

**Notice of Decision of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's Fitness to Practise Committee**

**REDACTED**

**Name:** Stephanie May Donaldson

**SCR No:** 2041987

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT** the Fitness to Practise Committee of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, at its meeting on **05 February, 18 February and 31 March 2025**, made the following decision about your registration with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council:

**The Committee found the facts proved;**

**The Committee found that your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your misconduct;**

**The Committee decided to issue a warning and directed that a record of the Warning should be placed on your entry in the Register for a period of five years.**

**Particulars of the Allegation (as served):**

That, on 27 April 2019, whilst being registered under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (as amended), and whilst employed as a social worker at the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, you:

- |    |                                                                                                                                    |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Breached professional social work boundaries by:                                                                                   |
|    | a) Permitting a vulnerable service user to attend your baby shower.                                                                |
|    | b) Permitting a vulnerable service user to stay overnight at the location of the baby shower.                                      |
| 2. | Posted photographs of a service user attending your baby shower on social media, where they remained for several days.             |
| 3. | Failed to take any steps to safeguard the vulnerable service user upon becoming aware that she was intoxicated and in a nightclub. |

And that by reason of the matters set out above, your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your misconduct.

**Particulars of the Allegation (as amended):**

That, on 27 April 2019, whilst being registered under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (as amended), and whilst employed as a social worker at the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, you:		
1.	Breached professional social work boundaries by:	
	a)	Inviting a vulnerable service user to attend your baby shower.
	b)	Permitting a vulnerable service user to stay overnight at the location of the baby shower.
2.	Posted photographs of a service user attending your baby shower on social media, where they remained for several days.	
3.	Failed to take any steps to safeguard the vulnerable service user upon becoming aware that she was intoxicated and in a nightclub.	
And that by reason of the matters set out above, your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your misconduct.		

**Procedure**

The hearing was held in the Northern Ireland Social Care Council ('the Council') offices. The Registrant was in attendance and was represented by Natalie Shiel, Union Representative, NIPSA. The Council was represented by Mr Peter Carson, Solicitor, Directorate of Legal Services.

**Preliminary Matters****Declarations of Conflict of Interest**

The Chair confirmed with the Committee that none of the Members had any conflict of interest with this case.

**Application for Hearing to be Conducted in Private**

At the outset of the hearing, the Committee was told by Ms Shiel that she wished to apply for the hearing to be conducted in private, due to matters that would be raised during the course of the hearing regarding the Registrant's health. Mr Carson had no objection to the application for the hearing to be conducted in private.

The Committee heard and accepted the Legal Adviser's advice. From its careful consideration of the papers, it was clear to the Committee that the Registrant's health and medical background would be raised throughout the hearing. Accordingly, the Committee granted Ms Shiel's application for the hearing to be conducted entirely in private.

## **Application to Amend the Particulars of the Allegation**

Mr Carson made an application to amend the Particulars of the Allegation at Paragraph 1 (a) by deleting the word “Permitting” and inserting the word “Inviting”. Mr Carson told the Committee that the Registrant had been on notice of the proposed amendment since October 2024. He further said that the word ‘inviting’ was used in the Registrant’s own statement, and is also used within the Agreed Statement of Facts.

Ms Shiel confirmed that there was no prejudice to the Registrant, and said that the amendment reflected the Agreed Statement of Facts.

The Committee received legal advice from the Legal Adviser, who referred the Committee to Paragraph 18 of Schedule 2 of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council’s Fitness to Practise (Amendment) Rules 2019 (‘the Rules’).

The Committee was satisfied that the Particular of the Allegation could be amended without causing prejudice to the Registrant and the application was, therefore, granted.

## **Reasonable Adjustments**

The Committee sought advice from the Legal Adviser in respect of any reasonable adjustments to be made for the Registrant and her baby. He referred the Committee to Pages 117 and 118 of the Equal Treatment Bench Book (July 2024).

