

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

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**Name:** Nikola Drozd

**SCR No:** 7020133

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT** the Fitness to Practise Committee of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, at its meeting on **19 May 2026**, 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 conviction;**

**The Committee decided to make an Order suspending your registration for a specified period of 18 months ('a Suspension Order').**

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

That, whilst being registered as a social care worker under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (as amended), and whilst employed as a care assistant by Havenbrooke Care Group, you were convicted of the following criminal offence at Belfast Magistrates' Court on 12 June 2025:

1. Defendant [You] on the 10th day of June 2024 stole cash to the value of £80 or thereabouts belonging to [REDACTED], contrary to Section 1 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969

And your actions as set out at 1 above show that your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your conviction in the United Kingdom for a criminal offence as per Rule 4 (1) (d) of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Fitness to Practise (Amendment) Rules 2019.

### **Procedure**

The hearing was held under the fitness to practise procedure.

### **Preliminary Issues**

The fitness to practise hearing was held at the Council's offices in James House, Belfast. The Registrant was in attendance and was not represented. The Council was represented by Mr Peter Carson, Solicitor, Directorate of Legal Services.

## 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 to Admit Hearing Bundle

The Committee accepted the hearing bundle into evidence, and marked it as Exhibit 1.

## Application to Amend the Particulars of the Allegation

Mr Carson made an application to the Committee to amend the Particulars of the Allegation. He said that following discussion with the Registrant this morning, it was confirmed that the conviction was imposed at Ballymena Magistrates' Court, as opposed to Belfast Magistrates' Court. The Registrant agreed to the amendment as set out, and confirmed that Ballymena Magistrates' Court was the correct Court.

The Committee heard advice from the Legal Adviser, who advised that Paragraph 18 of Schedule 2 to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Fitness to Practise (Amendment) Rules 2019 ('the Rules') permits a Committee to grant an application to make amendments to the Allegation. He advised that the Committee should consider whether the amendment would cause any prejudice to the Registrant, and whether it is required to accurately reflect the correct Allegation.

Having considered the nature of the proposed amendment, which is minor and of a technical nature, together with the fact that the parties are in agreement that the amendment should be made to accurately reflect the factual background and capture the correct Allegation, the Committee determined that the application should be granted and that no prejudice would be caused to the Registrant. The Particulars of the Allegation were, therefore, amended as outlined below:

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

That, whilst being registered as a social care worker under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (as amended), and whilst employed as a care assistant by Havenbrooke Care Group, you were convicted of the following criminal offence at Ballymena Magistrates' Court on 12 June 2025:	
1.	Defendant [You] on the 10th day of June 2024 stole cash to the value of £80 or thereabouts belonging to [REDACTED], contrary to Section 1 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969
And your actions as set out at 1 above show that your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your conviction in the United Kingdom for a criminal offence as per Rule 4 (1) (d) of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Fitness to Practise (Amendment) Rules 2019.	

## Findings of Fact

The Particulars of Allegation, as amended, were read to the Registrant. The Registrant told the Committee that, on the basis of her conviction, she admitted the facts as set out in the Particulars of the Allegation.

In accordance with Paragraph 19 (3) of Schedule 2 to the Rules, the Chair announced that the alleged facts had been found proved.

## **Background**

Mr Carson provided a brief background to the case. He outlined that the matter first came to the Council's attention following an Employer Referral Form ('ERF'), received from Ms Linda Jamieson, Care Home Manager of The Cara Residential Care Home ('the Home'), on 18 June 2024. The ERF said that the Registrant had admitted to the theft of money from a service user, and that she had provided a statement to confirm same. In that written statement, which was provided to the Committee within Exhibit 1, the Registrant said the following:

*'On Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> June, evening, unsure exact time, I had taken £80 out of [REDACTED] bedroom. I have never taken anything from anyone before and as soon as I done it I felt overwhelmed with guilt about what I had done. This wasn't me. Why had I done it? I have always lived my life with trust and respect for everyone around me, and would never have the heart to hurt anyone in any way. I understood immediately that I had no right to do what I done, so I set the money in the kitchen cabinet while coming to terms with what I had done. The next two days I had off, and struggled to understand what brought me to do such a thing. Feeling so guilty and disappointed in myself. I haven't ever thought about taking anything from anyone, I think the thought of being a young mother soon and having to quickly find somewhere to live because of my mother kicking me out took over me in the moment. Shortly after when I knew I was in the wrong, [REDACTED] was back up in her bedroom so I froze and wasn't sure what to do. This has changed me in many different ways and I will take any steps necessary to improve. I have apologised to [REDACTED] however before I could explain further, [REDACTED] asked me to leave.*

