that you are recognised as a practising and registered Social Worker. Please share this letter with whomever you feel necessary whilst ensuring the confidentiality of the involved party is upheld. It has come to our attention that a technological issue has resulted in your account being inadvertently linked with that of another individual. This is an administrative error in our systems rather than a matter relating to professional standing [...]”;*
  - d. An email dated 17 February 2026 from Ms Cornish’s former trade union representative to Social Work England stating *“I have taken instructions from the SW in this matter and she has confirmed that she generated the “letter of assurance” that is purported to have been authored by Social Work England and was sent to her employer”;* and
  - e. An email dated 12 February 2026 from North Somerset Council confirming that Ms Cornish is currently employed by them as a Preventative Caseworker which does not require social work registration.
31. At the hearing, Ms Cornish gave oral evidence. In summary, she stated that **[PRIVATE]** had impacted on her ability to cope with pressure. She felt overwhelmed and it resulted in her making very poor decisions. She had sought support in the form of **[PRIVATE]**, but it did not fully address the behavioural pattern and how she responded to pressure. She stated that through deep reflection she began to understand that her poor decisions had stemmed from a fear of disappointing others and were a *“maladapted coping mechanism”* when under pressure. Ms Cornish stated that her actions had fallen well below the professional values that are important to her, she feels shame and regret about them and she is committed to being a better professional moving forwards.
32. In response to questions from Ms Sharpe, Ms Cornish stated/accepted that:
- a. Her caseload at the Council was comparable to others in her team;
  - b. When she made false records of visits to Child 2 on 1 February 2022 and 5 April 2022, she would not have been confused at those times as to whether the visits had actually taken place;
  - c. She did not make any admissions until the final disciplinary hearing with the Council;
  - d. Following her dismissal from the Council in September 2022, she went on to work for an organisation called Stop Exploitation for about 6-7 weeks, and she undertook part-time work as a barista in a restaurant;

- e. She now works as a Preventative Caseworker for North Somerset Council and has done so since December 2022, initially on fixed term contracts, and from 10 September 2025 on a permanent contract;
- f. She has been aware of the interim suspension order imposed on her by Social Work England since 20 January 2023 and still in place;
- g. When she submitted written representations to Social Work England in June 2023, she stated that “*SW continues to work outside of social care*” despite working within the social care field as a Preventative Caseworker for North Somerset Council, because she did not believe that she needed to tell Social Work England about any employment role unless it was as a registered social worker;
- h. She did not tell her current employer, North Somerset Council, about the Social Work England investigation into her conduct;
- i. When she submitted written representations to Social Work England in August 2023, she stated that “*Since my dismissal from [the Council], I have been employed within hospitality*”. She accepted that not mentioning her current employment at North Somerset Council was misleading. She stated that she omitted to mention it to Social Work England at that time because she did not want her employer to know about her interim suspension order;
- j. When she submitted a reflective statement dated 11 October 2025, she did not mention that she was working for North Somerset Council because her employer was not aware of the Social Work England investigation and she did not want them to know about it;
- k. In respect of the ‘letter of assurance’ sent to North Somerset Council to pass on to the University of the West of England, in January 2026 she fabricated the letter out of panic because she was afraid of letting her employer down and she wanted to avoid them becoming aware of the Social Work England investigation into her conduct. She had previously told her employer that there was an IT error that had resulted in her registration with Social Work England showing as being subject to an interim suspension. She accepts that her conduct was dishonest and something she now deeply regrets;
- l. She now has a solid work-home life balance, she **[PRIVATE]**, she shares any concerns or stress with her colleagues or managers, and she uses healthy coping strategies outside of work; and
- m. She would love to be able to continue to practise as a social worker in the future.

33. In response to questions from the panel, Ms Cornish stated that:

- a. She is committed to addressing the regulatory concerns so that fear, shame and panic never again lead her to compromise her honesty and integrity;

- b. She is in the process of arranging further [PRIVATE] in order to be a better person and professional;
- c. She is considering seeking support via her employer's employee assistance programme; and
- d. Her current employer is now aware of these proceedings and the further concerns that have been raised.