The Committee invited submissions from the Parties as to their views on reasonable adjustments. Ms Shiel indicated that a 09.30 am start time was not problematic for the Registrant, and that taking breaks on an *ad hoc* basis would enable the Registrant’s participation in the hearing. She also indicated that the Registrant would decide within a matter of days whether she wished to make an application to join Day 2 of the hearing by video link.

Mr Carson indicated that the Council had no objection to the above adjustments.

The Committee granted the above adjustments, and invited Ms Shiel to make any application regarding the Registrant’s participation on Day 2 by video link by Friday 07 February 2025.

The Committee enquired with the Registrant as to whether a short lunch break was required before proceeding with stage one. The Registrant indicated that she would prefer to proceed and conclude stage one on Day 1, with stage two to follow on Day 2. Mr Carson indicated that the Council had no objection. The Committee was mindful that the Registrant and her baby had been in attendance for over four hours and, therefore, granted the Registrant’s request.

## **Hearing Bundle**

The Committee admitted the hearing bundle into evidence and marked it as Exhibit 1, as well as the Registrant’s undated statement which it marked it as Exhibit 2.

## **Agreed Statement of Facts**

Mr Carson read the following Agreed Statement of Facts:

*'That, on 27 April 2019, whilst registered under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (as amended), and whilst employed as a social worker with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, and following concerns raised in relation to her fitness to practise by reason of misconduct, the Registrant hereby accepts that she:*

- 1. Invited a 17-year-old service user, who was resident in Lakewood Secure Unit at the time, to attend a baby shower at her Mother's home on 27 April 2019.*
- 2. Permitted the service user to stay overnight at the baby shower's location.*
- 3. Posted photographs of the service user attending her baby shower on social media, where they remained for a number of days.*
- 4. Failed to take any steps to safeguard the service user once she became aware that the service user was in a nightclub and heavily intoxicated, which resulted in the service user coming to harm.*

*In relation to allegation 4, the Registrant reports being REDACTED on being notified of the service user's whereabouts.*

*It is accepted by the Registrant that her actions have breached the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers and in particular the following paragraphs:*

### **Standards of Conduct**

**Standard 3: As a social worker, you must promote the autonomy of service users while safeguarding them as far as possible from danger or harm. This includes:**

*3.7 Recognising and using responsibility with service users and carers, the power that comes from your work role*

**Standard 4: As a social worker, you must respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people. This includes:**

*4.2 Following risk assessment policies and procedure to assess whether the behaviour of service users or other presents a risk of harm to themselves or other people.*

*4.3 Taking necessary steps to minimise the risk of service users' behaviour causing actual or potential harm to themselves or other people.*

**Standard 5: As a social worker you must uphold public trust and confidence in social care services. In particular you must not:**

*5.4 Form inappropriate personal relationships with service users.*

5.7 Put yourself or other people at unnecessary risk.

5.8 Behave in a way, in work or outside of work, which would call into question your suitability to work in social care services.

5.9 Use social media or social networking sites or other forms of electronic communication in a way that contravenes professional boundaries, organisational guidelines or the NISCC standards.

### **Standards of Practice**

**Standard 1: Manage your role as a professional social worker. This includes;**

1.10 Maintaining personal and professional boundaries.

**Standard 7: Using social work interventions to manage risk and improve outcomes for service users. This includes:**

7.4 Identifying behaviours and environments that present potential risk of harm or abuse.

7.5 Reporting and investigating harm or abuse in line with regional safeguarding procedures, using persistence and assertiveness where required.

7.6 Promoting and supporting the safeguarding of service users in collaboration with multidisciplinary colleagues, adopting the least restrictive and least damaging course of action to guarantee their safety and protection.

*The Registrant further accepts that said misconduct constituted an impairment of her fitness to practise, at the relevant time, for the purposes of the Fitness to Practise Rules and in particular Rule 4.'*

Ms Shiel confirmed that, in light of the Agreed Statement of Facts, the facts were admitted. The Chair announced that the facts were found proved.

