

**What happens if a concern is raised about me?**

**Information for registrants**

 **July 2020**

**Contents**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **About Fitness to Practise** | **Page 2** |
| **Who can raise a concern?** | **Page 3** |
| **Standard of Acceptance** | **Page 5** |
| **Preliminary Enquiries** | **Page 5** |
| **Interim Orders** | **Page 6** |
| **Consensual Disposal** | **Page 8** |
| **The Preliminary Proceedings Committee** | **Page 10** |
| **Fitness to Practise Hearings** | **Page 12** |
| **Appealing against a Committee decision** | **Page 14** |
| **Publication of Information** | **Page 15** |
| **Referral to the Disclosure & Barring Service** | **Page 15** |
| **Further Information** | **Page 15** |

**About this booklet**

This booklet has been developed for registered social workers and social care workers who have had concerns raised about them. We understand that having a concern raised about you can be a stressful and worrying experience so we try to make our processes as open and clear as possible. We hope the information in this booklet will help you. It gives you information about the process a case will go through and the possible outcomes.

We want you to know that while we have procedures in place to ensure that concerns are investigated, we also ensure that only cases with evidence of serious misconduct are taken forward. We are committed to operating a fair process that protects your rights to a fair hearing and to an independent appeal whilst safeguarding the public.

**About Fitness to Practise**

Fitness to Practise means that a registrant has the skills, knowledge and character to practise their profession safely and effectively. It also includes acts by a registrant which may affect public protection or confidence in the profession or the regulatory process and may also include matters not directly related to professional practice.

**What is the purpose of Fitness to Practise process?**

Fitness to practise proceedings are about protecting the public. They are not a general complaints resolution process, nor are they designed to deal with disputes between registrants and service users or registrants and their employers.

The fitness to practise process is not meant to punish Registrants for past mistakes. It is to protect the public by ensuring that social workers and social care workers are fit to continue practising (or restricting their practice if not).

In deciding whether a Registrant’s fitness to practise is impaired (negatively affected), we will take into account any action/inaction that led to the allegation, together with factors such as whether it was an isolated incident. We will also consider whether, as a result of a Registrant’s conduct and practice since, he/she is fit to practise now and should be allowed to continue working. A Registrant may be able to continue working if he/she can show that they have learnt from their past mistake, there has been no repeat of the conduct, and steps have been taken to ensure that it will not happen again. Each case is considered separately and on its own merit.

Being fit to practise means that a Registrant is fit to practise in their role now, irrespective of whether something may have affected this in their past.

**Fitness to Practise Rules**

The *NISCC Fitness to Practise Rules* set out the process which we must follow when a concern is raised about a registrant. The Rules are published in the Fitness to Practise section of our website and they are sent out to a Registrant who has been referred to a Committee.

**Standards of Conduct & Practice**

Being registered with the Social Care Council means adhering to the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers and Social Care Workers. These Standards set out the required attitudes, behaviours and competence that a Registrant requires to practise safely and effectively.

When considering cases referred to us, we take account of the relevant Standards. A failure to adhere to the Standards does not automatically mean that your fitness to practise is impaired. Registrants do sometimes make mistakes or errors of judgement and it would not be in the public interest for us to pursue every minor lapse.

You can download a copy of the Standards from our website.

**Types of cases that we can consider**

If you have been referred to us for any reason, we will consider whether your fitness to practise may be impaired due to one or more of the following reasons:-

1. **misconduct** – behaviour which falls short of what can reasonably be expected of a registrant

2. **lack of competence** – lack of knowledge, skill and judgement, usually repeated and over a period of time, which means a registrant is unfit to practise

3. **physical or mental health** – usually a long-term, untreated or unacknowledged physical or mental health condition

4. **a conviction or caution** for an offence in the UK (or elsewhere, if it would be considered a crime in the UK).

5. **a decision by another relevant regulatory body -** that the Registrant’s fitness to practise is impaired;

6. **inclusion on a list maintained by the Disclosure and Barring Service** (DBS). The DBS can prevent people from working with children and /or vulnerable adults in a number of roles, not just in social care.