### Finding and reasons on grounds:

34. On behalf of Social Work England, Ms Sharpe submitted that the conduct found proved breached standards 2.1, 3.1, 3.2, 3.9, 3.12, 5.2 and 5.3 of the Social Work England Professional Standards (2019) and that the seriousness of those breaches was aggravated by the following matters:
- a. the conduct put child service users at risk of harm;
  - b. the dishonest falsification of records misled fellow professionals and was designed to conceal her own conduct;
  - c. the dishonest falsification of records cast aspersions on the reliability of information provided by a foster carer and a school safeguarding lead, risking an undermining of confidence in those professionals; and
  - d. the dishonest conduct was deliberate and persisted over an extended period of time.
35. Ms Sharpe submitted, therefore, that Ms Cornish's conduct found proved – both individually and cumulatively, was so serious that it amounted to professional misconduct.
36. Ms Cornish stated that she accepted responsibility for her poor decisions and recognised that her actions had fallen far below what was expected of registered social workers.
37. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser that:
- a. misconduct is an act or omission which falls short of what would be proper in the circumstances; and
  - b. not every breach of professional standards will amount to the statutory ground of misconduct, it must be a sufficiently serious breach.
38. The panel was satisfied that the conduct found proved amounted to conduct that fell short of what was expected of a registered social worker. Ms Cornish's conduct breached the following Social Work England Professional Standards:

*As a social worker, I will:*

*2.1 Be open, honest, reliable and fair;*

*3.1 Work within legal and ethical frameworks, using my professional authority and judgement appropriately.*

*3.2 Use information from a range of appropriate sources, including supervision, to inform assessments, to analyse risk, and to make a professional decision.*

*3.9 Make sure that relevant colleagues and agencies are informed about identified risks and the outcomes and implications of assessments and decisions I make.*

*3.11 Maintain clear, accurate, legible and up to date records, documenting how I arrive at my decisions.*

*3.12 Use my assessment skills to respond quickly to dangerous situations and take any necessary protective action.*

*As a social worker, I will not:*

*5.2 Behave in a way that would bring into question my suitability to work as a social worker while at work or outside of work.*

*5.3 Falsify records or condone this by others.*

39. The panel noted that the nature of the conduct was very serious – a social worker failing to investigate safeguarding concerns and undertake statutory safeguarding visits, fabricating multiple records to conceal those failures, and then fabricating evidence to their employer’s investigation to conceal those failures. The panel found that the repeated nature of the dishonest conduct persisted over an extended period of time and would have required careful thought and planning. That meant that it was unlikely that the conduct resulted from impulsive, spontaneous or confused reactions by Ms Cornish to **[PRIVATE]**. The conduct was deliberate, dishonest, put child service users at risk of harm, risked undermining the credibility of a foster carer and a school safeguarding professional, and amounted to a breach of trust/position. The conduct related to fundamental tenets of social work practice, namely safeguarding, accurate record keeping, and honesty and integrity.
40. Given that context, the panel was satisfied that the conduct found proved was, both individually and cumulatively, so serious as to amount to the statutory ground of misconduct.

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

41. On behalf of Social Work England, Ms Sharpe submitted that Ms Cornish’s fitness to practise is currently impaired in relation to both the personal and public elements of impairment.
42. In relation to the personal element of impairment, Ms Sharpe accepted that there was some evidence of remorse and reflection from Ms Cornish. However, Ms Sharpe submitted the list of training courses provided by Ms Cornish lacked supporting

evidence, was not appropriately targeted, and there was no evidence that any learning has been embedded in practice. She submitted that although there was evidence that Ms Cornish had accessed [PRIVATE], there was no evidence that it had successfully addressed her propensity to dishonest conduct. She also submitted that the references provided by Ms Cornish should be given little weight, if any, as one is anonymous and none have been verified as authentic. Given that context, and the new regulatory concerns which appeared to indicate that Ms Cornish had recently fabricated a letter in order to seek to give a false account of her social work registration status to her current employer, Ms Sharpe submitted that there was a risk of repetition of the misconduct.