*The guilt and disappointment I have felt for myself has ensured that never, even for a second, I would be tempted to do such a thing again. I feel deeply sorry for the sadness, anger and embarrassment [REDACTED] has had to feel because of me. I will be happy to cooperate and do whatever it takes for [REDACTED] to see I'm truely sorry.*

*I had never taken the money out of the home, however I understand it was wrongfell of me to invade [REDACTED] personal space and take it in the first place.' [sic]*

On 05 August 2025, the Common Law Police Disclosure ('CLPD') Unit provided the Council with a record of the Registrant's PACE interview, held on 30 August 2024, and the case summary. Mr Carson outlined that in that interview, the Registrant stated that she had taken the money without any intention to steal or permanently deprive the service user, but that she was, instead, placing it into a kitchen cabinet for safe-keeping. The Registrant said that this is where staff would usually place money for managers to keep. She said that she had placed the money into the cabinet but had not informed anyone, and she did not report it immediately when she returned to work after two days off. The Registrant said that she returned to work at 8 am, and that interviews with staff were being conducted about the missing money. She said that it did not register with her that the money was in the cabinet, but when she went to the cabinet for another purpose at approximately 11 am, she

realised that it was in there. The Registrant said that staff were supposed to log such matters but she had not done so. The Registrant said that she was not sure why she had not, but suggested that it may have been due to her pregnancy and having a lot on her mind, *'so it just went over the top of my head, just worrying about a lot of stuff'*.

The Certificate of Conviction confirms that the Registrant pleaded guilty to one count of theft on 30 April 2025, and was convicted. She received a Community Service Order, requiring her to complete 120 hours of unpaid work within 12 months.

### **Fitness to Practise**

Mr Carson outlined the Council's position and submitted that the Registrant's conviction, and her actions giving rise to that conviction, call into question her suitability to work in social care services, and to remain on the Register without restriction, or to be registered at all.

Mr Carson submitted that the Registrant's actions constituted serious wrongdoing on her part. He referred the Committee to alleged breaches of the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers ('the Standards') by the Registrant, specifically the Standards of Conduct, as follows: 5 – 5.1 and 5.8. He said that conflicting accounts had been given and it is not clear that the Registrant has any insight. Mr Carson submitted that there is a risk of repetition and, in light of the seriousness of the Registrant's actions, public confidence in the profession and the Council as the regulator had to be taken into account. Mr Carson submitted that, in all of the circumstances of this case, the Registrant's fitness to practise is currently impaired.

The Registrant provided a reflective statement and a character reference for the Committee's consideration. These were documents prepared in connection with her current studies to become a paramedic, and were not specifically obtained for these proceedings. They were not provided in advance of the hearing and so the Committee Clerk did not have an opportunity to make contact with the author of the testimonial to verify its contents. The Registrant also gave sworn oral evidence to the Committee.

In her oral evidence, the Registrant said that she understands that her evidence has been conflicting. She said that the written statement quoted above was taken immediately after she had told her manager that she had placed the money into the cabinet, and she was told by that manager that if she wrote a statement *'that pulled on the heart strings, everything would be ok'*. The Registrant said that she believed that the manager effectively *'blackmailed'* her into admitting theft. She said that she did not have time to think about it and she said that the manager had taken advantage of her. The Registrant said that she was pregnant at the time, and she outlined some personal difficulties during this period. The Registrant said that she had voluntarily attended the police station and had given a truthful account. The Registrant said that she had fought very hard to be allowed to train to be a paramedic, and that the University had believed in her enough to let her stay on the course. She said that she hoped the Committee would also see that she should be allowed to keep working. The Registrant said that she had reflected in her statement on the impact of her actions on the service user. She said that she had tried to explain and apologise to the service user, but that the service user did not want to talk to the Registrant.

The Registrant said that she placed the money into the kitchen cabinet for safe-keeping. She accepted that she was working in a position of trust, and said that her actions in not informing the resident of taking the money and discussing it with her were wrong. She said that there had been a problem with another service user at the time, who had taken money, and that she thought that her actions were right. The Registrant said that she labelled the money with the service user's name, and accepted that she should have told someone else.

When asked why she pleaded guilty to the offence if she was, in fact, innocent, the Registrant said that she had done so as a result of legal advice. She said that she wanted to contest the charge, but was very worried about the potential to be sent to prison. The Registrant said that her sentence of 120 hours of community service had been completed some time ago.

