

Social worker: Debra Milburn

Registration number: SW77852

Fitness to Practise

Final Order Review Meeting

Date of Meeting: 07 September 2026

Meeting venue: Remote

Final order being reviewed:
Suspension order (expiring 17 October 2026)

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

Introduction and attendees:

1. This is the first review of a final suspension order originally imposed for a period of 36 months by a panel of adjudicators on 19 September 2023.
2. Ms Milburn did not attend and was not represented.
3. Social Work England provided their written submissions, which are set out within the notice of hearing letter.
4. The panel of adjudicators conducting this review (hereafter “the panel”) and the other people involved in it were as follows:

Adjudicators	Role
Linda Owen	Chair
Sue Williams	Social worker adjudicator

Hearings team/Legal adviser	Role
Poppy Muffett	Hearings officer
Nabiha Asam	Hearings support officer
Scott McDonnell	Legal adviser

Service of notice:

5. The panel of adjudicators had careful regard to the documents contained in the final order review service bundle as follows:
 - A copy of the notice of the final order review hearing dated 27 July 2026 and addressed to Ms Milburn at her email address which she provided to Social Work England;
 - An extract from the Social Work England Register as of 27 July 2026 detailing Ms Milburn’s registered email address;
 - A copy of a signed statement of service, on behalf of Social Work England, confirming that on 27 July 2026 the writer sent by email to Ms Milburn at the email address referred to above: notice of hearing and related documents.
6. The panel accepted the advice of the legal adviser in relation to service of notice.
7. Having had regard to the Social Work England Fitness to practise rules 2019 (as amended) (the Rules) 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 Milburn in accordance with Rules 14, 15, 44 and 45.

Proceeding with the final order review as a meeting:

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

“If you would like to attend before the adjudicators in order to make oral submissions, please confirm your intention by no later than 4pm on 10 August 2026. 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 received no information to suggest that Ms Milburn had responded to the notice of final order review, but noted an email from her dated 16 June 2026 in which she stated that she would not be engaging with these proceedings.
10. The panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal adviser with regard to Rule 16(c) of the Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended) which provides:

“Where the registered social worker does not state within the period specified by the regulator whether they intend to attend before the regulator, the regulator may determine whether to make an order by means of a meeting.”
11. The panel was satisfied that it would be fair and appropriate to conduct the review in the form of a meeting in accordance with Rule 16(c).

Review of the current order:

12. This final order review hearing is taking place under Paragraph 15(1) of Schedule 2 of The Social Workers Regulations 2018 (as amended) and Social Work England’s Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended).
13. The purpose of this review is to review the current order, which is due to expire at the end of 17 October 2026. The order subject to review is a suspension order.

The allegations found proved which resulted in the imposition of the final order were as follows:

“Whilst registered as a social worker between April 2019 and November 2020,

1.1 Between October 2019 and March 2020, you did not ensure that Person A was properly supported following an allegation that Person A had been [PRIVATE];

2: Between 17 September 2020 and 16 November 2020 you failed in your duty as a social worker to engage with social services after Person A was made the subject of a Child In Need Assessment.”

The final hearing panel on 19 September 2023 determined the following with regard to impairment:

14. *“The panel considered Ms Milburn’s current fitness to practise firstly from the personal perspective and then from the wider public perspective. The panel also had regard to whether the conduct in this case is easily remediable, whether it has been remedied and whether it was likely to be repeated.*
15. *In deciding impairment, the panel considered whether:*
 - 1- *Ms Milburn has in the past and/or is liable in the future to place service users at unwarranted risk of harm.*
 - 2- *Ms Milburn has in the past brought and/or is liable in the future to bring the profession into disrepute.*
 - 3- *Ms Milburn has in the past breached and/or is liable in the future to breach one of the fundamental tenets of the profession.*
16. *In relation to the first question the panel determined that based on the evidence before it, Ms Milburn has not in the past placed service users at unwarranted risk of harm.*
17. *In relation to the question of whether Ms Milburn has in the past brought the profession into disrepute, the panel determined she had. A significant aspect of public interest is upholding proper standards of behaviour so as not to bring the profession into disrepute.*
18. *The panel took the view that members of the public would be extremely concerned to learn that a registered social worker had behaved in the manner found in Ms Milburn’s case even though the events occurred in her private life.*
19. *In finding that Ms Milburn did not conduct herself in such a way as to adhere to the HCPC and Social Work England Professional Standards, the panel determined that she had breached fundamental tenets of the social work profession. The panel considered that promoting and maintaining the wellbeing of people and effective communication are fundamental tenets of social work and lie at the heart of social work practice.*
20. *The misconduct found by the panel evidences that Ms Milburn was not properly supporting Person A’s wellbeing after the [PRIVATE] and nor was Ms Milburn effectively communicating with Melanie Farnell for the purpose of ensuring an accurate and informed Assessment that would best meet Person A’s needs.*
21. *The panel considered the extent to which the misconduct in this case can be, and has been remediated by Ms Milburn, and whether it is likely to be repeated.*
22. *The panel kept in mind that the facts found against Ms Milburn relate to her character rather than her professional practice, although it found such conduct*

