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

REDACTED

Name: **Reeve Donnel Blanco**

SCR No: **7031779**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT the Fitness to Practise Committee of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, at its meeting on **30 September 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 for removal of your registration from the Register ('a Removal Order').

Particulars of the Allegation:

That on 03 March 2026, whilst being registered as a social care worker under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (as amended), you were convicted of the following criminal offence:	
1.	Defendant [You] on 1st day of September 2024 intentionally touched [REDACTED], the circumstances being that the touching was sexual, that she did not consent to the touching and you did not reasonably believe that she so consented, contrary to Article 7(1) of the Sexual Offences (Northern Ireland) Order 2008.
And your actions as set out 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 remotely by way of video-link. The Registrant was not in attendance and was not represented. The Northern Ireland Social Care Council ('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.

Service

The Notice of Hearing and hearing bundle were sent to the Registrant's registered email address on 20 August 2026. An electronic proof of delivery receipt was received on the same date.

The Committee received legal advice from the Legal Adviser, and she referred the Committee to the requirements as set out in the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Fitness to Practise (Amendment) Rules 2019 ('the Rules') and, in particular, Rule 3 which states that proof of service shall be treated as being effected on the day after it was properly sent.

The Committee, in all of the circumstances of the case, was satisfied that the Notice of Hearing had been served in accordance with Rule 3 and Paragraph 5 of Schedule 2 of the Rules.

Proceeding in the Absence of the Registrant

Mr Carson made an application to proceed with the hearing in the absence of the Registrant under Paragraph 15 of Schedule 2 of the Rules, and submitted that the Committee should hear and determine the case in the Registrant's absence. He invited the Committee to conclude that the Registrant's absence was a voluntary waiver of his right to attend. He outlined to the Committee that, on 23 September 2026, the Committee Clerk attempted to call the Registrant's registered mobile telephone number to confirm if he would be in attendance at the hearing. However, an automated message was received to say that the number dialled was not recognised. Further, on 23 September 2026, an email was sent to the Registrant's registered email address confirming that the hearing would instead be conducted remotely by way of video-link. An electronic proof of delivery receipt was received on the same date.

Mr Carson submitted that the Registrant's absence is a deliberate decision, and amounts to a voluntary waiver of his right to attend and participate in the proceedings. He said that there has been no communication from the Registrant indicating that he wishes to attend on a future date, nor has he sought an adjournment of the hearing.

Mr Carson submitted that the Registrant has not instructed a representative to attend on his behalf and has not requested any additional time in which to obtain representation. He stated that the Council acknowledged that the Registrant may be disadvantaged by his absence, particularly as he will be unable to give evidence in person or make submissions directly to the Committee. However, he said that any disadvantage arises from his own decision not to engage with the proceedings.

In light of this information, Mr Carson submitted that, in all of the circumstances, it was fair to proceed with the hearing in the Registrant's absence. He further submitted that proceeding in the Registrant's absence was in the public interest, and was also justified to ensure the timely disposal of the hearing.

The Committee was mindful that the discretion to proceed in the absence of the Registrant should only be exercised with the utmost care and caution. In considering the application, the Committee sought to satisfy itself that all reasonable efforts had been made to notify the Registrant of the hearing, and accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. She referred the Committee to the cases of R v Jones and GMC v Adeogba. She reminded the Committee that in exercising its discretion to proceed in the Registrant's absence, it must have regard to all of the circumstances, with fairness to the Registrant being of prime consideration, although fairness to the Council and the public interest must also be taken into account.

The Committee noted that the Registrant had not requested an adjournment, nor had he indicated that he would be in attendance and / or represented if the hearing was to be adjourned. There was no reason to suppose that an adjournment of the hearing would secure the Registrant's attendance at a later date. Accordingly, the Committee was satisfied that the Registrant, with notice of the hearing, had voluntarily waived his right to attend. In addition, the Committee noted the serious nature of the allegations, which relate to events in 2024, faced by the Registrant and concluded that the public interest was strongly engaged in this case.

The Committee acknowledged that its decision may cause disadvantage to the Registrant. However, it concluded that his interests were outweighed by the public interest.

For these reasons, the Committee considered that it was fair and appropriate to proceed in the absence of the Registrant.