The Agreed Statement of Facts was exhibited as Exhibit 3.

## **COMMITTEE ADJOURNED UNTIL 18 FEBRUARY 2025**

### **Fitness to Practise**

At the impairment stage of the proceedings, the Registrant gave evidence to the Committee. She accepted that, by her actions, she had blurred professional boundaries in inviting the vulnerable service user in question to the baby shower. The Registrant stated that she had replayed the events of that day 'over and over', and expressed the hope that the service user did not have lasting adverse effects as a result of the Registrant's actions. The Registrant accepted that she had a duty of care towards the service user and that she had breached that duty, resulting in harm to the service user and acting in a manner which also failed to self-guard herself. The Committee was told that the Registrant REDACTED. The Registrant had had two more pregnancies and had worked in other high risk and stressful working environments.

During cross examination, the Registrant confirmed that she had not acted intentionally to place blame on others when she was investigated by her employer. The Registrant stated that she had given an honest account of her actions in the absence of having been shown witness statements recorded by her employer in relation to the incident.

The Registrant impressed upon the Committee her clear recognition today of the need in future to adhere to the highest professional standards, both inside and outside the working environment. She stated that she wished for other social work practitioners to learn from the mistakes that she had made. The Registrant assured the Committee that there would be no repeat of her misconduct and accepted that, even in a permissive working environment with blurred boundaries, she would take necessary action to address shortcomings by raising these with those in a management position.

The Registrant confirmed that she had remained registered as a social worker for the last five years. She said that she had returned to work after a period of maternity leave in February 2020 and took a paid post in the voluntary sector as a deputy social worker, until a further period of maternity leave in 2021. The Registrant returned to work with the Western Health and Social Care Trust in April 2022, where she remained in post until December 2023. The Registrant told the Committee that she has not practised in a social work role since December 2023.

Mr Carson, in his submission, invited the Committee to make a finding of current impairment. He stated that such a finding was required on public protection and public interest grounds. Mr Carson submitted that the Registrant's insight is developing but is not complete. He submitted that as a result, there remains a risk of repetition, and that the public interest requires a finding of current impairment to uphold proper standards and to maintain the reputation of the social work profession.

Ms Shiel, in her submission, invited the Committee to make no finding of current impairment and to dismiss the proceedings at this stage. Ms Shiel submitted that this was a single incident from which the Registrant had learned a lot about her professional conduct. Ms Shiel stressed the adverse personal circumstances of the Registrant at the material time. REDACTED. Ms Shiel also drew attention to what, in her submission, was the inappropriate working environment in which the Registrant found herself. There was a custom and practice which allowed service users to attend social events, and boundaries were frequently blurred between professional staff and service users. Ms Shiel also stated that the Registrant, at the material time, was not aware that the service user was under a secure order.

Ms Shiel submitted that events had demonstrated the Registrant's ability to practise in the time following the incident. She has worked in stressful and highly pressurised circumstances without any concerns being raised and the Registrant, the Committee was told, REDACTED.

The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. He referred the Committee to the Standards, and advised it to adopt a sequential approach when considering the question of current impairment and the provisions of Paragraph 24 (3) of Schedule 2 of the Rules.

The Committee, in considering the issue of impairment of fitness to practise, took account of Paragraph 24 (3) of Schedule 2 of the Rules, which states that it should have regard to:

- (a) whether it is satisfied as to the reason for the alleged impairment of fitness to practise;
- (b) the Standards of Conduct and Practice issued by the Council under Section 9 of the Act;
- (c) whether the impairment is capable of remediation;
- (d) whether the impairment has been remediated;
- (e) the risk of repetition; and
- (f) the public interest.

When considering the Registrant's actions, the Committee had regard to the Standards and the Council guidance entitled 'Making a Determination of Impaired Fitness to Practise: Guidance for Committees on Remediation' ('the Guidance'). The Committee also had careful regard to the Registrant's oral evidence and the documentary evidence presented, together with the Parties' oral submissions.

