Case Examiner Decision

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FTPS-25139

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The role of the case examiners

The case examiners perform a filtering function in the fitness to practise process, and their primary role is to determine whether the case ought to be considered by adjudicators at a formal hearing. The wider purpose of the fitness to practise process is not to discipline the social worker for past conduct, but rather to consider whether the social worker's current fitness to practise might be impaired because of the issues highlighted. In reaching their decisions, case examiners are mindful that Social Work England's primary objective is to protect the public.

Case examiners apply the 'realistic prospect' test. As part of their role, the case examiners will consider whether there is a realistic prospect:

- the facts alleged could be found proven by adjudicators
- adjudicators could find that one of the statutory grounds for impairment is engaged
- adjudicators could find the social worker's fitness to practise is currently impaired

If the case examiners find a realistic prospect of impairment, they consider whether there is a public interest in referring the case to a hearing. If there is no public interest in a hearing, the case examiners can propose an outcome to the social worker. We call this accepted disposal and a case can only be resolved in this way if the social worker agrees with the case examiners' proposal.

Case examiners review cases on the papers only. The case examiners are limited, in that, they are unable to hear and test live evidence, and therefore they are unable to make findings of fact.

Decision summary

Decision summary	
Preliminary outcome	30 July 2026
	Accepted disposal proposed - warning order of 12 months' duration
Final outcome	17 August 2026
	Accepted disposal - warning order of 12 months' duration

Executive summary

The case examiners have reached the following conclusions:

1. There is a realistic prospect of regulatory concern 1 being found proven by the adjudicators.

2. There is a realistic prospect of regulatory concern 1 being found to amount to the statutory grounds of misconduct.

3. For regulatory concern 1, there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators determining that the social worker's fitness to practise is currently impaired.

The case examiners did not consider it to be in the public interest for the matter to be referred to a final hearing and determined that the case could be concluded by way of accepted disposal.

As such, the case examiners requested that the social worker was notified of their intention to resolve the case with a warning order of 12 months' duration; the social worker subsequently advised that they accepted the terms of this proposed disposal in full.

The case examiners have considered all of the documents made available within the evidence bundle. Key evidence is referred to throughout their decision and the case examiners' full reasoning is set out below.

Anonymity and redaction

Elements of this decision have been marked for redaction in line with our Fitness to Practise Publications Policy. Text in blue will be redacted only from the published copy of the decision, and will therefore be shared with the complainant in their copy. Text in red will be redacted from both the complainant's and the published copy of the decision.

In accordance with Social Work England's fitness to practise proceedings and registration appeals publications policy, the case examiners have anonymised the names of individuals to maintain privacy. A schedule of anonymity is provided below for the social worker and complainant, and will be redacted if this decision is published.

Person A	
Person B	
Professional A	 Independent Conference Chair
Professional B	 social worker's team manager

The complaint and our regulatory concerns

The initial complaint	
The complainant	The complaint was raised by the social worker's former employer.
Date the complaint was received	5 June 2025
Complaint summary	The former employer alleges that the social worker, having been shown a photograph of a child (child A) showing bruising to their arms, failed to take prompt action to ensure the child's safety.

Regulatory concerns

Regulatory concerns are clearly identified issues that are a concern to the regulator. The regulatory concerns for this case are as follows:

Whilst registered as a social worker;

1. You failed to respond in a reasonable time to a safeguarding concern, brought to your attention on 22 May 2025, in respect of Child A.

Grounds of impairment:

The matters outlined in regulatory concern (1) amounts to the statutory grounds of misconduct.

Your fitness to practice is impaired by reason of misconduct.

Preliminary issues

Investigation		
Are the case examiners satisfied that the social worker has been notified of the grounds for investigation?	Yes	☒
	No	☐
Are the case examiners satisfied that the social worker has had reasonable opportunity to make written representations to the investigators?	Yes	☒
	No	☐
Are the case examiners satisfied that they have all relevant evidence available to them, or that adequate attempts have been made to obtain evidence that is not available?	Yes	☒
	No	☐
Are the case examiners satisfied that it was not proportionate or necessary to offer the complainant the opportunity to provide final written representations; or that they were provided a reasonable opportunity to do so where required.	Yes	☒
	No	☐

The realistic prospect test

Fitness to practise history

The case examiners have been informed that there is no previous fitness to practise history.

