STATUTORY COMMITTEE OF THE PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY OF NORTHERN IRELAND

In the matter of:	Hannah Belema Thom-Manuel (7651)
Location:	The offices of the Pharmaceutical Society NI, 73 University Street, Belfast, BT7 1HL.
Date:	15 August 2025
Committee:	Mr Mark Scott (Deputy Chair), Mr Derek McFaull (Lay), Dr Briegeen Girvin (Registrant)
Persons Present and Capacity:	Mr Dennis Hamill , Barrister, instructed by Ian Black, Solicitor (PSNI's Legal Representatives), Ms Charlene Kelly (Interim Case Mgmt Lawyer), Alan Goleac (PSNI Paralegal)

PRELIMINARY

1. The Statutory Committee ('the Committee') met on the 15 August 2025, to consider allegations of convictions in respect of Ms Hannah Belema Thom-Manuel, a registered pharmacist (the Registrant), made by the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland ('the Society').

2. The Registrant was self-representing and did not have legal or union representation. The Registrant attended the hearing remotely by video conference.

3. The Committee satisfied itself that service of the Notice of Hearing was properly effected. The Notice of Hearing, dated 10 July 2025, was appropriately served by electronic mail to the Registrant's email address in accordance with the relevant regulations. This was within the 35 days' notice required to be given under regulation 18 of The Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (Fitness to Practise and Disqualification) Regulations (NI) 2012 ('the Regulations').

5. In the course of the hearing, the Committee admitted in evidence the following documents.

- Exhibit C 1: Hearing bundle numbering page 1 to 156.

- Exhibit C 2: Statement of Case on behalf of the Society

- Exhibit C 3: An agreed statement of facts signed by the parties and dated 13th August 2025

- Exhibit C 4: Registrar statement of Charlene Kelly, signed and dated 10th August 2025.

- Exhibit C 5: An email dated 22nd January 2025 from the Registrant to her former employer.

PRELIMINARY LEGAL ARGUMENT

6. There were no preliminary legal arguments.

ALLEGATIONS

7. The particulars of the alleged conviction from which it is alleged that impairment of fitness to practise arises are set out as follows, namely:

On 27 June 2024, whilst a registered pharmacist, you were convicted at a Magistrates Court in Northern Ireland in relation to the following offences:

- *On 27 of July 2023, you stole cash to the value of £20 or thereabouts belonging to Heather Trueick contrary to Section 1 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969.*

- *On 27 of July 2023, you stole toiletries to the value of £17. 78 or thereabouts belonging to Heather Trueick contrary to Section 1 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969.*

- *On 28 of July 2023, you stole toiletries to the value of £17.98 or thereabouts belonging to Heather Trueick contrary to Section 1 of the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969*

You received concurrent custodial sentences of three months suspended for a period of one year for each of the above offences.

DECISION ON FACTS

8. The Registrant confirmed to the Committee that the agreed statement of facts was an admission in respect of the allegation, specifically the three theft convictions and the concurrent custodial sentences of three months suspended for a period of one year. The Committee announced the allegation as admitted and found proved as per Regulation 34(6).

SUBMISSIONS

9. Mr Hamill referred the Committee to paragraphs 20 to 31 of the Society's Statement of Case. He also referred the Committee to relevant case law and highlighted the need to consider Regulation 4 and reminded the Committee that it needed to determine whether the Registrant's fitness to practise was *currently* impaired.

10. Mr Hamill said that the wider public interest was clearly engaged owing to the Registrant's convictions. He further said that theft convictions are serious matters. Whilst there was no harm to patients, such convictions impact on the reputation of the profession and damage public confidence. He also said that the behaviour breaches fundamental tenets of the profession (to act honestly). They also bring the profession into disrepute, and call into question the integrity of the Registrant. The Committee was specifically told that with the privilege of being a professional comes the additional responsibility of adhering to the standards of the profession.

11. Mr Hamill referenced dishonesty being hard to remediate and encouraged the Committee to consider the issues of insight, remorse and remediation. He identified the following matters as being relevant to these considerations:

- The Registrant had pleaded guilty to the criminal charges;
- The Registrant had made admission before the Committee;
- The Registrant was 25 years old and in the early stages of her career at the time of the offending behaviour;
- The Registrant was otherwise of good character;

- There was no actual or potential harm to patients;
- There was no concern about the Registrant's clinical practice;
- There were no patients or vulnerable persons involved in the offending;
- The Registrant had co-operated with the Society and had self-referred following her convictions;
- The convictions could be described as low level offending given the sum of cash and the value of the items. In addition the thefts involved money and toiletries and not controlled drugs; and
- The Registrant had a difficult working relationship with her former employer.