The Committee first considered whether the Registrant's actions amounted to misconduct. The Registrant permitted a vulnerable service user to attend a baby shower at the Registrant's mother's home, and subsequently failed to take adequate steps to safeguard the service user once the Registrant became aware that the service user was in a nightclub and was heavily intoxicated. The Registrant's actions fell far below the standards to be expected of a registered social worker, were serious, and amounted to misconduct in the Committee's judgement.

The Committee was satisfied that the Registrant's actions were in breach of the following Standards of Conduct and Practice:

### **Standards of Conduct**

**Standard 3: As a social worker, you must promote the autonomy of service users while safeguarding them as far as possible from danger or harm. This includes:**

- 3.7 Recognising and using responsibility with service users and carers, the power that comes from your work role.

**Standard 4: As a social worker, you must respect the rights of service users while seeking to ensure that their behaviour does not harm themselves or other people. This includes:**

- 4.2 Following risk assessment policies and procedure to assess whether the behaviour of service users or other presents a risk of harm to themselves or other people; and
- 4.3 Taking necessary steps to minimise the risk of service users' behaviour causing actual or potential harm to themselves or other people.

**Standard 5: As a social worker you must uphold public trust and confidence in social care services. In particular you must not:**

- 5.4 Form inappropriate personal relationships with service users;
- 5.7 Put yourself or other people at unnecessary risk;
- 5.8 Behave in a way, in work or outside of work, which would call into question your suitability to work in social care services; or
- 5.9 Use social media or social networking sites or other forms of electronic communication in a way that contravenes professional boundaries, organisational guidelines or the NISCC standards.

## **Standards of Practice**

**Standard 1: As a social worker, you must manage your role as a professional social worker. This includes:**

- 1.10 Maintaining personal and professional boundaries.

**Standard 7: As a social worker, you must be able to use social work interventions to manage risk and improve outcomes for service users. This includes:**

- 7.4 Identifying behaviours and environments that present potential risk of harm or abuse;
- 7.5 Reporting and investigating harm or abuse in line with regional safeguarding procedures, using persistence and assertiveness where required; and
- 7.6 Promoting and supporting the safeguarding of service users in collaboration with multidisciplinary colleagues, adopting the least restrictive and least damaging course of action to guarantee their safety and protection.

Having found misconduct, the Committee next turned to consider whether, by reason of her misconduct, the Registrant's fitness to practise is currently impaired.

In principle, the Committee was prepared to accept that the Registrant's misconduct was capable of remedy, with appropriate evidence of remediation and insight submitted in support. The Committee next considered whether, in fact, the Registrant had remedied her misconduct. In this regard, the Committee paid particular attention to the Registrant's oral evidence. The Registrant's acceptance of wrongdoing, combined with her statement that, in future, she would adhere to the highest professional standards, was heartening to the Committee. However, the Committee could not lose sight of the seriousness of the incident in question. The Registrant acted in an entirely inappropriate manner by inviting the service user to the Registrant's baby shower and by subsequently failing to properly safeguard the service user, which resulted in the service user coming to harm. This also included the posting of photographs of the service user on social media whilst she attended the baby shower.

While acknowledging her failure of judgement, the Committee was not persuaded that the Registrant has fully grasped the seriousness of her misconduct which resulted in harm to the service user. Accordingly, the Committee concluded that the Registrant's insight is partial, and that she has a significant distance to travel



before it could be said that she has full insight into the seriousness of her misconduct. The Registrant has also provided insufficient evidence of remediation. Although she touched on the issue in her oral evidence, particularly in relation to the question of repetition, the Registrant did not provide evidence of remedial action undertaken by her to ensure that there would be no repeat of her misconduct. This is a matter of some concern to the Committee, particularly in light of the Registrant's work history and her evidence that she has worked in challenging and stressful environments since the incident in question. In those circumstances, taking account of the Registrant's partial and undeveloped insight, together with insufficient evidence of remediation, the Committee concluded that there is a risk of repetition. Accordingly, the Committee decided that it was necessary to make a finding of current impairment of the Registrant's fitness to practise to protect the public.