could be capable of flowing into Ms Milburn's practice. Character concerns are often harder to remediate because it is more difficult to produce objective evidence of reformed character. Nonetheless, the panel did consider that the misconduct found was capable of being remedied providing that sufficient insight and reflection could be evidenced.

- 23. The panel took into account the detail provided by Ms Milburn about the circumstances at the time of the misconduct, in which Ms Milburn describes a turbulent relationship with Person A, as a result of Person A's attitudes and behaviours. However, the panel concluded that Ms Milburn has shown no insight into the impact of her behaviour either on Person A, or the wider public, focusing mainly on the impact the events and subsequent investigations have had on her life.*
- 24. Whatever the difficulties Person A was displaying, she was a child, and Ms Milburn was the adult, and more specifically, a trained social work professional, and therefore she was well placed to have done what was expected of her in the circumstances.*
- 25. The panel noted that Ms Milburn has not provided any evidence of remediation and the reflections she provided attribute blame to others rather than reflecting on what she could or should have done differently. In relation to the Child and Family Assessment, Ms Milburn states, 'Instead, I was not listened to, I was ignored by the Social Worker and I was blatantly lied about by the Team Manager, with the end result manifesting as a character assassination within a Core Assessment report.*
- 26. This assessment contained lies, factual inaccuracies, unsubstantiated information and an enormous and unhelpful dollop of hearsay. To this day I have not completed reading the report as I found the lies and inaccuracies contained within to be incredibly distressing, and I had to stop engaging with the document [PRIVATE].*
- 27. In written submissions (dated 04 September 2023), Ms Milburn states, 'This whole hearing has literally no meaning for me, I know the truth and my life will carry on. I have requested de-registration; I have no intention to return to a profession governed by an unethical company who has no governance in respect of their own practice'.*
- 28. The panel had no confidence that Ms Milburn recognises what went wrong, nor that she accepts her role and responsibility in relation to the events. The panel found that Ms Milburn has shown no remorse for her conduct which is a theme that was evident within the facts and misconduct found. For example, when Ms Milburn told Melanie Farnell that Person A deserved 'an Oscar for the way she behaved when she [PRIVATE]. Whilst the panel acknowledge that Ms Milburn had to an extent engaged with Social Work England, it considered this to be limited and to be hostile rather than co-operative in nature.*

29. *Due to the sustained nature of Ms Milburn's attitude (from October 2019 – November 2020), the lack of insight, and lack of remediation the panel concluded that the risk of repetition remains. Whilst the panel acknowledged the repetition of behaviour would not relate to Person A, it considered that the individuals or families Ms Milburn worked with would be at risk, due to the misconduct. This is because the nature of the misconduct, albeit occurring in Ms Milburn's personal life, is likely to arise in her future professional conduct.*
30. *The misconduct related to supporting vulnerable people and communicating effectively with professionals in the course of assessments to ensure the best outcome. The conduct could therefore flow into Ms Milburn's professional practice which requires her to be empathic, supportive and communicate effectively with other professionals to ensure the best interests of service users are met.*
31. *The panel took into account the testimonials provided by Ms Milburn and in doing so had regard to paragraphs 52-59 of the 'Impairment and Sanctions' guidance. The panel placed limited weight on them as it found the content was not relevant to the specific Allegation in the case, instead they speak more generically about the issues with Person A and seek to undermine evidence from Durham County Council. The panel was not persuaded that those writing the testimonials had had full disclosure of the Allegation under consideration.*
32. *The panel determined that Ms Milburn's fitness to practise is currently personally impaired on the grounds of her misconduct. The panel next considered whether a finding of current impairment was necessary in the public interest. The panel was mindful that the public interest encompassed not only public protection but also the declaring and upholding of proper standards of conduct and behaviour as well as the maintenance of public confidence in the profession.*
33. *It took into account the guidance in the NMC v Grant case at paragraph 74:- 'In determining whether a practitioner's fitness to practise is impaired by reason of misconduct, the relevant panel should generally consider not only whether the practitioner continues to present a risk to members of the public in his or her current role, but also whether the need to uphold proper professional standards and public confidence in the profession would be undermined if a finding of impairment were not made in the particular circumstances.'*
34. *The panel considered that members of the public, even if they knew that the misconduct occurred within Ms Milburn's personal life, would be concerned if Social Work England, were not to mark the seriousness of Ms Milburn's misconduct with a finding of current impairment on public interest grounds. The panel considered that not to make a finding of current impairment of fitness to practise in relation to the facts of this case would undermine public trust and confidence in the profession and would fail to uphold and declare proper standards. In reaching its decision the panel bore in mind HR's evidence, who*