**Who can raise a concern?**

**Employer Referrals**

Employers are expected to play a part in the regulation of the workforce and in the support of high quality practice and care. This includes informing us about any fitness to practise issues that would call into question a registrant’s registration.

While your employer must decide whether you are suitable to continue working in a particular job, we have a broader responsibility to determine whether you should be allowed to remain on the Register.

Employers are required to cooperate with our proceedings and must provide us with full and accurate records of disciplinary proceedings, including any evidence used and the reasons for decisions taken. We are only able to make decisions on the basis of evidence and we will form our own view on the evidence supplied.

**Service users/members of the public**

Sometimes service users or their families raise concerns about the care or treatment received. In these circumstances, we will contact your employer to see whether a similar complaint has been made to them and if so, what has been done about it. An employer is sometimes best placed to deal with service user concerns.

**Anonymous allegations**

We will not normally take action if information about a registrant is provided anonymously, this is because we want to operate a fair and clear process and we cannot go back and ask for more information if we do not know who has contacted us.

Likewise, we do not normally take further action if the person raising the concern does not want us to share their name as it is very difficult to do so if the registrant does not know who raised the concerns.

If we receive anonymous allegations about you, we will contact your employer to establish whether there is some other means of verifying the concerns raised .If the information relates to serious and credible concerns about your fitness to practise, we will consider whether it is appropriate to take further action.

**Police notifications**

The PSNI may tell us about criminal investigations or proceedings against a registrant if they decide there is a pressing social need to do so. It is important to remember however, that you also have a responsibility, under the terms of your registration, to inform the Social Care Council if you have been interviewed by or are being investigated by the PSNI for any reason.

**Self-referrals**

You have a responsibility to tell us if you have any important new information about your conduct or health. In particular you must let us know straightaway if you are:-

* convicted of a criminal offence, receive a police caution or are the subject of any criminal investigation
* suspended or disciplined by your employer
* diagnosed with a condition which could seriously affect your ability to practise.

In these circumstances, we will conduct enquiries to establish what action might be necessary to establish what impact the matters might have on your registration.

**Other sources**

If we receive other information from another source – a newspaper article for example, we can look into it if it suggests that your fitness to practise may be impaired.

**Standard of Acceptance**

When we receive a referral from any source, we will first apply the Standard of Acceptance. The *Standard of Acceptance* sets out how we decide whether to act on a referral. It acts as a filter to ensure that resources are not expended on pursuing matters which do not raise a credible cause for concern and aims to provide a proportionate threshold which allegations must meet before they will be investigated by us

The Standard of Acceptance can be found in the Fitness to Practise section of our website.

**What happens if the Standard of Acceptance is not met?**

In some cases it will be clear from the start that it is not appropriate for us to become involved, this could be because the complaint is really about a service provided by an employer or a decision made by another body, e.g. the Courts, rather than the actions of an individual worker. In these circumstances we will direct the person raising the concerns (the referrer) to the relevant employer or service provider.

In some circumstances the office of the NI Ombudsman would be the most appropriate body to deal with the complaint.

**What happens if the Standard of Acceptance is met?**

If we consider that the Standard of Acceptance has been met, we will open a case about you which will be allocated to a Fitness to Practise Officer, whose job is to make preliminary enquiries and gather all relevant information. The Fitness to Practise Officer manages the progress of your case and acts as a contact for everyone involved. The Fitness to Practise Officer can give you information on the process but cannot give legal advice.

**Preliminary enquiries**

**How long will the preliminary enquiries take?**

We will complete our enquiries as quickly and efficiently as we can.

Our enquiries depend very much on the nature, complexity and seriousness of the concerns raised with us. We might have to ask for further documents from an employer following a disciplinary process or confirm the circumstances of a conviction with the PSNI. If you have more than one employer we may contact the others for information.

