

COUNCIL SLAMMED BY JUDGE

A NOTTINGHAM Crown Court judge today slammed Notts County Council's social services department after hearing that assistant social worker Michael Preston was allowed to continue looking after a 12-year-old girl — despite telling his boss that he was worried about their relationship.

Ex-Army mechanical engineer Preston, 41, formerly of Warren Hill, Arnold, and now living in Cardiff, admitted two counts of indecently assaulting the girl last October while she was in care at a county council children's home.

Sentencing him to nine months' imprisonment, two-thirds suspended, Mr Justice Tudor Price told Preston: "On the face of it, culpable responsibility for the assaults lies with your superiors as well as with you."

"This case, in my opinion, reveals a most disturbing state of affairs because it appears on the face of the papers that the officer in charge of the children's home, and other persons in the social services, were well aware of the temptations to which you were subject — and yet they took no steps to relieve you of your responsibilities in order to protect the child."

Background

He directed that the case papers be sent to the Secretary of State so that inquiries would be made if he thought fit into the background of the matter.

Prosecuting, Mr Peter Joyce, said other social workers told police they agreed there was "something not quite right" about Preston. It was even suggested he might be a potential child molester.

Mr Joyce said the social services department had declined his invitation to be represented at the hearing.

Defending, Mr Andrew Hamilton, said Preston was unsuited to be a social worker and his cries for help were ignored. He could not cope with the situation and resigned immediately.