The Committee next considered whether it was appropriate to make a finding of current impairment of the Registrant's fitness to practise on public interest grounds. Given the nature of the misconduct, together with limited evidence of insight and remediation which raises a risk of repetition, the Committee concluded that an informed member of the public would be shocked and troubled to learn that the Registrant had been permitted to practice unrestricted. Accordingly, in order to uphold standards and maintain the reputation of the social work profession, the Committee concluded that it was also necessary to make a finding of current impairment of the Registrant's fitness to practise on public interest grounds.

For these reasons, the Committee has decided, to protect the public and in the public interest, that the Registrant's fitness to practise is currently impaired.

## **Sanction**

Prior to hearing submissions on sanction, the Parties told the Committee that in ease of the Registrant's childcare commitments they had agreed, subject to the Committee, to conclude the hearing earlier than what might be expected on a hearing day. Mr Carson stated that, in fairness to the Registrant, it was agreed between the Parties that he would make his submission on sanction today to enable the Registrant and her representative to consider the submission and, thereafter, to present the Registrant's submission on sanction on the next agreed hearing date. Mr Carson also indicated that the Parties were agreed that they could attend remotely on the next date. Ms Shiel confirmed her agreement to the course of actions proposed by Mr Carson.

The Committee heard a submission from Mr Carson on the question of what, if any, sanction should be imposed on the Registrant's registration. He set out the mitigating and aggravating factors, which he submitted were present in this case:

Mr Carson submitted the mitigating factors to be:

- No previous regulatory referrals – good work history;
- Evidence of insight and remorse;
- Full engagement in the regulatory proceedings; and
- Registrant gave oral evidence at the hearing.

Mr Carson submitted the aggravating factors to be:

- The service user was particularly vulnerable; and
- The Registrant had sought to blame the service user and others.

Mr Carson told the Committee that, having carefully considered the matter and the range of available sanctions, the Council had concluded that the public interest would be upheld and protected by the imposition of a 'high end' Warning in the order of three years, or a Suspension Order. Mr Carson stated that he was otherwise instructed to leave the appropriate sanction to the independent judgement of the Committee.

### **THE COMMITTEE ADJOURNED UNTIL 31 MARCH 2025**

The Committee received into evidence the Registrant's written submissions on sanction and this was marked as Exhibit 4 along with two character references and training records which were marked as Exhibit 5. In her oral submission to the Committee, Ms Shiel referred to the Registrant's submission on sanctions, together with evidence of training undertaken by the Registrant and character references submitted on her behalf for the purposes of the hearing. Ms Shiel submitted that with evidence of insight and remorse, taken together with evidence of remediation, the public would be protected and the public interest upheld by the imposition of a 'high end' Warning. Ms Shiel did not specify the duration of the Warning and left that issue to the discretion of the Committee.

The Committee heard and accepted the Legal Adviser's advice. He set out the range of available sanctions which are provided for by Paragraph 26 of Schedule 2 of the Rules. He referred the Committee to the Guidance, and reminded the Committee to consider the question of sanction in ascending order of severity, paying particular attention to the issue of proportionality. The Committee was reminded that the purpose of a sanction is not to be punitive, although a sanction may have a punitive effect. Instead, in its consideration of a sanction, the Committee should have at the forefront of its mind the need to protect the public and the public interest.

The Legal Adviser referred the Committee to Paragraph 26 of Schedule 2 of the Rules which provides that, upon a finding of impairment of fitness to practise, the Committee may:

- (a) impose no sanction; or
- (b) warn the Registrant and direct that a record of the warning should be placed on the Registrant's entry in the Register for a specified period of up to 5 years; or
- (c) make a Conditions of Practice Order for a specified period not exceeding 3 years; or
- (d) make an Order suspending the Registrant's registration for a specified period not exceeding 2 years (a 'Suspension Order'); or
- (e) make an Order for removal of the Registrant's registration from the Register ('a Removal Order').