Decision summary

Is there a realistic prospect of the adjudicators finding the social worker's fitness to practise is impaired?	Yes	☒
	No	☐

The case examiners have determined that there is a realistic prospect of regulatory concern 1 being found proven, that the concern could amount to the statutory grounds of misconduct, and that the social worker's fitness to practise could be found impaired.

Reasoning

Facts

Whilst registered as a social worker;

1. You failed to respond in a reasonable time to a safeguarding concern, brought to your attention on 22 May 2025, in respect of Child A.

The case examiners have carefully considered all of the information provided to them in relation to this concern, and have summarised below the evidence that they consider to be key in assessing the regulatory concern:

Prior to regulatory concern 1 arising, child and family assessments (28 March 2025 & 23 May 2025) had been conducted with regards to child A, due to them presenting with significant bruising in January and March 2025. A child protection medical in March 2025 concluded that the marks appeared consistent with grab or grip marks

on both forearms, and that considerable force had been used. A safety plan was implemented for child A to remain in the care of person B.

Reflective supervision notes dated 1 May 2025 indicate that the social worker was aware of concerns about child A having suffered bruising, considered to be non-accidental injuries, to their arms, and that a police investigation into the cause of the bruising in March 2025 was on-going.

On 22 May 2025, person A raised concerns with the social worker via email that a photo had been posted on social media on 14th May 2025, in which child A appeared to again have bruising on their arms. In this email, person A stated that the bruising made them worried for the child's wellbeing. They asked the social worker to review them and call them about the photos.

On 2 June 2025, a Record of an Independent Reviewing Officer/ICC Escalation & Resolution Notification completed by professional A records that person A showed the above photos to others during the course of a child protection conference on that same date. It also records that the social worker informed other professionals that they had seen the photos when shared with them on 22 May 2025, but that they had not discussed the photos with their team manager, and had not visited the child.

A record of a Child Protection Visit to child A by the social worker indicates that social worker conducted a visit to child A on 2 June 2025, at which time the social worker observed no visible bruising to child A. The social worker presented the photograph shared with them by person A on 22 May 2025, and asked about the bruising. The social worker was able to identify that, of three areas on child A's arm where potential bruising had been indicated on the photograph, one was related to eczema on the arm, and another was the 'elbow fold'. The third related to a bruise that child A stated they received while at school.

Minutes of strategy discussion meeting held 4 June 2025 indicate that as no bruises were now visible, and the child had presented as happy in the care of person B, there was no need for a child protection medical and that the threshold for a section 47 investigation was not triggered.

A copy of the Local Authority's Children's Services Procedures Manual outlines that where action is required to safeguard and promote the welfare of a child who is suspected to be suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, a strategy discussion should be held as soon as possible, bearing in mind the needs of the child. This should be held within 72 hours, or immediately for urgent situations.

In both their initial comments (29 December 2025) and final submissions to the regulator (18 April 2026), the social worker accepts the concern, and while offering

some mitigation, acknowledges their "professional responsibility to respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns'. They state that they recognise that the information provided to them should have been treated as requiring immediate assessment, discussion with their manager, and escalation in line with safeguarding procedures.

Having carefully analysed the information as summarised above, the case examiners consider that there is evidence to indicate that the social worker received photos indicating a safeguarding concern (i.e. bruising to arms) for child A on 22 May 2025. The evidence also indicates, particularly given the context of previous bruising recorded as non-accidental injuries to child A and an on-going police investigation, that the social worker should have taken prompt action to ensure that child A was safeguarded and a strategy meeting was held, but did not do so. The case examiners note that it was not until person A showed the photos to other professionals on 2 June 2025, that further action was taken to ensure that child A was safe.

The case examiners therefore consider there to be a realistic prospect of adjudicators finding concern 1 proven in relation to the facts.

Grounds

The case examiners are aware that misconduct is generally considered to consist of serious acts or omissions, which suggest a significant departure from what would be expected of the social worker in the circumstances. This can include conduct that takes place in the exercise of professional practice, and also conduct which occurs outside the exercise of professional practice, but calls into question the suitability of the person to work as a social worker.