Application to Admit Hearing Bundle

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

Background

The Registrant is registered on Part 2 of the Register.

The matter first came to the attention of the Council on receipt of an employer referral form ('ERF') from [REDACTED], Home Manager [REDACTED], on 01 October 2024. The ERF stated that the employer was aware of an ongoing social services and / or police investigation into the Registrant, but that he had not made any admissions to his employer. The ERF also stated:

'Staff RB is employed by [REDACTED] since 23.08.2023 under sponsorship visa. He was initially deployed in [REDACTED] and transferred to [REDACTED] sometime on February 2024. He was working without any concerns since arriving to the country and assessed to be a good worker with good communication skills. On 01/09/2024 A new female staff member- [REDACTED] raised her concerns against RB with allegation of sexual nature (touched her on her bottom and attempting to kiss her) Staff advised the home that she don't want to

involve PSNI, she just want not to work with him at all. Reassurance provided. Then next day, 3rd September, PSNI came to [REDACTED] looking for RB, staff RB was off then heading to Annual leave the following week. PSNI advised that they can't arrest RB due to geographical location, he is resident of Belfast and not Antrim.' [sic]

On 24 October 2024, the Common Law Police Disclosure ('CLPD') Unit sent a notification letter to the Council concerning the Registrant, which stated:

'The subject is under police investigation for an alleged sexual assault of a work colleague at [REDACTED] on 1st September 2024. The subject has been interviewed and denied the allegations. The matter will be subject to report to PPS.'

The Council sought further updates from CLPD and, on 09 March 2026, it was confirmed that the Registrant had been convicted of Sexual Assault at Antrim Magistrates' Court on 03 March 2026. CLPD also provided the Council with an MG5 Case Summary, MG11 Victim Impact Statement, and notes from the Police interview with the Registrant. The MG5 Case Summary stated as follows:

'[REDACTED] presented at [REDACTED] Police Station to report having been sexually assaulted by the defendant, a fellow Care Assistant at [REDACTED] on Sunday 1st September 2024. At approximately 1700 hrs when they were working together, caring for a resident with dementia the defendant gestured to [REDACTED] for a hug. During the hug the defendant is alleged to have gripped the bottom inner part of [REDACTED]'s bum and made eye contact in a manner which made [REDACTED] believe he wanted to kiss. The defendant afterwards allegedly talked in detail about how he massages labia in his spare time and how females differ in appearance and preferences. The defendant called [REDACTED] "hot and sexy for her age" numerous times. This behaviour made [REDACTED] feel very uncomfortable and she left the room to cry in the female toilets. Between 1900hours and 2000hours [REDACTED] was asked by the defendant to assist him in giving a resident a shower. After the shower the defendant told [REDACTED] that she looked sweaty. The defendant wrapped a towel around his hand and tried to pull [REDACTED]'s t-shirt back at the top behind her neck. The defendant then allegedly proceeded to stick his hand down [REDACTED]'s shirt in an attempt to dry her sweat off. [REDACTED] ducked and moved away from the defendant to avoid him. All this was unwanted.'

Evidence

Mr Carson submitted that it was the Council's case that the Registrant's fitness to practise is impaired by reason of his conviction. He directed the Committee to the evidence contained within the hearing bundle, and submitted that the Council sought to rely on this evidence to prove the case.

Mr Carson asked the Committee to pay careful attention to the Certificate of Conviction, dated 09 March 2026, contained within the bundle of evidence. He submitted that this document provides evidence that the Registrant pleaded not guilty in the Magistrates' Court on 18 November 2025. On 03 March 2026, the Registrant was sentenced to five months imprisonment, suspended for two years, and placed on the Sex Offenders' Register for

a period of seven years. Mr Carson told the Committee that the Council considered the Registrant's conviction to be very serious.

Mr Carson submitted that the Certificate of Conviction, along with the ERF, and documents provided by the CLPD, provide conclusive proof of the facts, and that the Council had discharged the burden of proof in establishing the facts in this case.