43. In relation to the public element of impairment, Ms Sharpe submitted that the public has a right to expect social workers to carry out their duties with honesty and integrity and that, given the seriousness of the misconduct in this case, public confidence would be undermined if Ms Cornish's fitness to practise was not found to be impaired.
44. Ms Cornish submitted that she had reflected deeply on how she had responded in the wrong way when under pressure, and that, although it is not an excuse for her actions, it is important that the panel understands that she was [PRIVATE]. Ms Cornish submitted that she is committed to continuing professional development and has undertaken CPD / training, and sought out personal and professional support to be able to respond to pressures in a healthy way. In relation to the recent allegations, Ms Cornish stated that she understood that it may cause the panel concern and may appear to demonstrate a pattern of behaviour. However, Ms Cornish submitted that she has reflected on that incident, carefully examined her professional responsibilities and understands that she must put transparency, accountability, honesty and integrity first. Ms Cornish stated that, in hindsight, she wished that she had provided a fuller record of the training that she had undertaken, let her employer know about the Social Work England concerns and sought references from her current employer which would have been impactful.
45. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser that:
  - a. a social worker is fit to practise when they have the skills, knowledge, character and health to practise their profession safely and effectively without restriction;
  - b. the panel must assess the current risk of repetition of the misconduct, based on the social worker's past conduct and any steps they have taken to demonstrate insight and remediation; and
  - c. the panel must consider both the personal and public elements of impairment.
46. The panel took into account Social Work England's 'Impairment and sanctions guidance'.
47. The panel noted the submissions of both Social Work England and Ms Cornish.

48. With reference to the test formulated by Dame Janet Smith in her Fifth Shipman Report, and approved by Cox J in *Council for Healthcare and Regulatory Excellence v Nursing and Midwifery Council and Grant* [2011] EWHC 927, the panel found that the nature and seriousness of the misconduct in this case meant that all four limbs of that test were engaged:
- a. has in the past acted and/or is liable in the future to act so as to put a service user or service users at unwarranted risk of harm;
  - b. has in the past brought and/or is liable to in the future to bring the social work profession into disrepute;
  - c. has in the past breached and/or is liable in the future to breach one of the fundamental tenets of the social work profession; and
  - d. has in the past acted dishonestly and/or is liable to act dishonestly in the future.
49. Ms Cornish's misconduct in failing to investigate safeguarding concerns and undertake statutory safeguarding visits and then fabricating records to conceal those failures put child service users at risk of harm in that required checks on the safety of child service users had not been made and social work colleagues at the Council were not aware of that. Ms Cornish's misconduct in failing to undertake the safeguarding investigation and visits, dishonestly fabricating records to conceal those failures, and dishonestly fabricating evidence to the Council's investigation to conceal those failures brought the social work profession into disrepute because it amounted to breaches of fundamental tenets of the social work profession, namely safeguarding, accurate record keeping, and honesty and integrity.
50. The panel found that the misconduct was attitudinal in nature, and reflected serious errors of judgement on the part of Ms Cornish. As such, the panel considered that the misconduct, whilst remediable, would not be easy to remediate.
51. The panel noted that Ms Cornish had made admissions to the local investigation (albeit only at the end of the process), had made early admissions to Social Work England, had provided two detailed reflective statements, had provided evidence of **[PRIVATE]**, and had attended the hearing and given oral evidence, which was all to her credit. The panel considered that Ms Cornish's reflective statements and her oral evidence demonstrated some level of remorse and an acceptance that her conduct was wrong and amounted to a serious falling short of the standards expected of a social worker. It therefore demonstrated the beginnings of insight. However, although Ms Cornish had stated that she understood the impact that her conduct would have had on service users, colleagues, her employer, the wider social work profession and the public, the panel considered that fully developed insight would need to be demonstrated in practice as well as theoretically. It therefore looked at what evidence was available in relation to action taken by Ms Cornish's since the conduct in question.