To help them decide if the evidence suggests a significant departure from what would be expected in the circumstances, the case examiners have considered Social Work England's professional standards for social workers, which were applicable at the time of the concerns. Having done so, they are of the view that the social worker may have breached the following standards:

As a social worker I will:

3.4: Recognise the risk indicators of different forms of abuse and neglect and their impact on people, their families and their support networks.

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.

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

The case examiners have noted evidence indicating that the social worker may have failed to recognise the potential risk to child A by not ensuring that timely action was taken to assess child A's situation and ensure that they were safe, and to facilitate a prompt and effective investigation into the cause of what appeared to be bruising to child A's arms. Further, there is evidence that the social worker did not inform their team manager of the photos and concerns raised by person A, and/or ensure that a strategy meeting with relevant colleagues and/or agencies was convened.

Guidance on their professional standards reminds social workers that they have a responsibility to stay alert to and investigate suspected harm, neglect or abuse and, where risk has been identified, agree plans to address it urgently. Social workers also need to cooperate closely with relevant colleagues and agencies to consider options for action. They will maintain a focus on the person at risk, whatever other demands or issues come to light. All of this must be done within the law, and often under pressure.

The case examiners consider that the alleged actions and/or omissions by the social worker are a potential breach of standards 3.4, 3.9, and 3.12. While noting that the social worker's actions appear to be isolated in nature, the case examiners are satisfied that, given evidence of on-going concerns of non-accidental injuries to child A, the alleged concerns in this case, if proven, would represent a significant breach of the professional standards outlined above. As such, the case examiners consider that the concern would potentially be found to be sufficiently serious as to amount to misconduct.

The case examiners have also noted some mitigation provided by the social worker regarding professional and personal challenges that they were facing at the time the concerns arose, but they are not of the view that this justifies the social worker failing to respond in a timely way to what appears to have been a serious safeguarding risk to a young child. They note that the social worker also does not seek to present this mitigation as an excuse for their alleged actions/omissions, which they also acknowledge as being serious.

The case examiners therefore consider there to be a realistic prospect of adjudicators finding the statutory grounds of misconduct proven.

Impairment

Assessment of impairment consists of two elements:

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

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

Personal element

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

Whether the conduct can be easily remedied

The case examiners are of the view that the concern raised in this case, which while serious, appears isolated in nature, and is capable of remediation. This could be, for example, through evidence of reflection and relevant training.

Insight and remediation

The case examiners consider that the social worker has demonstrated a high degree of insight into the concern raised in this case, and has provided strong evidence of remediation. They note that in both their initial comments and final submissions, which are comprehensive, the social worker acknowledges the seriousness of the alleged concerns, and expresses regret and remorse. They also outline how they should have responded, including treating the images as "safeguarding information requiring immediate assessment and follow-up", and they recognise that not following up on the information appropriately "*highlighted a serious lapse in (their) prioritisation and decision making at that time*".

The social worker has highlighted personal and professional challenges at the time the concerns arose, and the case examiners note that there is evidence in supervision records that on 21 May 2025, the day before the images were shared with the social worker, the social worker had shared with professional B that they felt "overwhelmed", and were struggling to complete work. The social worker does not present this mitigation as justification for not "fulfilling their responsibilities", but rather provides it as context. They advise that they understand that "*safeguarding responsibilities must always take precedence over competing demands, and that any indication of potential harm, particularly unexplained bruising, requires immediate action*."

The social worker also outlines how they have engaged in reflective work using recognised reflective models, critically examining their decision making, prioritisation, and responses to safeguarding information. They state how this reflection has helped them to understand "how workload pressures, personal well-being, and insufficient escalation can negatively impact on professional judgement if not actively managed". Further, the social worker appears to have revisited statutory guidance and relevant local safeguarding procedures, and conducted relevant targeted safeguarding learning. The social worker has provided cogent evidence of how this learning has reinforced their understanding of how they should respond in future.

The case examiners note that the social worker is currently employed as a social worker and that no further fitness to practice concerns have arisen.

Risk of repetition

The case examiners are satisfied that the social worker has demonstrated sufficient insight and remediation to satisfy them that a risk of repetition is low.