Findings of Fact

The Committee took into account the submissions made on behalf of the Council, the Certificate of Conviction and the legal advice from the Legal Adviser. The Legal Adviser reminded the Committee that under Paragraph 12 (5) Schedule 2 of the Rules, a certificate of conviction issued in any UK Criminal Court '*shall be conclusive proof of the facts or convictions so found*'. She advised the Committee that a registrant could challenge a certificate of conviction if it does not refer to the Registrant or where the conviction had been challenged successfully on appeal. She informed the Committee that the Certificate of Conviction in this case was issued before a competent Court of jurisdiction and, in the absence of any other evidence to undermine its validity, the Committee was required to rely on the Certificate of Conviction to establish conclusively that the Registrant had been convicted of the offences as set out. She also advised the Committee that the Certificate of Conviction could also be relied upon to establish the facts underlying the conviction.

The Committee took into account the submissions from Mr Carson on behalf of the Council, and had careful regard to all of the documentary evidence submitted and, in particular, the Certificate of Conviction. The Committee concluded that the Certificate of Conviction is conclusive proof of the conviction and the underlying facts.

The Committee, therefore, found the facts proved by reason of the Certificate of Conviction.

Fitness to Practise

The Committee proceeded to consider whether, by reason of the Registrant's conviction, his fitness to practise is currently impaired.

The Committee heard submissions from Mr Carson. Mr Carson said that the Registrant has not provided any written evidence admitting impairment of his fitness to practise. There has been no admission of wrongdoing, no acknowledgment of the seriousness of the matters before the Committee and no evidence of insight into the conduct which led to his conviction.

Mr Carson submitted that the conviction is directly related to the Registrant's role as a social care worker and has been properly evidenced before the Committee. He said that the conduct underlying the conviction is serious, and falls significantly below the standards expected of a registered social care worker. Mr Carson submitted that the Registrant's actions are incompatible with the requirements of the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers ('the Standards'), in particular, Standards 5, 5.1, 5.2 and 5.8. He said that the Registrant's

conduct and subsequent conviction call into question his suitability to remain on the Register, and that they have the potential to undermine public confidence in both the workforce and the Council as its regulator.

Mr Carson submitted that, in this case, there is no evidence that the Registrant accepts that his actions were inappropriate. He submitted that the Registrant, when asked about his conduct during police interview, denied all involvement. Mr Carson said that there is no evidence of remorse, reflection, or understanding of the impact of his actions on the injured party or public confidence in the profession. He said that the Registrant has not engaged meaningfully with these proceedings, and has not provided submissions or other material for the Committee's consideration. He said that there is no evidence upon which the Committee could conclude that the Registrant has developed insight or undertaken any remedial action.

Mr Carson submitted that there remains a high risk of repetition. He said that the Registrant has not accepted responsibility for his actions and has not challenged the evidence before the Committee. He said that in the absence of any acknowledgement that the Registrant's conduct was inappropriate, the Council's position is that there is a real risk that similar behaviour could be repeated in the future.

In relation to the wider public interest, Mr Carson submitted that the public is entitled to be assured that serious misconduct and criminal behaviour on the part of a registrant will be appropriately addressed by the Council. Given the seriousness of the Registrant's actions, and the absence of any evidence of insight, remediation or reduced risk, a finding of current impairment is necessary to maintain public confidence in the social care workforce, maintain proper professional standards and declare and uphold the standards expected of registered social care workers.

Accordingly, Mr Carson submitted that the Registrant's fitness to practise is currently impaired on both public protection and public interest grounds.

The Committee considered the submissions from Mr Carson on behalf of the Council and had regard to all of the evidence in the case. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. She referred the Committee to the Standards, and advised it to adopt a sequential approach when considering the case. In particular, she asked it to take into account the nature and content of the criminal conviction against the Registrant, and reminded the Committee that it is being asked to determine whether the Registrant's fitness to practise is impaired because of the conviction. She referred the Committee to Paragraph 24 of Schedule 2 of the Rules, and the requirements as set out in the case of the GMC v Cohen, looking at the current competence and behaviour of the Registrant along with the need to protect service users, members of the public, the upholding of proper standards of behaviour and maintaining of public confidence in the social care workforce. She further referred the Committee to the findings of Dame Janet Smith in the fifth Shipman Report as regards the potential causes of impairment. She also referred the Committee to the case of CHRE v NMC & Grant.

The Committee considered whether the Registrant's fitness to practise is impaired by reason of his conviction, as set out in the Particulars of the Allegation.