The Fitness to Practise Officer will keep you informed as the case progresses but you can contact them at any time if you have any questions about what is happening.

**What happens when the preliminary enquiries are complete?**

When we have gathered enough information to allow us to make a decision on future action, we will write to you. It helps if you respond. You may want to get advice from your union or professional body (if you are a member) or a solicitor before you respond. However, you do not have to send a response if you would prefer not to.

We may decide to close your case with no further action in which case that is the end of the matter. Where we believe that your behaviour has fallen short of the Standards of Conduct & Practice, but does not merit regulatory action, we may issue a “Letter of Advice” regarding future behaviour. We may also invite you to consider “consensual disposal” or we may decide to progress your case through a Committee process.

**Interim Orders**

There are two types of interim measures that can be taken while our investigation is ongoing, an **Interim Suspension Order** and an **Interim Conditions of Practice Order**. These measures are only taken in serious circumstances. They can only be imposed by an independent Preliminary Proceedings Committee (PPC).

**Interim Suspension Order (ISO).**

If we believe that the allegation against you is so serious that you need to be prevented from working in social work or social care while the case is being investigated, we will seek an Interim Suspension Order. An ISO means that you will be suspended from the Register on a temporary basis, without prejudice, while the allegation is being thoroughly investigated and until a final decision is made. It also means that you will not be able to work as a social worker or social care worker until the Order is removed.

**Interim Conditions of Practice Order (ICPO)**

An ICPO is an Order that temporarily places conditions upon your registration while investigations are ongoing. You can still work if an ICPO is imposed.

The types of conditions that could be imposed may be:

* You must undertake specific training within a defined period and provide evidence of the successful completion of that training to us;
* You must provide us with a monthly report signed by your employer confirming that you are continuing to comply with a relevant requirement or restriction.

**Attendance & Representation at an Interim Orders Hearing**

You can attend an Interim Orders Hearing and argue your case directly to the PPC.

You may find it helpful to discuss your case with your trade union representative or someone from your professional body. You can also ask a solicitor to act on your behalf.

We recommend that your representative comes with you to the Hearing. If you do not have a representative, the Chair of the Committee will ensure that that you understand what is happening at all times and the Legal Adviser to the Committee will ensure that the proceedings are conducted fairly.

**What will the PPC take into account when making its decision?**

When making its decision, the PPC will consider a range of factors, including:-

* The seriousness of the allegation/s
* The potential risk to service users, colleagues or other members of the public
* The nature of the evidence
* The likelihood of your alleged conduct being repeated if an Order is not made
* The impact an Order would have on you, both financially and on your reputation
* The principle of proportionality

In deciding what sanction to impose, the Committee refers to a booklet called; “*Indicative Sanctions and Use of Interim Orders: Guidance for Fitness to Practise Committees”,* which is available to read in the Fitness to Practise section of our website.

**Duration & Review**

An initial Interim Order cannot be imposed for more than 6 months. Before the period expires, the Order will be reviewed by the PPC who will decide whether to continue it, remove it or vary it. The PPC can also replace an Interim Suspension Order with an Interim Conditions of Practice Order and vice versa.

You can apply for an Interim Order to be reviewed at any point in the process.

An Interim Order can last up to a maximum of two years and can only be extended in exceptional circumstances.

**Who sits on a PPC?**

Our Committees are usually made up of three people –two lay members and one social care member. A lay member is someone who does not work in the social care field. One of the lay members will act as Chair of the Committee. The social care member will be registered with the Social Care Council. All Committees have access to specialist legal advice when they are considering a case and medical advice where necessary.

The PPC is independent of the Council.

**If I am referred to an Interim Orders Hearing what should I do next?**

The Committee process is managed by our Committee Management Team. If you are referred to an Interim Orders Hearing, the Committee Management Team will provide you with further information and guidance about the process.

You will receive a *Notice of Intention* telling you when your case is scheduled to be heard and it will set out the actual allegations that the Committee will be considering. You will also be sent copies of any supporting documentation, (the “bundle”), and a copy of the *Fitness to Practise Rules*.