Public element

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

Having carefully considered all of the information presented to them, the case examiners are of the view that a fully informed and reasonable member of the public would be concerned by the serious nature of concern raised in this case. The alleged actions/omissions on the part of the social worker appear isolated in nature and have been identified as unlikely to be repeated. However, given the ongoing concerns regarding non-accidental injuries to a young child at the relevant time, which were subject to a police investigation, the public are likely to be alarmed by evidence that a social worker did not respond to potential evidence of recent injuries and ensure that child A was safe. Further the delays resulting from the social worker's alleged omissions, may have prevented a fuller investigation, including a child protection medical to properly identify the cause of any injuries, to be conducted.

The case examiners consider that a finding of impairment and an appropriate sanction would be expected by the public to maintain public confidence in the profession and maintaining professional standards.

The case examiners are therefore satisfied that there is a realistic prospect of adjudicators finding impairment.

The public interest

Decision summary		
Is there a public interest in referring the case to a hearing?	Yes	☐
	No	☒

Referral criteria		
Is there a conflict in the evidence that must be resolved at a hearing?	Yes	☐
	No	☒
Does the social worker dispute any or all of the key facts of the case?	Yes	☐
	No	☒
Is a hearing necessary to maintain public confidence in the profession, and/or to uphold the professional standards of social workers?	Yes	☐
	No	☒

Additional reasoning

The case examiners have considered whether a referral to a hearing may be necessary in the public interest, and have noted the following:

There is no conflict in the evidence in this case and the social worker admits the concern.

While the social worker has indicated that they do not consider themselves to be currently impaired, the case examiners' decision and proposal will allow the social worker to review the case examiners' reasoning on impairment and consider whether they do accept the case examiners' findings. It is open to the social worker to reject any accepted disposal proposal and request a hearing if they wish to explore the matter of impairment in more detail.

The case examiners are therefore of the view that the public would be satisfied to see the regulator take prompt, firm action in this case, with the publication of an accepted disposal decision providing a steer to the public and the profession on the

importance of adhering to the professional standards expected of social workers in England.

Interim order		
An interim order may be necessary for protection of members of the public	Yes	☐
	No	☒
An interim order may be necessary in the best interests of the social worker	Yes	☐
	No	☒

Accepted disposal

Case outcome		
Proposed outcome	No further action	☐
	Advice	☐
	Warning order	☒
	Conditions of practice order	☐
	Suspension order	☐
	Removal order	☐
Proposed duration	12 months	

Reasoning

In considering the appropriate outcome in this case, the case examiners had regard to Social Work England's Sanctions Guidance (2022) and reminded themselves that the purpose of a sanction is not to punish the social worker but to protect the public and the wider public interest.

In determining the most appropriate and proportionate outcome in this case, the case examiners considered the available options in ascending order of seriousness. Before doing this, they also noted the key mitigating and aggravating factors relevant to this case:

Mitigating factors:

Evidence of insight and remediation;

Absence of previous fitness to practise history;

Personal and professional challenges impacting on the social worker at the time the concerns arose.

Aggravating factors:

Risk of harm to vulnerable child.

The case examiners commenced by considering whether it may be appropriate to reach a finding of impairment, with no requirement for any further action (a no further action outcome). The case examiners were satisfied that in this case, given the potential risk of harm to a vulnerable child, a finding of no further action would be insufficient to protect public confidence.

The case examiners have next considered whether offering advice would be sufficient in this case. Advice will normally set out the steps a social worker should take to address the behaviour that led to the regulatory proceedings. The case examiners consider that whilst they could offer advice to prevent this situation arising again, this would also not be sufficient to mark the seriousness with which they viewed the social worker's lack of competence and capability.

The case examiners went on to consider a warning order, which would provide a clearer expression of disapproval of the social worker's conduct than an advice order. The case examiners concluded that, in light of a risk of repetition being considered low, and the mitigating factors identified, together with no further concerns arising while the social worker has been practising in a social work role, that a warning order is the most appropriate and proportionate outcome in this case, and represents the minimum sanction necessary to adequately address the public's confidence in the profession. The case examiners also considered that a warning order would sufficiently mark the seriousness with which the case examiners view the social worker's conduct, and would appropriately safeguard public confidence in the social work profession, and in the regulator's maintenance of professional standards for social workers.