12. Mr Hamill said that notwithstanding the above matters, the Registrant was found guilty of multiple convictions for theft and those were serious matters for which she had received a suspended custodial sentence. The offences occurred on two dates and there was an element of concealment. The offences involved a degree of planning or forethought and they appeared to be an angry response to her perception of mistreatment by her employer. He also said that the offences happened on pharmacy premises and there was a clear breach of trust.

13. Mr Hamill said that with regard to insight, there had been some acceptance for her actions but the Registrant had also sought to blame her former employer and at times downplayed her actions. He further said that whilst there was an apology it referenced the former employer treating the Registrant badly on a daily basis. He referenced the Registrant stating that her actions were not those of a thief but someone overwhelmed by circumstances. He also referenced that her guilty plea appeared to be somewhat equivocal and based on legal advice. He added that in the absence of a reflective statement the Registrant's thoughts on her actions were unknown.

14. Mr Hamill concluded by saying that the risk of repetition had not been addressed. A finding of impairment would be appropriate as the Registrant's actions amounted to a gross departure from professional standards, they undermined public trust, and the dishonest element of her actions called into question her integrity.

15. The Registrant told the Committee that she takes full accountability for her actions. She said that she apologised directly to her former employer and in subsequent questions from the Committee she was able to demonstrate two occasions (in or around early August 2023 and 22nd January 2025) when she had sent an email to her former employer apologising for her actions. She said that she was in the wrong and should have sought help. She highlighted that she was 25 years old, in her first job, and working in a different country away from her home.

16. The Registrant said that she had not reoffended and had not had any previous issues. She expressly stated that theft is a serious matter. She also said that the convictions had affected her self-image and her mental health. She referenced her attempts to navigate difficult workplace challenges and said that she had tried multiple ways to resolve the difficulties she had been experiencing.

17. The Registrant told the Committee that she pleaded guilty because she was '*absolutely in the wrong'*. She also highlighted to the Committee that the relevant items were returned before the matter was reported to the police.

18. The Registrant said that she could guarantee that she would never reoffend. In response to questions from the Committee, the Registrant said that the correspondence from the ministry of interior in Hungary and the police Nigeria showed that she had a clear criminal record in those countries. She said that she had learnt her lesson and wanted to move on with her life.

19. The Committee asked the Registrant how she would deal with similar workplace issues if they arose again. She said that she would seek to resolve them, engage with human resources or labour relations, get advice, and speak with senior personnel rather than taking matters into her own hands. The Registrant was also asked about what coping strategies she had in place now and she said that she recognises she had acted in anger. She said that in the future she would separate her emotions from her decisions in a workplace and she recognised that she must work with integrity at all times.

DECISION ON IMPAIRMENT

20. The Committee had regard to the submission of the parties and all of the documentary evidence.

21. The Committee has considered relevant case law, and in particular,

(a) In GMC –v- Meadow 2006 EWCA CIV1319 the Court of Appeal said,

> "The purpose of FTP procedures is not to punish the practitioner for past misdoings but to protect the public against the acts and omissions of those who are not fit to practice. The (Panel) thus looks forward not back. However, in order to form a view as to the fitness of a person to practice today, it is evident that it will have to take account of the way in which the person concerned has acted or failed to act in the past."

(b) In CHRE –v- NMC & Grant 2011 EWHC 927 the Court confirmed the test to be applied was a current, forward looking one, confirming the question that the committee has to ask itself and determine was:

> "Is this registrant's current fitness to practice impaired?"

(c) Further, in Cohen –v- GMC 2008 EWHC5821 Admin the Court said,

> "As assessment of current fitness to practice will nevertheless involve consideration of past misconduct and of any steps taken subsequently by the practitioner to remedy it;", and

> "It must be highly relevant in determining if a doctor's fitness to practice is impaired that first his or her conduct which led to the charge is easily remediable, second that it has been remedied and third that it is highly unlikely to be repeated."

22. The Committee considered the provisions of Regulation 4(2) of the Council of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland (Fitness to Practice and

Disqualification) Regulations (N.I.) 2012 ("the Regulations"). They provide mandatory criteria that the Committee must have regard to when considering whether or not a person's fitness to practice is in fact currently impaired. Regulation 4(2) states;

> "In relation to evidence about the conduct or behaviour of the registered person which might cast doubt on whether the requirements as to fitness to practice are met in relation to the registered person, the statutory committee must have regard to whether or not that conduct or behaviour
>
> (a) Presents an actual or potential risk to patients or to the public;
> (b) Has brought or might bring, the profession of pharmacy into disrepute;
> (c) Has breached one of the fundamental principles of the profession of pharmacy as defined in the standards, or
> (d) Shows that the integrity of the registered person can no longer be relied upon."