as a member of the public, had not known at the time he met Ms Milburn that she was a social worker, but felt that he could not imagine that Ms Milburn could provide the support service users needed, having considered her failures to support Person A. HR states that, he ‘could not express how distraught I would be if I found out [Ms Milburn] [sic] was in a job like that again myself’.

35. *The panel therefore decided on the public interest element of impairment that Ms Milburn’s fitness to practise is currently impaired.”*

The final hearing panel on 19 September 2023 determined the following with regard to sanction:

36. *“The panel applied the principle of proportionality by weighing Ms Milburn’s interests with the public interest and by considering each available sanction in ascending order of severity.*
37. *The panel considered the mitigating and aggravating factors in determining what sanction, if any, to impose.*
38. *The panel identified the following mitigating factors:*
- Ms Milburn has no previous adverse regulatory findings against her and has partially engaged with the Social Work England investigation and regulatory process.
 - Ms Milburn and Person A had a difficult and turbulent relationship.
 - Ms Milburn has provided positive testimonials relating to her professional social work practice and good character, from her previous team manager and two social work colleagues.
39. *The panel identified the following aggravating factors:*
- Ms Milburn’s failure to engage with the Child and Family Assessment given her knowledge and experience of social work practice.
 - Ms Milburn’s conduct continued from October 2019 to November 2020.
 - Ms Milburn’s lack of insight, remorse, and remediation to date.
40. *Considering the serious nature of the findings of fact, the panel decided that taking no further action, or issuing advice or a warning, would not be appropriate in this case as these sanctions would not restrict Ms Milburn’s practice and would therefore not protect the public from the risks that have been identified.*
41. *The panel went on to consider whether a conditions of practice order would be appropriate.*

42. *It is difficult to see how a conditions of practice order might address and safeguard members of the public from the risks of the attitudinal nature and behavioural failings found in Ms Milburn's case. The panel reminded itself that it had found Ms Milburn had not remediated and there was risk of repetition. With this in mind the panel considered that conditions of practice would not be guaranteed to prevent the risk of repetition.*
43. *The facts found in Ms Milburn's case relate to her character and attitude which make conditions of practice hard to formulate. The panel noted its earlier determination that Ms Milburn had shown no insight and therefore the panel could not be confident that Ms Milburn would comply with conditions even if conditions could be formulated. The panel therefore concluded that a conditions of practice order is not sufficient to protect the public.*
44. *The panel then considered whether a suspension order should be imposed to protect the public and the wider public interest. The panel considered that suspension orders can be imposed for a period of up to three years. It noted from the Sanctions guidance 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 or where removal is not an option.' The panel had in mind that the purpose of a suspension order is not to punish but to protect the public and public interest.*
45. *The panel asked itself what a period of suspension would seek to achieve in Ms Milburn's case. A period of suspension would provide an opportunity for Ms Milburn to seek to address the misconduct findings made against her. The panel reminded itself that it had found that whilst character concerns are often harder to remediate, it did consider that the misconduct found was capable of being remedied providing that sufficient insight and reflection could be evidenced.*
46. *The panel took into account that whilst it had not found evidence of insight, Ms Milburn has been partially engaging with Social Work England, including providing further submissions as recently as 08 September 2023. Within those submissions there is consideration by Ms Milburn of the impact the hearing could have on Person A's [PRIVATE]. The panel did not find that this amounted to a demonstration of insight, but when considered alongside the positive testimonials that Ms Milburn had been a conscientious social worker who had 'high standards', it found that there was enough evidence to satisfy it that a period of suspension could be used by Ms Milburn for reflection, understanding and the development of insight.*
47. *The panel kept in mind that it should select the least restrictive sanction necessary to protect the public and the wider public interest. The panel took into account the strong submissions made by Mr Santos that Social Work England, as Ms Milburn's regulator, believes that a suspension order would be the appropriate and proportionate order in this case. The panel agreed that a*