Overall, the Registrant submitted that her fitness to practise is not impaired and that there is no risk of repetition.

The Committee accepted the Legal Adviser's advice. He told the Committee that a registrant's criminal conviction can, under Rule 4 of the Rules, lead to a finding of impairment. The Legal Adviser outlined that the Committee must exercise its own independent judgment, and that there is no burden of proof or standard of evidence to be met. The Legal Adviser referred the Committee to the approach outlined in the Fifth Shipman Report and endorsed in CHRE v NMC & Grant. He told the Committee that a registrant's insight is a central consideration, as too are issues of whether the Registrant's actions are capable of remediation and have been remediated. The Legal Adviser referred the Committee to the case of Meadow v GMC and reminded it that the assessment is conducted as things stand today. The Committee was referred to Paragraph 24 (3) of Schedule 2 of the Rules, which provides that, when deciding upon the issue of current impairment of fitness to practise, the Committee shall 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.

The Legal Adviser said that, with regard to the reference to 'impairment' in sub-paragraphs (c) and (d), the Committee should not presume impairment, and that it should instead consider whether the Registrant's actions / conviction are capable of remediation and have been remediated.

The Committee was satisfied that Rule 4 (1) (d) provides that a registrant's fitness to practise may be impaired by reason of a conviction in the United Kingdom for a criminal offence. The Committee noted that Paragraph 12 (5) of Schedule 2 to the Rules provides that, where a registrant has been convicted of a criminal offence, the findings of fact and certification of any UK Criminal Court shall be conclusive proof of the facts or conviction so proved.

The Committee noted that, although the Registrant now disputes the offence, she pleaded guilty and has been convicted. The Committee did not consider that it can go behind the conviction.

The Committee considered that the Registrant's conviction is a very serious matter. She was convicted of one count of theft, and the circumstances of the offence are such that the theft occurred while she was working. The money was stolen from a vulnerable service user, and the Registrant's actions caused harm to that person in undermining her trust in her carers. The Registrant's actions constituted a serious breach of trust, and the Committee considered that they breached a fundamental tenet of the profession – to act with probity and integrity. Having regard to the nature of the dishonesty offence and the background, the Committee was satisfied that the Registrant's actions and subsequent conviction were in significant breach of the following Standards:

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

- 5.1 Abuse, neglect or harm service users, carers or colleagues; or
- 5.8 Behave in a way, in work or outside work, which would call into question your suitability to work in social care services.

The Committee first considered whether the Registrant's conviction and actions are capable of being remediated. The Committee noted that it can be very difficult to remediate dishonest behaviour. However, noting the particular circumstances of the Registrant's actions, the Committee determined that, while difficult, remediation is possible.

The Committee then considered whether the Registrant has in fact remediated her actions and conviction. In this regard, the Committee was very concerned to note that, despite pleading guilty to the offence, the Registrant now appears to deny that she stole the money or that her actions were dishonest. It was concerned to note that the Registrant appears to attach blame to others, and that she does not really seem to accept that her actions were improper, except to the extent that she did not follow proper procedures and obtain consent from the service user. The Committee noted that the Registrant's reflective statement appears to minimise her actions, and it does not actually mention having been convicted of a dishonesty offence. The Registrant has not provided any evidence of having reflected on her dishonesty, given that she does not accept that her actions were, in fact, dishonest. She has not given any evidence of any steps taken to remediate her actions or conviction. In these circumstances, the Committee determined that the Registrant has not demonstrated significant insight into the matters which have brought her to the attention of her regulator, or indeed the seriousness of her actions and conviction. While she demonstrates some limited insight into the objective seriousness of the conviction, she does not accept that her actions were dishonest. The Committee, therefore, considered that there currently remains a risk of repetition. In reaching these conclusions, the Committee considered that it was unable to attach significant weight to the testimonial written by a former line manager of the Registrant's, given that she is not aware of the Registrant's actions or conviction, or indeed the fact that the letter has been submitted for today's hearing.

The Committee also considered the public interest, which includes the need to declare and uphold proper standards of conduct and behaviour, and to maintain the reputation of the social care workforce and the Council in its regulatory function. The Committee was in no doubt that the Registrant's actions fell seriously below the standards expected of a registrant. She stole from a vulnerable service user in her workplace. On any reading, her actions and subsequent conviction brought the profession into disrepute, and breached a fundamental tenet of the profession. In all of the circumstances of this case, the Committee determined that public confidence in the profession would be significantly undermined if a finding of current impairment were not made. It considered that such a finding is necessary to protect the public, to promote and maintain public confidence in the profession and regulator, and to promote and maintain proper professional standards and conduct for members of the profession. A member of the public would be extremely concerned if a finding of current impairment were not made.