23. The offences occurred on more than one date and theft convictions involved an element of dishonesty. The Committee also had regard to the Registrant having received, and served, a suspended custodial sentence. The Committee considered the Registrant's offending behaviour to be a serious matter. The Committee noted that the Registrant was convicted for multiple offences.

24. The Committee considered that the documentary evidence clearly illustrated significant workplace difficulties faced by the Registrant. These related to issues including apparent withholding of her pension contributions; not paying travel expenses; lone working; and challenges with getting annual leave approved. In addition, the Committee specifically noted text and WhatsApp exchanges in respect of these matters as well as travel documents illustrating the expenses incurred by the Registrant. In the Committee's view the documents supported the Registrant's assertion that she faced a challenging workplace environment, when she was 25 years old, in her first employment, and away from some of her support mechanism. In addition, the Registrant alleged that she was the recipient of racial abuse. Whilst the Committee noted the absence of documentary evidence to

corroborate this allegation, it was also mindful that the Committee was not in a position, nor was it tasked, with adjudicating on these allegations. However, even a perception on the part of the Registrant that she was facing racial abuse would have made her workplace environment even more challenging. The Committee also specifically noted that some of the text message exchanges between the Registrant and her former employer suggested that the Registrant was subject to manipulative behaviours, for example being told that if she didn't do certain things then the Home Office or the Society would be contacted.

25. The Committee was mindful that no patients had come to harm or potential harm.

26. The Registrant's actions, specifically her convictions, had clearly brought the pharmacy profession into disrepute. She had fallen short of the standards expected of her, and she specifically breached standard 3.1 of the Pharmaceutical Society of Northern Ireland's Code of Professional Standards of Conduct, Ethics and Performance for Pharmacists in Northern Ireland (2016). The said standard (at 3.1.1) requires pharmacists to adhere to acceptable standards of personal and professional conduct inside and outside of work. The Registrant had clearly breached this standard by stealing from her former employer. The said standard (at 3.1.2) also requires pharmacists to maintain public trust and confidence by acting with honesty and integrity. Again, this was clearly breached. The Registrant had chosen to steal from her employer, at her place of work, and on two consecutive days.

27. With regard to insight, the Committee considered that this was now fully developed. The Registrant had pleaded guilty and in her oral evidence she was clear that this was based on her actions being absolutely wrong. The Committee specifically noted that unlike parts of the documentary evidence, in her oral evidence the Registrant was unequivocal about the wrongness of her actions and the need for her to be accountable for them. The Committee also noted that in her oral evidence there was an absence of any attempt to justify her actions by reference to the context in which they arose. The Committee found the Registrant to be genuine in her evidence and considered that she was remorseful for her actions.

28. It is well established that actions involving dishonesty are hard to remediate and that is relevant in this case. However, the Registrant returned the stolen cash and items within a matter of days of the theft. She had provided an apology on two occasions. She pleaded guilty, had served her sentence and there was no reoffending. She also admitted the allegations and engaged with the fitness to practise investigation. In the Committee's view the Registrant has remediated her actions.

29. The Committee considered that the risk of repetition was low. The Registrant had explained how she would cope if she was faced with similar circumstances again. The Committee was of the view that the entire episode, including her involvement with the criminal and regulatory proceedings, was likely to be a salient lesson for the Registrant.

30. Notwithstanding, the insight developed and remediation on the part of the Registrant, the Committee determined that a finding of impaired fitness to practise was necessary to maintain public confidence in the profession and to uphold the public interest. This was owing to the seriousness of the Registrant's conduct, the dishonesty element, and the extent to which she fell short of the expected professional standards. In the Committee's view an average member of the public, aware of all of the relevant circumstances, would be shocked if a finding of impairment were not made in these circumstances.

SANCTION

31. The Committee considered the Pharmaceutical Society of NI, Indicative Sanctions Guidance published in January 2019 with effect from the 27th March 2019, "(The Guidance)". In considering what sanction to impose, if any, the Committee had regard to the principle of proportionality, and of the need to balance the public interest against the Registrant's own interests.

32. The Committee acknowledged that the purpose of a sanction is not to be punitive, but to uphold the public interest. The sanction imposed should pose no greater restriction upon the Registrant than is absolutely necessary to achieve its

objectives. When considering proportionality, and the public interest, the Committee noted that it is entitled to give greater weight to the public interest, and to the need to maintain public confidence in the profession, than to the consequences to the Registrant of the imposition of a sanction. The Committee also noted that the public interest in this case includes maintaining public confidence in the profession of pharmacists, and maintaining proper standards of behaviour. It does not include issues of public protection.

33. The Committee first considered the seriousness of the registrant's actions and had regard to the mitigating and aggravating circumstances section of the Guidance at sections 2.10 to 2.16.