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.

The Committee had regard to the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers and the Council guidance entitled 'Making a Determination of Impaired Fitness to Practise: Guidance for Committees on Remediation and Insight'. The Committee was satisfied that the Registrant's actions, which had resulted in his conviction, were in breach of the following Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Care Workers as follows:

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;

5.2 Exploit service users, carers or colleagues in any way; 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 Registrant has been convicted of a serious sexual offence against a female colleague, whilst attending a vulnerable service user. The Registrant's actions, which resulted in his conviction, fell significantly short of the expected standards of a registered social care worker.

The Committee considered whether the conduct which resulted in the Registrant's conviction was capable of remediation. The Committee noted that the Registrant had denied wrongdoing on several occasions when he was interviewed under caution by police. The Committee considered that during the Registrant's interview with police, he did not demonstrate any insight or reflection and he showed no empathy or understanding of the inappropriateness of his conduct. The Committee noted that the Registrant pleaded not guilty to the offence and was subsequently found guilty. The Registrant is currently subject to a suspended sentence, and will remain on the Sex Offenders' Register for a period of seven years. The Committee was of the view that there is no evidence of remediation.

The Registrant has not meaningfully engaged in the Council's proceedings. The Committee was satisfied that the Registrant has shown no insight at any stage into the seriousness of his conduct and its impact on his female colleague. There is a high risk of repetition as a result. The Committee concluded that a finding of current

impairment of the Registrant's fitness to practise was required to protect the public which, in this instance, includes vulnerable service users and work colleagues.

The Committee next considered whether a finding of current impairment of the Registrant's fitness to practise was required in the public interest. The Committee had no hesitation in concluding that such a finding was necessary in the public interest. The Registrant sexually assaulted a female colleague whilst at work and exploited his position towards her, and his conduct also put vulnerable service users at risk. There was no evidence of insight and a high risk of repetition. In the Committee's view, not to make a finding of current impairment would seriously undermine the public's trust and confidence in the social care workforce, and would fail to declare and uphold proper standards of conduct in the social care workforce. The Committee concluded that a finding of current impairment of the Registrant's fitness to practise was necessary to protect and uphold the public interest.

For these reasons, the Committee finds that, to protect the public and uphold the public interest, the Registrant's fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of his conviction.

Sanction

The Committee heard submissions from Mr Carson regarding mitigating and aggravating factors. In terms of mitigating factors, Mr Carson confirmed that the Registrant had no previous disciplinary record with the Council and so is entitled to the benefit of a good working history. In terms of aggravating factors, he said that the Registrant committed a sexual offence against a colleague, at the workplace, and whilst providing care to vulnerable service users. Mr Carson said that the Registrant has not engaged with the Council's investigations, and has not provided the Committee with any evidence of insight or reflection.

The Committee went on to hear a submission from Mr Carson on the question of what, if any, sanction to impose. In light of its findings, it was Mr Carson's submission that the only appropriate and proportionate sanction to impose, to protect the public and uphold the public interest, was a Removal Order.

The Committee heard and accepted the Legal Adviser's advice. She set out the range of available sanctions which are provided for by 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 fundamental right 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 Mr Carson's submissions. It also had careful regard to the NISCC Indicative Sanctions, Interim Orders and Consensual

Disposal: Guidance for Fitness to Practise Committees, Fitness to Practise Officers and Preliminary Proceedings Committees 2026 ('the Guidance').

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

The Committee considered the mitigating factors to be as follows:

- No previous referrals / previous good character.

The Committee considered the aggravating factors to be as follows:

- Conviction for serious offence of a sexual nature;
- Occurred in the workplace when caring for vulnerable service users;
- Failure to co-operate with the investigation by the Council;
- Failure to provide any evidence of remediation;
- Lack of insight; and
- Lack of regret.

Having balanced the 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, and proceeded to consider which sanction to apply in this case.

No Sanction – Having regard to its findings, the Committee considered that to conclude this matter and to take no further action would be a wholly inadequate response, and would fail to protect the public and uphold the public interest.

Warning – For similar reasons as those advanced under 'No Sanction', the Committee concluded that to issue the Registrant with a warning would fail to protect the public and uphold the public interest. The Committee considered that the Registrant's conviction is not at the lower end of the spectrum.