52. The panel noted the training log provided by Ms Cornish, but did not consider that it demonstrated any clear steps towards remediation because it was not sufficiently targeted at the concerns in this case (in particular, the concerns relating to dishonesty), it was not recent (in that the last item listed was from July 2023, over two years ago), it was not supported by any independent evidence (for example, training certificates), and it was not accompanied by any evidence of how the learning undertaken had improved Ms Cornish's level of insight or been embedded into her professional life and social work practice.
53. The panel noted the three references / character testimonials provided by Ms Cornish. The panel noted that the references were positive but decided it could only give them little weight because one was provided anonymously and undated, the other two were dated but not recent (13 August 2023 and 29 August 2023), and Social Work England had not been able to verify the authenticity of the documents because no response had been received to emails sent to the referees. The panel noted that Ms Cornish has been working in a non-social work role for North Somerset Council since December 2022 but that no reference had been provided from that current employer. Without that reference, the panel was not able to assess whether Ms Cornish had made relevant improvements in her professional conduct, for example if she had faced stressful situations at work and how she had coped. It was also not able to ascertain whether Ms Cornish's current employer had any concerns about her honesty and integrity.
54. Taking into account the nature and gravity of the misconduct, which was very serious and involved fundamental aspects of social work practice, together with the evidence indicating that, although there was remorse and the beginnings of insight, there was little evidence of remediation, the panel decided that there was a clear risk of repetition of the misconduct.
55. The panel also took into account the new information about further regulatory concerns in relation to Ms Cornish that were recently (February 2026) referred for a Social Work England investigation. The panel reminded itself that these matters had not yet been referred to the Case Examiners, and had not been considered and found proved by a panel of adjudicators. Nevertheless, with its public protection function in mind, the panel considered it appropriate, as part of its assessment of the risk of repetition of the misconduct found proved, to take into account the evidence available in relation to the new concerns. The panel noted that the documentary evidence from independent and reliable sources (a university and Ms Cornish's employer, a local authority), taken together with Ms Cornish's oral evidence to the panel at the hearing, appeared to indicate that Ms Cornish had recently fabricated a letter from her regulator, Social Work England, in order to mislead her employer, North Somerset Council, and the University of the West of England as to her registration status. Ms Cornish had also told the panel that she accepted that her conduct was dishonest.
56. The panel considered that the new concerns, and the weight of evidence in support, appeared to indicate that Ms Cornish had recently repeated conduct of the same nature as the misconduct found proved – namely, the dishonest fabrication of

professional documents. The panel found that this added to its concern that there was a risk of repetition of the misconduct found proved.

57. In relation to the personal element, the panel therefore concluded that Ms Cornish's fitness to practise is currently impaired.
58. The panel also considered that a finding of impairment was required in relation to the public element of impairment. Given the nature and seriousness of the misconduct in this case (putting service users at risk by failing to undertake safeguarding investigations and visits and then dishonestly fabricating records and evidence to conceal those failures) and the risk of repetition of the misconduct, the panel found that a reasonable member of the public would expect a finding of current impairment in order to uphold proper professional standards and maintain public confidence in the social work profession.

### Decision and reasons on sanction:

59. On behalf of Social Work England, Ms Sharpe submitted that the imposition of a final order of removal from the social work register would be the only appropriate and proportionate sanction in this case because of the seriousness of the misconduct and the risk of repetition.
60. Ms Cornish submitted that a period of suspension would be appropriate and proportionate because the conduct was remediable and she was fully committed to taking steps to further develop her insight and to demonstrate remediation.
61. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser that:
  - a. The panel's powers at this stage are set out in paragraphs 12 and 13 of Schedule 2 to the Regulations. It may take no further action, give advice, give a warning, impose conditions of practice, impose a period of suspension, or remove the social worker from the social work register;
  - b. The purpose of any sanction is to protect the public. This includes direct protection from the risk of harm, and it also includes upholding proper professional standards and maintaining public confidence in the social work profession;
  - c. The reputation of the social work profession is more important than the fortunes of any individual social worker;
  - d. Any sanction imposed must be appropriate, taking into account the seriousness of the misconduct and any mitigating and aggravating factors; and
  - e. Any sanction imposed must be proportionate, balancing the interests of the social worker with the interests of the social work profession and the public interest.

62. The panel took into account Social Work England’s ‘Impairment and sanctions guidance’.
63. The panel noted the submissions of Ms Sharpe and Ms Cornish.
64. The panel identified a number of mitigating factors. The panel noted that Ms Cornish does not have any previous fitness to practise history. The panel also noted Ms Cornish’s personal circumstances at the relevant times, including **[PRIVATE]**. The panel noted that Ms Cornish had made full admissions early in the Social Work England process and that she had attended and given oral evidence at the hearing. The panel reminded itself of its earlier finding that Ms Cornish had demonstrated remorse and the beginnings of insight. She had undertaken detailed reflection, acknowledging and accepting responsibility for her wrongdoing.
65. The panel identified a number of aggravating factors. The panel reminded itself of its earlier finding that Ms Cornish’s misconduct had been deliberate, repeated and that it had continued over an extended period of time. The misconduct was therefore not an isolated incident, but appeared to represent a pattern of behaviour. The dishonest conduct was undertaken for personal gain, in an attempt to conceal earlier wrongdoing. Furthermore, the panel found that the misconduct amounted to an abuse of position and trust, putting child service users at risk of harm and risking undermining the credibility of a foster carer and a school safeguarding professional.
66. The panel noted paragraphs 154 and 158 of the Social Work England guidance document, which gave specific guidance in relation to abuse of position / trust:

*“154. Social workers hold privileged positions of trust. Their role often requires them to engage with vulnerable people. It is essential to the effective delivery of social work that the public can trust social workers. Any abuse of trust by a social worker is a serious and unacceptable risk in terms of public protection and confidence in the profession”.*

*“158. Decision makers must assess each case on its facts and circumstances. They must apply proportionality considering any mitigating or aggravating factors. However, most cases of serious abuses of trust are likely to require suspension or removal from the register. If a decision maker decides on a lesser sanction, they must provide detailed reasoning”.*

67. The panel noted paragraphs 174 to 181 of the Social Work England guidance document, which gave specific guidance in relation to dishonesty as follows:

*“174. Concerns that raise questions of character (such as dishonesty) may be harder to remediate. This is because it is more difficult to produce objective evidence of reformed character. Evidence of professional competence cannot mitigate serious or persistent dishonesty. Dishonest conduct is highly damaging to public confidence in social work. Therefore, it is likely to warrant a finding of impairment and a more serious sanction of suspension or removal”.*

*“175. The most serious instances of dishonesty in professional practice are those which (do either of the following): directly harm service users; have the potential to put service users at risk. This could include [...] falsifying records (such as falsely recording that a safeguarding referral has been made or a statutory visit carried out)”.*

*“180. Dishonesty is generally recognised as one of the most serious forms of misconduct. However, decision makers should consider that dishonest behaviour is nuanced and can take different forms. They should consider it on a scale of seriousness”.*

*“181. Factors that decision makers can consider when reviewing dishonesty include (all of the following):*

- the duration of any dishonesty*
- whether the dishonesty was an isolated instance, or indicates a larger problem or pattern of behaviour*
- whether the social worker admitted dishonest behaviour at an early opportunity, or if they tried to purposefully hide their dishonesty*
- whether the dishonesty was for the social worker’s own personal gain*
- any other relevant aggravating or mitigating factors”.*

68. The panel assessed the misconduct in this case to be very serious including multiple acts of dishonesty. Although a number of mitigating factors had been identified, the panel was mindful that the misconduct involved serious breaches of fundamental tenets of social work practice and that there were a number of aggravating factors including that the conduct had been deliberate, continued over an extended period of time, amounted to an abuse of trust and had put service users at risk of harm. In assessing the seriousness of the dishonest conduct, and with reference to paragraphs 175 and 181 of the guidance, the panel noted that the dishonest conduct put service users at risk of harm, had persisted over an extended period of time, was not an isolated incident but appeared to represent a pattern of behaviour, and included conduct intended to conceal wrongdoing (namely, the falsification of records to conceal a failure to carry out statutory safeguarding checks). The panel therefore assessed the dishonest conduct to be at the higher end of the spectrum of seriousness.

#### **No further action, advice and warning:**

69. Given its finding that the misconduct was very serious, and with reference to paragraphs 93 to 112 of the Social Work England guidance document, the panel decided that this was not a case in which imposing no restriction on the social worker’s registration would be appropriate. There were no exceptional circumstances that would justify taking ‘no further action’ in this case. Furthermore, in its assessment of impairment, the panel had found a clear risk of repetition, indicating that service users and the public could be put at risk of harm if the social worker were permitted to

practise without restriction. Therefore, giving advice or giving a warning would be insufficient to protect the public and the wider public interest in this case.

### Conditions of practice:

70. The panel next considered whether conditions of practice might be an appropriate and proportionate sanction. With reference to paragraphs 118 to 119 of the Social Work England guidance document, the panel noted that conditions of practice are unlikely to be appropriate in cases involving dishonesty and an abuse of trust. Furthermore, with reference to paragraphs 114 to 117 of the Social Work England guidance document, the panel reminded itself of its finding that Ms Cornish had demonstrated the beginnings of insight and that the misconduct was capable of being remedied. However, the panel had also found that the misconduct was attitudinal in nature, demonstrating serious errors of judgement. As such, the panel decided that it was not possible to formulate workable conditions. Given the nature of the misconduct, to be effective in addressing the identified risk of harm to service users and the public, any conditions would need to be so stringent as to be tantamount to suspension. That would not be fair or practical. Furthermore, the panel was not satisfied that conditions of practice would be sufficient to mark the seriousness of the misconduct and protect the wider public interest.

