



Neutral Citation Number: [2022] EWHC 1164 (Admin)

Case No: CO/1440/2022

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE**  
**QUEEN'S BENCH DIVISION**  
**ADMINISTRATIVE COURT**  
**SITTING IN LEEDS**

16<sup>th</sup> May 2022

**Before:**

**MR JUSTICE FORDHAM**

**Between:**

**SOCIAL WORK ENGLAND**  
**- and -**  
**VERONICA SUSAN RALPH**

**Claimant**

**Defendant**

**Sadaf Etemadi** (instructed by Capsticks Solicitors LLP) for the **Claimant**  
The **Defendant** did not appear and was not represented

Hearing date: 16.5.22

Judgment as delivered in open court at the hearing

**Approved Judgment**

I direct that no official shorthand note shall be taken of this Judgment and that copies of this version as handed down may be treated as authentic.

THE HON. MR JUSTICE FORDHAM

Note: This judgment was produced and approved by the Judge, after using voice-recognition software during an ex tempore judgment in a remote hearing.

**MR JUSTICE FORDHAM:**

1. This was the remote hearing by MS Teams of SWE's application (Social Workers Regulations 2018 Sch 2 §14) for a 12-month extension (to 24.5.23) of an interim suspension order (ISO) originally imposed on 26.11.20 for 18 months which will otherwise expire on 25.5.22. SWE holds a postal and email address and a phone number for the Defendant. By a telephone call (27.4.22) Capsticks informed the Defendant about this hearing and that the papers were being sent to her. In that conversation she stated that she wanted minimal contact and correspondence, wants the matter to conclude as soon as possible, and no longer wants to practise as a social worker. Later on 27.4.22 a freestanding letter was sent (first-class), as were the papers (special delivery and email). Nobody took delivery of the papers and a collection slip was left. The letter was returned to Capsticks (received by them 13.5.22). The papers were not collected. There was no email 'bounce-back'. The Defendant is not required to respond or participate in this hearing. It is entirely a matter for her. I am satisfied that she has been properly notified, has decided not to respond, that it is appropriate to proceed, and that there will be no need for a "liberty to apply" protection. As for open justice, the case, its timing and mode of hearing were all published in the Court's cause list, with an email address usable by any member of the press or public who wished to observe.
2. The relevant test for an extension is necessity for the protection of the public or in the public interest. Necessity applies to the extension, the nature of the order being extended, and the duration of the extension. GMC v Hiew [2007] EWCA Civ 369 explains (§§28 and 31-33) that the Court has regard to the gravity of the allegations, the seriousness of the risk of harm to the relevant public, the reasons why the case has not been concluded and the prejudice to the practitioner if the interim order is continued. It is not my role to make findings of fact or determine allegations against the Defendant.
3. I am satisfied that SWE has discharged the onus of demonstrating the necessity of the 12-month extension of the ISO. The concerns are linked to 2018/19 conduct while working for Bristol City Council (BCC) as Projects Coordinator at a housing project for vulnerable service users between the ages of 16 and 21. The Defendant is alleged to have displayed a pattern of disrespectful, bullying, intimidatory and inconsistent conduct (including unjustified assumptions linked to race, ethnicity and religious belief). Those concerns led to suspension in April 2019 and disciplinary dismissal in May 2020. The case was referred by BCC to SWE's predecessor the Health and Care Professions Council in May 2019. After the ISO in November 2020 there were referrals to, and by, Case Examiners in August and October 2021 respectively. Witness statement evidence is being prepared and, where appropriate, matters have been escalated with witnesses who are not promptly engaging. The case has entered the case-management stage, the disclosure stage is anticipated for August 2022, and a hearing window has been identified between October 2022 and January 2023. The additional period sought sensibly allows 'headroom' in case any step takes longer than anticipated. If the substantive proceedings are resolved between now and May 2023 the ISO would, one way or another, fall away.
4. As the most recent (fifth) review of the ISO in March 2022 the following points (among others) were recognised: the matters are serious and wide-ranging; they may in part be attitudinal; they span a significant period of time; they cover fundamental elements of social work; multiple staff members raised concerns with a consistent narrative; the matters present an identifiable risk of emotional and physical harm to vulnerable service

users (and colleagues); there is no evidence of a developed understanding or steps to address matters on the part of the Defendant; there is a risk of repetition; vulnerable service users need to be protected from risk of harm; and there has been no engagement from the Defendant such as could assist in trying to formulate workable conditions of practice, for a 'lesser' interim order. All of these points in my judgment are justified and well-made. I have well in mind the prejudice to the Defendant from a significant and continuing inability to work as a social worker, but also recognising also her stated current position about not working again as a social worker. There is in this case a clear objective justification rendering necessary the extension of the ISO, for the period of 12 months sought, for public protection and public interest reasons.

16.5.22