Conditions of Practice Order – The Registrant's conviction for sexual assault is not something that can be addressed with conditions. In the Committee's view, there were no concerns about the Registrant's practice but, instead, it relates to a fundamental attitudinal issue on the Registrant's part. In any event, the uppermost consideration in the Committee's mind was the seriousness of the conduct found proved, and the absence of evidence that the Registrant had insight into the seriousness of his conduct. Consequently, the Committee deemed that there is a high risk of repetition. Furthermore, the Committee had no evidence in relation to the Registrant's current circumstances, and was not aware as to whether an employer would co-operate with the imposition of conditions. The Committee concluded that a Conditions of Practice Order was wholly insufficient to protect the public and uphold the public interest.

Suspension Order – The Committee gave careful consideration to this sanction. The Committee noted that the Registrant had failed to engage with the regulatory proceedings against him. There was no evidence of insight, and the Committee had found that there was a high risk of repetition. The case involved an attitudinal issue

which resulted in the Registrant's conviction for a serious sexual assault of a female colleague. He is the subject of a five-month prison sentence, suspended for two years and, further, has been placed on the Sex Offenders' Register for a period of seven years. The Committee concluded that the Registrant's conduct was deplorable and was at the most serious end of the spectrum of seriousness. The Committee had no doubt in concluding that the Registrant's conduct was fundamentally incompatible with continuing to be a registered social care worker.

Removal Order – As a result, the Committee decided that the only appropriate and proportionate sanction to impose, with immediate effect, was to make a Removal Order in respect of the Registrant's registration. In so doing, the Committee had regard to the very serious nature of the Registrant's conduct, which resulted in his conviction, and the fact that he is the subject of a suspended sentence and required to remain on the Sex Offenders' Register for a period of seven years. The Committee considered the Guidance, which refers to cases involving sexual misconduct, and notes that it is highly likely that, in such a case, the only proportionate sanction will be removal from the Register.

The Committee noted that a Removal Order is likely to be appropriate when the Registrant's behaviour is fundamentally incompatible with being a registrant. The Registrant has demonstrated no evidence of insight into the seriousness of his actions and the likely impact on service users and professional colleagues. The Committee had found that there was a high risk of repetition. The Committee was of the view that there is no evidence that there is likely to be satisfactory remediation, and that confidence in the social care profession would be undermined by allowing the Registrant to remain on the Register. Whilst the Committee took account of the impact of a Removal Order on the Registrant, this is outweighed by the serious nature of his conviction for sexual assault. The Committee considered that any sanction short of a Removal Order would fail to uphold proper standards of conduct and behaviour, and would fail to maintain the reputation of the social care workforce.

For these reasons, the Committee imposed a Removal Order and decided, with immediate effect, to revoke the Interim Suspension Order, to which the Registrant has been subject until this hearing.

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 removed.

You are prohibited from working as a social care worker in any of the following positions:

1. A member of care staff at a:
    a.) Children's home;
    b.) Residential care home;
    c.) Nursing home;
    d.) Day care setting;

e.) Residential family centre.

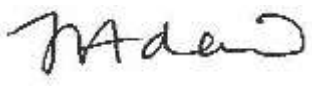
2. A person who is supplied by a domiciliary care agency to provide personal care in their own homes for persons who by reason of illness, infirmity or disability are unable to provide it for themselves without assistance.

3. A manager of a:

   a.) Residential care home;
   b.) Day care setting;
   c.) Residential family care centre; or
   d.) Domiciliary care agency.

It is **compulsory** for the above social care workers to be registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council in order to work. This is pursuant to the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Workers Prohibition) and Fitness of Workers Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2013 and the Northern Ireland Social Care Council (Social Care Workers Prohibition) and Fitness of Workers (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017.

In accordance with Schedule 3, Paragraph 9 of the NISCC Fitness to Practise Rules, you may not apply to be restored to the Register within five years from the date of removal. This does not affect your right to appeal the Committee's decision to the Care Tribunal. You are prohibited from working in a social care role until a successful application for restoration onto the Register has been made to the Council.



06 October 2026

Hearings Officer
(Clerk to the Fitness to Practise Committee)

Date