### Suspension:

71. The panel reminded itself that paragraphs 158 and 174 of the guidance indicated that, in most cases of serious abuses of trust and dishonest conduct, a more serious sanction of suspension or removal is likely to be required. Therefore, the panel next considered whether a period of suspension might be an appropriate and proportionate sanction.
72. The panel noted paragraphs 136 to 138 of the Social Work England guidance document, 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.*

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

- *the social worker has not demonstrated any insight and remediation;*
- *there is limited evidence to suggest they are willing (or able) to resolve or remediate their failings”.*

73. The panel noted that the concerns in this case represented serious breaches of multiple professional standards and that Ms Cornish had demonstrated the beginnings of insight. However, although Ms Cornish’s written reflections and oral evidence demonstrated some willingness to remediate her failings, the repeated nature of the misconduct and the new concerns about very similar alleged conduct, meant that the panel had real concerns about whether Ms Cornish would be able to effectively resolve or remediate her failings.
74. The panel noted that Ms Cornish had told them that, although aware of the ongoing Social Work England proceedings into alleged dishonest conduct, as recently as January 2026 she had fabricated a letter, impersonating her regulator, in an effort to deceive her current employer, North Somerset Council, as to her registration status. The panel found that admitted conduct cast serious doubt upon whether Ms Cornish would be able to effectively remediate her dishonest conduct, even if she was willing to try to do so.
75. The panel also had a concern as to whether an order of suspension would sufficiently mark the seriousness of the misconduct in this case (which it had assessed as very serious), in order to uphold proper professional standards and maintain public confidence in the profession of social workers.

### Removal from the social work register:

76. As the panel had been unable to formulate workable conditions of practice to protect the public and the wider public interest, and the circumstances of this case did not fit squarely within the factors of the guidance that indicated that suspension might be suitable, it went on to consider whether removal from the register might be appropriate and proportionate.
77. The panel noted that:
- paragraph 149 of the Social Work England guidance document indicated that a removal order may be appropriate in a case involving an abuse of position or trust, dishonesty (especially where persistent and/or concealed), and social workers who are unwilling and/or unable to remediate; and
  - paragraph 148 of the Social Work England guidance document stated that a removal order must be made where no other outcome would be enough to protect the public and the wider public interest.
78. The panel reminded itself that it had assessed the misconduct in this case as very serious. It included failing to investigate safeguarding concerns and undertake statutory safeguarding visits and then dishonestly fabricating records and evidence to conceal

those failures. Whilst there were some mitigating features, including no previous regulatory history, early admissions to Social Work England and attending the hearing to give evidence, the panel was mindful that there were numerous and significant aggravating features. The conduct had been deliberate, persisted over an extended period of time, amounted to an abuse of trust, had put child service users at risk of harm, and had risked undermining the credibility of a foster carer and a school safeguarding professional. The panel reminded itself of its finding that, given the lack of evidence of well-developed insight and of remediation, there was a risk of repetition and that, given recent new concerns, the conduct may also represent an ongoing pattern of dishonest behaviour.

79. Given that context, very serious misconduct touching on fundamental aspects of social work practice (safeguarding, accurate record keeping, and honesty and integrity), a clear risk of repetition, and recent concerns appearing to indicate an ongoing pattern of deceitful behaviour, the panel decided that the conduct found proved was incompatible with remaining on the social work register. Any action short of removal would be inappropriate because it would fail to properly address the risks to public protection and the wider public interest.
80. The panel was mindful that removal from the social work register is the most serious sanction available and would inevitably have a serious impact on Ms Cornish, preventing her from practising as a social worker which could have consequences for her professional reputation and financial wellbeing. However, given the circumstances of this case, the panel was satisfied that Ms Cornish's interests were outweighed by the interests of the public, both in terms of public protection and the wider public interest.
81. The panel therefore decided that the only appropriate and proportionate sanction was to remove Ms Cornish from the social work register.