He further reminded the Committee that in deciding which sanction to impose, the Committee should take into account:

- (a) the seriousness of the Particulars of the Allegation;
- (b) the degree to which the Registrant has fallen short of any expected standards;
- (c) the protection of the public;
- (d) the public interest in maintaining confidence in social care services; and
- (e) the issue of proportionality.

The Committee applied the principles of fairness, reasonableness and proportionality, weighing the public interest against the Registrant's interests, and taking into account any aggravating and mitigating factors in the case. The public interest includes the protection of members of the public, including service users, the maintenance of public confidence in the profession and the declaring and upholding of proper standards of conduct and behaviour within the profession. The Committee took into account its powers under Paragraph 26 of Schedule 2 of the Rules in relation to the sanctions available to it, and also had regard to the Guidance, bearing in mind that the decision on sanction was one for its own independent judgement.

The Committee carefully considered all of the available documentary material, together with the Parties' submissions. It also had careful regard to the Guidance.

The Committee considered the aggravating and mitigating factors in this case.

The Committee considered the aggravating factors to be:

- The service user in these proceedings was highly vulnerable, and there was evidence of harm having been caused to the service user as a result of the Registrant's misconduct;
- Upon being made aware of the circumstances by which the service user had come to harm, the Registrant failed to act with all due haste to safeguard the service user; and
- There was evidence that the Registrant sought to blame the service user and others for her misconduct – she failed to appreciate the nature of her role and responsibilities towards the service user, and lacked candor in her subsequent actions.

The Committee considered the mitigating factors to be:

- Evidence of insight, remorse and remediation – this was detailed and extensive, particularly as set out in Exhibits 4 and 5;
- Early admission as to the facts as set out in the Agreed Statement of Facts; and
- Whilst not excusing the Registrant's misconduct, there was evidence of REDACTED circumstances at the material time.

**No sanction** - having regard to its findings, the Committee considered that to conclude this matter and to take no further action would be an inadequate response, and would fail to protect the public and uphold the public interest.

**Warning** – The Committee considered whether it would be appropriate to impose a Warning in respect of the Registrant's registration, and bore in mind that such a response would permit the Registrant to continue to work in the social work setting.

The Committee paid careful attention to the oral and documentary evidence and, in particular, to the contents of Exhibit 4 and Exhibit 5. Neither of these exhibits were available to the Committee until the sanction stage of the proceedings. The submission on sanction prepared by the Registrant was an impressive document. The Registrant stated in relation to the findings of fact made by the Committee:

*'At the time, I failed to fully grasp the professional and ethical boundaries that must be maintained at all times — both inside and outside of work and especially when working with vulnerable young people. While my intentions may have been rooted in care and empathy, I now understand that good intentions do not excuse poor judgement, nor do they mitigate the risk I created.'*

The Registrant further stated:

*'Posting photographs on social media further exacerbated the blurred lines of professionalism. I failed to protect her privacy and dignity. While there was no intention to exploit or cause harm, I now realise that this could have led to feelings of embarrassment, loss of trust, or exposure to unwanted attention.'*

In relation to her insight, the Registrant stated:

*'At the time, I believed I was offering kindness and support by inviting the young person into my personal life. But I now understand that I overstepped professional boundaries in a way that may have been confusing, inappropriate, and even harmful — especially given the young persons age, vulnerability, status as a resident in secure care and whom had previously experienced significant trauma in her life.'*

The Registrant further stated:

*'I fully accept that my actions, including inviting the young person to my baby shower at my mother's home, permitting them to stay overnight, sharing photographs on social media, and failing to respond adequately when they were later found intoxicated in a nightclub, were wholly inappropriate and breached the expected standards of professional conduct. I also acknowledge that these actions placed the service user at risk and ultimately she came to harm. This also undermines public trust in the profession.'*

The Registrant reflected in detail in relation to how her actions had breached applicable standards. She further set out those remedial steps which she had taken to ensure that there would be no repeat of her misconduct. These included additional safeguarding training, research and ethical decision making in relation to personal / professional boundaries, stepping back from front line services following her misconduct, and undertaking reflective supervised practice.