suspension order would sufficiently protect the public and meet the wider public interest.

48. The panel took into account that a suspension order might cause Ms Milburn financial hardship and reputational damage, however, the panel concluded that the protection of the public outweighs the harm that might be caused to Ms Milburn by the imposition of this order.

49. The panel went on to consider the duration of the suspension order and concluded that a period of three years would be necessary and proportionate and would reflect the seriousness of the misconduct. This period will allow Ms Milburn to consider her future within the profession, to develop her insight and attempt to address the impairment in her fitness to practise.

50. In order to satisfy itself of the appropriateness and proportionality of a suspension order, the panel tested it against the most restrictive sanction, that of removal.

51. The panel took into account the Sanctions Guidance which states:

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

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

52. The panel considered that a removal order is a sanction of last resort and should be reserved for those categories of cases where there is no other means of protecting the public and the wider public interest. The panel decided that Ms Milburn’s case falls short of requiring removal as the findings against her were not of such gravity as those set out at paragraph 149 of the Sanctions guidance.

53. The panel concluded that a three-year suspension order was therefore the appropriate and proportionate order in all the circumstances of Ms Milburn’s case.

54. The panel would encourage Ms Milburn to engage with Social Work England prior to the hearing that will be held to review this order and to attend at the review hearing. In the absence of improved insight or other remediation upon a review, it will be open to a reviewing panel to consider imposing a removal order. The panel believes that the following actions would help a future panel undertaking the review to establish whether Ms Milburn’s practice remains impaired:

(i) A written reflective statement using a recognised model addressing the misconduct and the impact it did/could have on Person A/service users/the profession.

(ii) Evidence of remediation to put right the deficiencies and shortfalls identified by the panel. This could include participation in training linked to the findings of fact in this case, such as value-based training.

(iii) Evidence of maintaining continuing education and professional development.

(iv) Testimonials from any workplace whether the employment is paid or unpaid.”

Social Work England submissions:

55. The panel read submissions from Social Work England, which sought a Removal Order. Social Work England submitted that:

“Subject to any evidence of remediation or insight provided by the social worker, the Panel is invited to determine that a finding of impairment remains necessary and impose a Removal Order.

Whilst the social worker has complied with the Suspension Order, they have not engaged with the regulatory process since the Final Hearing. The social worker has confirmed that they will not engage now, or in the future, and has no desire to return to the profession.

Voluntary removal guidance and an application form was provided to the social worker on 1 May 2024. However, Social Work England has not received any completed application from the social worker to date.

In the absence of any evidence relating to insight and remediation, it is submitted that the concerns cannot be said to have been fully addressed. Furthermore, the lack engagement, and absence of evidence demonstrating remediation indicates that the risk of repetition remains high.

Additionally, it is submitted that the social worker does not have insight into the concerns by continuing to deny the findings made by the Final Hearing Panel and describing the concerns as a ‘false narrative’. As such, Social Work England submits that a finding of impairment remains necessary to protect the public and the wider public interest.

It is submitted that the most appropriate order to impose is now a Removal Order.

The concerns are serious and give rise to failings that are centred around fundamental tenets of the profession. There is a persistent lack of insight from the social worker at this stage and there is clear evidence that the social worker is unwilling and unable to remediate. It would not be in the public’s interest to

continue the order where the social worker has made it explicitly clear that they do not wish to return to the profession.”