#### Interim order (under paragraph 11 of Schedule 2 to the Regulations):

82. In light of its findings on sanction, the panel next considered an application by Ms Sharpe for an interim suspension order to cover the appeal period before the final order becomes effective.
83. Ms Cornish stated that she had no objection to an interim order being imposed to cover the appeal period.
84. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser that:
  - a. the final order of removal from the register will not come into effect until the expiry of the period for making an appeal, that is 28 days, or when the appeal is finally disposed of, if an appeal is made;
  - b. where a panel has made a final order, it may make an interim order under paragraph 11(1)(b) of Schedule 2 to the Regulations to cover the appeal period where it considers that doing so is necessary for the protection of the public or in the best interests of the social worker;

- c. the panel should take into account its findings at the impairment and sanction stages, and any risks identified; and
  - d. the panel must apply the principle of proportionality, imposing only the least severe restriction necessary to address the risks identified.
85. The panel had regard to paragraphs 203 to 204 and 206 to 208 of the Social Work England ‘Impairment and sanctions guidance’ document.
86. The panel bore in mind that it had found a clear risk of repetition of misconduct, impaired fitness to practise, and that a final order of removal from the social work register was the appropriate and proportionate sanction in this case. Since the panel’s final order of removal would not come into effect until the expiry of the 28-day appeal period, or until any appeal is dealt with, it considered that an interim order was necessary to protect the public.
87. The panel reminded itself that appropriate and workable conditions could not be formulated to address the risks in this case. Therefore, an interim order of conditions would be insufficient to protect the public. It therefore decided that the appropriate and proportionate type of interim order to impose at this stage was an interim suspension order.
88. The panel decided that the interim suspension order should be imposed for a period of 18 months in order to allow sufficient time for any appeal that might be lodged to be dealt with.
89. Accordingly, the panel concluded that an interim suspension order is necessary for the protection of the public. When the appeal period expires this interim order will come to an end unless an appeal is filed with the High Court. If there is no appeal, the final order of removal shall take effect when the appeal period expires.

### Interim order (under paragraph 8 of Schedule 2 to the Regulations):

90. Ms Sharpe invited the panel to revoke the interim order currently in place under paragraph 8 of Schedule 2 to the Regulations.
91. Ms Cornish agreed that would be an appropriate course of action, and confirmed that she was content to waive her right to notice of the review of that interim order.
92. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser that:
- a. Paragraph 8(6)(d) of Schedule 2 to the Regulations provides that where an interim order is in place and a final order is made in respect of the social worker, the interim order will cease to have effect:
    - i. if there is no appeal against the final order, when the period for appealing expires; or
    - ii. if there is an appeal against the order, when the appeal is withdrawn or otherwise finally disposed of;

- b. The panel may convene an early review of the interim order, without notice if the social worker consents to waive their right to notice, and in that case the panel may revoke the interim order under paragraph 14(5) of Schedule 2 to the Regulations if satisfied that it is no longer necessary for the protection of the public or in the best interests of the social worker;
  - c. The panel may be assisted by paragraphs 209 to 212 of the Social Work England 'Impairment and sanctions guidance' document.
93. Given that the public and the wider public interest would be protected by the removal order and, during the appeal period, by the interim suspension order imposed under paragraph 11(1)(b) of Schedule 2 to the Regulations, the panel decided that the interim suspension order currently in place under paragraph 8 of Schedule 2 to the Regulations pending the outcome of the regulatory proceedings was no longer necessary to protect the public or in the best interests of the social worker.
94. The panel therefore decided to revoke that interim suspension order.

### Right of appeal:

95. 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.
96. 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.
97. 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.
98. This notice is served in accordance with Rules 44 and 45 of the Social Work England Fitness to Practice Rules 2019 (as amended).

### Review of final orders:

99. Under Paragraph 15(1), 15(2) and 15(3) of Schedule 2 of the regulations:

- a. 15(1) The regulator must review a suspension order or a conditions of practice order, before its expiry
  - b. 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
  - c. 15(3) A request by the social worker under sub-paragraph (2) must be made within such period as the regulator determines in rules made under Regulation 25(5), and a final order does not have effect until after the expiry of that period
100. Under Rule 16(aa) of the rules 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:

101. 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>.