Taking these matters together, the Committee concluded that the Registrant has demonstrated significant insight into her failings and, while the risk of repetition could not be discounted, the Committee was of the view, in light of

the evidence of insight and remediation presented at the sanction stage, that the risk is low. In addition, there has been no repetition of the Registrant's misconduct since 2019 when the subject incident occurred.

The Committee also had the benefit of character references, which spoke highly of the Registrant both personally and professionally. Karleen Taylor, who managed the Registrant for the first few months of her post and who worked with the Registrant at the Children's Disability Team at Gransha Hospital from February 2022 to April 2023, stated:

*'Stephanie Donaldson was employed within our team from February 2022 to April 2023 as a social worker. I had managed Stephanie for the first few months of her post. Stephanie was a valued member of our team, we had a good working relationship and from the onset of her employment, she had been open and honest about her ongoing NISCC investigation.'*

*Stephanie had experience from her previous job and was an asset to the team in regards to her experience and knowledge.*

*From my experience of managing Stephanie, she was open and honest, hardworking. She had developed good working relationships with the team and other professionals and also the families she worked with.'*

The Committee also had regard to a character reference provided by Laura Winster, a social worker who worked alongside the Registrant as social workers in residential care settings. Ms Winster stated:

*'From February 2023 until January 2024, I had the opportunity to act in the role of deputy manager, where I held line management responsibility for Stephanie. During this time, I witnessed her exceptional capabilities firsthand. Stephanie consistently displayed professionalism and competence, managing her responsibilities with a level of maturity and confidence that belies her years of experience. She has a remarkable ability to connect with young people in our care, establishing trust and rapport that facilitate positive relationships and development.'*

*Her commitment to the young people we support is unwavering, and her interventions are always tailored to meet their individual needs. Stephanie has a unique skill set that enables her to navigate complex situations, offering creative solutions that benefit both the young people and the team. She fosters an inclusive environment and encourages the voices of the children, ensuring they feel valued and heard.*

*In conclusion, I wholeheartedly recommend Stephanie as a Social Worker. She is a terrific asset to any team, and I have no doubt that she will continue to make a profound difference in the lives of those she serves.'*

From its careful consideration of the documentary evidence, which included the character references as set out above, the Committee was satisfied that the public interest would be upheld and protected by the imposition of a sanction which permitted the Registrant to continue in practise, unrestricted.

For these reasons, in the public interest, the Committee decided that it was appropriate and proportionate to impose a Warning in respect of the Registrant's registration, with immediate effect.

In deciding the duration of the Warning, whilst regard was had to the evidence presented at the hearing by the Registrant, the Committee could not disregard the seriousness of the underlying misconduct which was established in this case. The Committee concluded that the Registrant's actions were serious, and noted that harm was caused to the service user as a result of the Registrant's actions. In order to mark this, on balance, the Committee concluded that a Warning for five years is appropriate and proportionate.

The Committee considered whether it would be appropriate and proportionate to impose a Conditions of Practice Order, but concluded that this would not be in the public interest, and noted that this case did not give rise to general concerns about the Registrant's ability to practise safely and effectively in a social work setting.

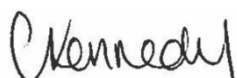
These proceedings are now concluded.

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**You have the right to appeal this decision to the Care Tribunal. Any appeal must be lodged in writing within 28 days from the date of this Notice of Decision.**

**You should note that the Fitness to Practise Committee's decision takes effect from the date upon which it was made.**

**The effect of this decision is that you have been warned and a record of the warning has been placed on your entry in the Register for a period of five years (31 March 2025 – 30 March 2030). This warning does not affect your ability to practise.**



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Committee Hearings Officer

03 April 2025

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Date