Panel decision and reasons on current impairment:

56. 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 previous panel. 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’.
57. The panel had regard to all of the documentation before it, including the decision and reasons of the original panel. The panel also took account of the written submissions made by Social Work England.
58. The panel heard and accepted the advice of the legal adviser. The panel was reminded that a social worker’s fitness to practise is impaired if they pose a risk to public safety, or if their conduct or performance undermines the confidence the public is entitled to place in all social workers in England. A social worker’s fitness to practise may also be impaired if their actions make it necessary to send a public message about the standards expected of social workers.
59. If the panel decided that Ms Milburn’s practice is currently impaired then it should then consider what sanctions are available and refer to Social Work England’s “Impairment and Sanctions Guidance”. The panel must start from the least restrictive sanction. Insight and remediation are important factors.
60. The panel first considered whether Ms Milburn’s fitness to practise remains impaired.
61. The panel noted that the original panel had found impairment on the basis of misconduct and in the public interest.
62. This panel noted that Ms Milburn had not engaged in any meaningful way throughout these proceedings and there was no change in circumstances since the final order had been made.
63. Ms Milburn had provided no evidence of training or remediation. The position remained the same as it had been three years ago.
64. The panel noted that no new information had been provided by Ms Milburn since the last review although she had been in contact with Social Work England by email regarding her attendance at the review proceedings. Therefore, her position had not changed since the final hearing.
65. As such this panel was unable to find that Ms Milburn’s circumstances had changed over the past 3 years and since the final hearing. Ms Milburn had not shown that she had taken action to address the concerns raised.
66. The panel therefore decided that Ms Milburn’s practise is currently impaired.

Decision and reasons:

67. Having found Ms Milburn's 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.
68. The panel considered the written submissions made by Social Work England, within which they invited the panel to consider imposing a removal order. Ms Milburn had provided no written submissions.
69. The panel also took into account the 'Impairment and sanctions guidance' published by Social Work England.
70. The panel was mindful that the purpose of any sanction is not to punish Ms Milburn, 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 Ms Milburn's interests with the public interest.

Take no further action, advice or warning, allow the current suspension order to lapse upon its expiry

71. The panel noted that none of these measures would restrict Ms Milburn's ability to practise. As such they were not appropriate or sufficient to address the concerns raised due to the nature and seriousness of Ms Milburn's impairment which has not yet been remedied
72. Furthermore, none would be sufficient to protect the public, maintain public confidence and uphold the reputation of the profession.

Conditions of practise order

73. The panel went on to consider whether it would be possible to replace the current suspension order with a conditions of practise order.
74. The panel could not identify any conditions of practice that would be sufficient to protect the public or that would be practicable noting the wide ranging nature of the concerns found. Ms Milburn had not engaged with the proceedings and the panel were not confident she would conform to any conditions of practise. In addition, because she does not intend to work as a social worker conditions would not be workable or appropriate.

Extend the current suspension order with effect from the expiry of the current order

75. The panel considered whether the current suspension order should be extended for a further period of time.

76. The panel did not consider that extending the current suspension order would sufficiently address the circumstances before the panel including that Ms Milburn had failed to demonstrate any remediation or insight during these proceedings and during the period of suspension of 36 months. The panel decided that no purpose would be served in extending the current suspension order in light of this. Ms Milburn had not provided evidence of training or a reflective piece as recommended by the final hearing panel and no effort had been made to provide evidence of insight or remediation. The panel considered that there remains a high risk of repetition and a risk to the public should Ms Milburn be permitted to practise without restriction.

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

77. The panel was satisfied it could consider that a removal order was available to the panel as Ms Milburn's fitness to practise was originally found impaired on the basis of one or more grounds as set out in regulation 25(2)(a), (c), (d), (f) or (g).

78. 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 be appropriate because Ms Milburn had demonstrated a persistent lack of insight into the seriousness of her actions or consequences. In addition Ms Milburn had shown that she was unwilling or unable to remediate.

79. The panel noted that although Ms Milburn had appeared to comply with the suspension order she had confirmed in correspondence that she did not wish to return to practise as a social worker. She further stated that Social Work England had "given nothing", provided "a false narrative" and Ms Milburn wanted "nothing to do" with Social Work England. It was clear to the panel that Ms Milburn was determined not to engage.

80. The panel therefore decided to impose a new order namely a removal order with effect from the expiry of the current order.

Right of appeal:

81. 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.

82. 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.
83. 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.
84. This notice is served in accordance with Rules 44 and 45 of the Fitness to Practise Rules 2019 (as amended).

Review of final orders:

85. 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).
86. 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

87. 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>