34. The Committee looked at the mitigating factors and noted;

- The Registrant had pleaded guilty to the criminal charges;
- The Registrant had made admission before the Committee;
- The Registrant was 25 years old and in the early stages of her career at the time of the offending behaviour;
- The Registrant was otherwise of good character;
- There was no actual or potential harm to patients;
- There was no concern about the Registrant's clinical practice;
- There were no patients or vulnerable persons involved in the offending;
- The Registrant had co-operated with the Society and had self-referred following her convictions;
- The convictions could be described as low-level offending given the sums and value of the items, and that the thefts involved money and toiletries and not medicines (including controlled drugs);
- The Registrant had experienced significant workplace difficulties including suggestions of being on the receiving end of manipulative behaviour from her former employer;
- The Registrant returned the cash and the toiletries within days of the theft and had remediated her actions; and
- The Registrant has developed full insight;

35. The Committee looked at the aggravating factors and noted;

- The Registrant's actions amounted to an abuse of trust. She had stolen from her employer whilst in their employment; and
- The Registrant's actions were dishonest.

36. The Committee had specific regard to sections 2.26-2.32 of the Guidance. The Committee was of the view that the Registrant's actions involved behaviour which could destroy trust instantly. However, on the spectrum of dishonest conduct, the Registrant's actions are at the lower end. Her theft did not involve significant sums of money or items of particular value nor did it involve drugs/medicines. Her actions were not very sophisticated and whilst there were multiple thefts over two days the dishonesty did not persist for a protracted period. This was evidenced by the return of the items and cash as well her admissions and apologies.

37. The Committee acknowledged the need to have regard to the full range of sanctions available to it, starting with the lowest, and decide if it is appropriate to this case. If not, then the Committee would consider the next sanction, until it decides which sanction is appropriate.

38. First, the Committee considered whether it was appropriate to take no action. The Committee agreed with Mr Hamill that this would be wholly inappropriate on the basis that it would fail to mark the seriousness of the convictions.

39. The Committee next considered whether a warning was appropriate. In the Committee's view, given that the Registrant's actions could not be described as a minor breach of the relevant standards, and also considering the damage to public confidence in the profession, a warning would not be appropriate.

40. The Committee next considered whether conditions of practice would be appropriate. In the Committee's view, it would not be possible to devise conditions which would appropriately address the concerns in this case, and in any event, conditions would not be sufficient to mark the seriousness of the convictions.

41. The Committee considered that a suspension would be appropriate on the basis that it would highlight to the profession, and the public, that actions such as the

Registrant's are unacceptable and unbefitting of a member of the pharmacy profession. The Committee further considered whether removal was required. It acknowledged that dishonest actions could require removal but in the Committee's view the Registrant's actions were not fundamentally incompatible with registration. This was owing to the development of full insight, the remediation, and the context in which the thefts occurred.

42. The Committee had regard to the principle of proportionality and weighed the public interest against the Registrant's interests. The Committee was mindful that the Registrant is keen to practise again as a pharmacist and she informed the Committee that she has a job waiting if she registers with the General Pharmaceutical Council. The Committee was mindful that a period of suspension would impact the Registrant both personally and financially, but took the view that no lesser sanction would adequately mark the seriousness of her actions and uphold the public interest.

43. The Committee considered the duration of the suspension and again was mindful of proportionality. The Committee considered that the Registrant had been convicted, served her sentence, and now she had a finding of impaired fitness to practise against her registration. Having regard to all the circumstances, the Committee concluded that a period of three months suspension would adequately mark the seriousness of the Registrant's actions. The Committee further concluded that any lesser period would not uphold the public interest and maintain confidence in the profession, and any longer period would be disproportionately hard on the Registrant.

INTERIM MEASURE

44. A period of 28 days is allowed for a Registrant to lodge an appeal with the High Court. The decision of the Committee is not formally imposed until this period of appeal has formally ended or, where an appeal is brought, the date on which the appeal is fully disposed of. If the Committee considers that it is in the public interest to do so, it has the power to impose 'interim measures' until the appeal period is over or, if an appeal is successfully lodged, until the appeal has been fully disposed of. Given that the Committee imposed the sanction of Suspension the

Committee had to consider whether it should impose an interim measure in this case.

45. The Committee heard an application from the Society in favour of imposing an interim measure to cover the appeal period. The Registrant had a neutral view and did not consent nor object to the imposition of such measures. In light of the nature of the findings in this case the Committee considered that the imposition of an Interim Measure was appropriate and necessary in order to uphold the public interest. The Registrant will therefore be suspended forthwith and for the duration of the 28-day appeal period (28 days beginning with and including the date on which the written notice of the reasons for the decision was sent), or if an appeal is brought, up to the date when that appeal is fully disposed of

COSTS

46. No costs application was made by the Society.

Mark Scott
Deputy Chair of the Statutory Committee
15 August 2025