In reaching this conclusion, the case examiners also considered that higher sanctions, i.e., a conditions of practice order or a suspension order, would be disproportionate in the circumstances of this case. The concerns appear to be isolated in nature and to have arisen at a time when the social worker faced personal and professional challenges, rather than appearing to have impacted throughout their career. The case examiners are therefore satisfied that conditions of practice are not required, and would be disproportionate in the circumstances of this case. Further, this is not a case which has fallen only marginally short of requiring removal from practise, so a suspension order is not considered appropriate.

The case examiners therefore moved on to consider the length of the warning order, with reference to the regulator's sanctions guidance. Warning orders can be imposed for 12 months, three years or five years. The case examiners are satisfied that in this case a 12 month warning order would be sufficient to mark the seriousness of the conduct in question. In reaching this conclusion, the case examiners referred to the sanctions guidance, and noted that the guidance states that such a period may be

appropriate for an isolated incident of relatively low seriousness. In such cases, the primary objective of the warning is to highlight the professional standards expected of social workers. The case examiners are of the view that, although they do not consider this case to be one of 'low seriousness', it appears isolated in nature and should also be weighed against the mitigating factors identified. In light of evidence of strong insight and remediation, and that the social worker's alleged actions/omissions appear to have occurred at a challenging time both personally and professionally, the case examiners are satisfied that a 12 month warning is sufficient to protect the public, and to safeguard public confidence.

To test this position, the case examiners considered the guidance in respect of a three-year order, which may be appropriate for more serious concerns, or a five-year order, for where a case has fallen only marginally short of requiring restriction of practice. The case examiners are of the view that, in light of the mitigating features and their impact on an otherwise unblemished career, a 12 month order is sufficient to protect the public, and to safeguard public confidence; as such a longer order would be disproportionate. The case examiners are also not of the view that this is a case that has fallen only marginally short of requiring restriction to practice.

The case examiners have therefore decided to propose to the social worker a warning order of 12 month's duration. They will now notify the social worker of their intention and seek the social worker's agreement to dispose of the matter accordingly. The social worker will be offered 14 days to respond. If the social worker does not agree, or if the case examiners revise their decision regarding the public interest in this case, the matter will proceed to a final hearing.

Content of the warning

The case examiners formally warn the social worker as follows:

Your conduct in this case had the potential to prevent a vulnerable child being safeguarded, and a prompt investigation into injuries sustained by them being investigated. It is also likely to have an adverse impact on public confidence in you as a social worker and the social work profession.

The case examiners warn that as a social worker, it is of paramount importance that you take timely and appreciate actions, in line with policy and guidance, to ensure that service users are appropriately safeguarded.

The case examiners specifically remind you of the following Social Work England professional standards:

As a social worker I will:

3.4: Recognise the risk indicators of different forms of abuse and neglect and their impact on people, their families and their support networks.

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.

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

The conduct that led to this complaint should not be repeated. Any similar conduct or matters brought to the attention of the regulator are likely to result in a more serious outcome.

Response from the social worker

On 14 August 2026, the social worker accepted the proposed disposal, confirming that they had:

- read the case examiners' decision and the accepted disposal guide;

- admitted the key facts set out in the case examiner decision, and that their fitness to practise is impaired;

- understood the terms of the proposed disposal of their fitness to practise case and accepted them in full.

Case examiners' response and final decision

The case examiners concluded that the social worker's fitness to practise was likely to be found impaired, but that the public interest could be met through a prompt conclusion, published decision, and a warning order, rather than through a public hearing. They proposed a warning order of 12 months' duration, and the social worker accepted in full the terms of this proposal.

Having been advised of the social worker's response, the case examiners again turned their minds as to whether the proposed disposal remains the most appropriate means of disposal for this case. They have reviewed their decision, paying particular regard to the overarching objectives of Social Work England, i.e., protection of the public, the maintenance of public confidence in the social work profession, and the maintenance of proper standards. Having done so, they remain of the view that an accepted disposal by way of a warning order of 12 months' duration is a fair and proportionate disposal, and is the minimum necessary to protect the public and the wider public interest.