### **Sanction**

Mr Carson advised the Committee that the Registrant has had no previous regulatory findings, and that the event giving rise to her conviction appears to be a 'one-off'. He said that there have been no other regulatory issues before or since. Mr Carson stated that the Council recognises that the Registrant is present today and has engaged in the regulatory process. She pleaded guilty at court. He said that these are matters which can appropriately be taken into account as mitigating factors.

With regard to aggravating factors, Mr Carson submitted that the Registrant stole money from a vulnerable service user at a time when that service user relied upon her to provide care. He said that the Registrant was in a position of trust and that her actions seriously breached that trust. Mr Carson said that the Registrant has given conflicting reasons as to why she took the money in her statement and police interview. Mr Carson referred to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Indicative Sanctions and Use of Interim Orders: Guidance for Fitness to Practise Committees ('the Sanctions Guidance') and submitted that the appropriate sanction in this case is one of a Removal Order, taking into account the seriousness of the Registrant's actions and conviction.

The Registrant said that she had read the Committee's determination on impairment, and she wanted to say that she understands that she has been dishonest. She said that she understands that her actions fell below the standards expected of her. The Registrant said that the consequences on her since her actions have been with her every day, and they have involved physical and mental health impacts. She said that she has had trouble sleeping, nightmares, flashbacks, that her hair has fallen out, her nails have been brittle and that she has experienced stress.

The Registrant referred to the Committee's finding that remediation is possible in the circumstances of her case, and she said that she is taking steps to remediate. She said that she is undertaking her paramedic course at university and has been reflecting on the training provided, which includes ethics training. The Registrant said that she would like the opportunity to prove that she can and will remediate, and asked to stay on the Register. The Registrant submitted that she would like no action to be taken, but that she will accept any sanction imposed

by the Committee and she understands that '*actions have consequences*'. The Registrant said that she is committed to adhering to the relevant standards of ethics and honesty for both the Council and the Health and Care Professions Council ('HCPC'), the regulator for paramedics. She said that she will have to persuade HCPC at the end of her course to permit her to be registered, and she knows that the decision of this Committee will be taken into account in this application. However, although there is a risk that she will not be registered by HCPC, she is committed and determined to qualifying as a paramedic.

The Registrant said that she had started working as a care assistant at 16. She acknowledged that the role is a significant position of trust and she expressed her wish to regain trust, stating that she wants her 16-month-old baby to be proud of her.

The Committee heard and accepted the Legal Adviser's advice, who outlined the range of available sanctions set out in Paragraph 26 of Schedule 2 of the Rules. In summary, the Committee could impose no sanction, warn the Registrant for a period of up to five years, make a Conditions of Practice Order not to exceed three years, make a Suspension Order not to exceed two years or make a Removal Order.

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 also reminded the Committee that it should act proportionately, and that any measure taken to limit the ability of the Registrant to practise in the social care setting should be no more than what is necessary in the public interest.

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 reminded itself as to its own findings at the impairment stage on issues of insight, remediation and the risk of repetition.

The Committee considered the mitigating factors to be as follows:

- At 19 years old, the Registrant was very young at the time of her actions leading to her conviction. The Committee considered that this was a relevant factor to be taken into account, given the Registrant's level of maturity and life experience at 19 was likely to be relatively limited;
- The Registrant has engaged with her regulator and in these proceedings;
- The Registrant has no previous criminal or adverse regulatory history;
- The Registrant pleaded guilty at court and admitted the Particulars of Allegation;
- There has been no evidence of repetition;
- The behaviour under consideration appears to have been an isolated incident arising from an opportunistic action, as opposed to involving significant premeditation;
- The Registrant was under some personal pressures at the time as a result of her personal circumstances;
- The Registrant has expressed regret and remorse to the Committee; and

- The Registrant has begun in her submissions on sanction to demonstrate insight into both the dishonest nature of her actions and their inherent seriousness. Notwithstanding its findings with regard to insight in its determination on impairment, the Committee considered the Registrant's late development of an evolving insight to be genuine.

The Committee considered the aggravating factors to be the following:

- The Registrant's actions were dishonest in nature and were committed at work;
- The actions involved a significant breach of trust;
- The Registrant has only just begun to demonstrate insight into her dishonest actions, albeit that the Committee was satisfied that she is beginning to genuinely accept her actions and their inherent seriousness;
- A risk of harm was posed to a vulnerable service user as outlined previously; and
- The Registrant's actions showed serious disregard for the Standards.

Having balanced the above mitigating and aggravating factors, and having taken into account the interests of public protection and the public interest, the Committee was satisfied that some form of sanction was necessary in the circumstances of this case. It therefore proceeded to consider which sanction to apply, starting with the least restrictive.

**No Sanction** – Having considered the seriousness of the Registrant's actions and her conviction and the overall circumstances, the Committee determined that taking no action would not meet the needs of this case. It would not protect the public, or the public interest. It would not be sufficient to mark the seriousness of the Registrant's actions.

**Warning** – Similarly, having considered the seriousness of the Registrant's actions and her conviction and the overall circumstances, the Committee determined that a warning would be insufficient in the circumstances of this case. Such action would not protect the public, or the public interest. It would not be sufficient to mark the seriousness of the Registrant's actions.

**Conditions of Practice Order** – Having had regard to the Sanctions Guidance, and taking into account the overall circumstances of this case, the Committee determined that a Conditions of Practice Order would be insufficient to mark the seriousness of the Registrant's actions and conviction. The Committee also considered that appropriate and workable conditions could not be formulated which would address the Registrant's actions, taking into account the need to protect the public interest.

**Suspension Order** – The Committee reviewed the Sanctions Guidance with regard to Suspension Orders. Having balanced the mitigating and aggravating factors in the case, as outlined above, the Committee determined that the Guidance indicates that a Suspension Order is the appropriate and proportionate sanction to impose. The Committee considered that such a sanction will be sufficient to protect and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of service users and the public, promote and maintain public confidence in the profession;

and promote and maintain proper professional standards and conduct for members of the profession. The Committee considered that the Registrant's actions were plainly very serious, and it was reminded of its own concerns with regard to issues such as insight, remediation and risk of repetition. However, taking into account the mitigating factors, to include the Registrant's very young age and personal circumstances at the time of events under consideration, the Committee considered that she should be given a further opportunity to demonstrate full remediation. The Committee determined that suspension for a period of 18 months would mark the seriousness of the Registrant's actions and conviction, and provide sufficient opportunity for her to develop full insight, take steps to remediate and satisfy the Council that the risk of repetition has been addressed.

**Removal Order** – Having determined that a Suspension Order is the appropriate and proportionate sanction to impose in this case, the Committee determined that, as things stand, a Removal Order would be disproportionate and unduly punitive.

The Committee noted that the Suspension Order will be reviewed, and that the Registrant will have the opportunity to reflect and further develop her insight. The Registrant will have the opportunity to provide evidence of the steps taken to remediate. The Committee determined that any future review would be assisted by:

- A reflective piece addressing how the Registrant's conviction has damaged public confidence in the social care workforce and the Council as its regulator;
- Evidence of any proactive steps the Registrant has taken to address the Committee's concerns regarding insight, remediation and the risk of repetition; and
- Character references from the Registrant's employer and / or University.

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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 your entry in the Register has been suspended for a specified period of 18 months and you may not practise as a social care worker during the period 19 May 2026 to 18 November 2027 inclusive.**

### **Early Review**

The Fitness to Practise Committee may, at your request, review the Order before the end of the period for which the suspension has been imposed if there has been a material change of circumstances since the Order was imposed. The Committee may, after reviewing a Suspension Order, revoke that Order or replace that Order with a Conditions of Practice Order.

### **Review at Conclusion of Sanction**

A review of your fitness to practise will be undertaken towards the end of the period for which the Suspension Order has been imposed. The Council will write to you no later than 12 weeks before the expiry of the Order to invite you to submit any information or documentation which you would like to have considered as part of the

review process. The review will consider the particular concerns which have been outlined above by the Fitness to Practise Committee, and will seek to ascertain what remedial steps you have taken during the period of your suspension.

Following the Council's review, the matter may be referred for review by the Fitness to Practise Committee. If the Committee reviews the Order and it is satisfied that your fitness to practise remains impaired, it may impose a further Order to commence upon expiry of the existing Order, or it may impose a Conditions of Practice Order to commence upon expiry of the existing Order, or it may vary the terms of the existing Order, or it may revoke the existing Order and impose a Removal Order.



20 May 2026

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Hearings Officer  
(Clerk to the Fitness to Practise Committee)

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Date