It is important that you reply as directed by the Committee Management Team. You can contact them at any time if you have a question about what is going to happen next.

**Consensual Disposal**

The Fitness to Practise Rules make provision for the Social Care Council in certain circumstances to dispose of cases “consensually”. Consensual disposal is a means by which the Council and a Registrant can conclude a case without the need for a contested hearing, by agreeing a sanction of the kind which a Fitness to Practise Committee would be likely to make.

A guidance document for Fitness to Practise Officers considering this option is available in the Fitness to Practise section of our website.

The primary role of the Social Care Council is to protect the public from poor or unsafe standards of care and we will only consider resolving a case by consent if the following factors are met:

* Where a proper assessment has been made of the nature, scope and viability of the allegation including a robust risk assessment.
* Where it is considered that there is a realistic prospect of a finding of impaired fitness to practise;
* Where the Registrant is willing to admit the allegation in full. (A Registrant’s insight into, and willingness to address, failings are key elements in the fitness to practise process and it would be inappropriate to dispose of a case by consent where the Registrant denies or disputes the allegations made against them;)
* Where there is no public interest in the case being heard by a Fitness to Practise Committee;
* Where there is a likelihood that a Fitness to Practise Committee would impose a sanction similar to the one deemed appropriate under Consensual Disposal.

There are **three options** that may be considered under Consensual Disposal arrangements:-

1. **Warning:** A warning may be imposed for a period of 1 to 5 years. A warning may be appropriate where we consider that your behaviour was at the lower end of the spectrum of impairment, where the lapse has been corrected and if we think that it is unlikely to happen again.

If we think that a Warning is appropriate in your case, we will write to you to inform you that we are proposing a warning. If you do not write back –we have the right to impose it anyway.

**2) Agreed Undertakings:** Undertakings are an agreement between the Social Care Council and a Registrant about future practice. Undertakings may include:

* Restrictions on practice
* Restrictions on behaviour
* Commitments to practise under supervision
* Commitments to undergo training

We will only consider Undertakings to be appropriate in your case if:-

* you admit the allegation/s
* you admit that your actions amount to impaired fitness to practise.
* you show insight into the need to restrict your practice
* a period of retraining and/or supervision is likely to be the most appropriate way of addressing any shortcomings
* we are satisfied that you will comply with undertakings
* you show that you have the potential to respond positively to remediation, or retraining or to your work being supervised
1. **Removal by Agreement**: Removal by agreement is the process by which a Registrant who is the subject of a fitness to practise allegation may be removed from the Register.

Removal by Agreement is the most serious sanction within the consensual disposal process and is likely to be appropriate if we consider that your behaviour is fundamentally incompatible with being a social worker or social care worker.

Before considering Removal by Agreement, we must be satisfied that

the public interest does not warrant a public hearing and that the public will be best protected by the Registrant’s immediate removal from the Register.

We will only grant Removal by Agreement if:-

1. you admit the allegation
2. sign an agreed Statement of Facts
3. admit that the facts amount to impaired fitness to practise
4. provide written confirmation of the matters set out above

Removal by agreement is not the same as voluntary removal, where a Registrant without any actual or potential fitness to practise issues can ask to be removed from the Register.

In general, if we consider that you are likely to seek restoration to the Register in the future, we will not grant Removal by Agreement.

**What happens if I refuse to accept a proposed consensual disposal?**

If a proposal is made by the Social Care Council and it is refused by you, we are obliged to refer the matter for the consideration of a Preliminary Proceedings Committee.

**The Preliminary Proceedings Committee (PPC)**

If we believe that your case is not suitable for consensual disposal because it is too serious or because you have rejected the Social Care Council’s offer of consensual disposal, we will refer it for consideration by a Preliminary Proceedings Committee.

We will let you know if we are pursuing this option – normally at the point when we refer the case to our solicitor who will conduct further investigations and take statements. Our solicitor prepares the case for consideration by the PPC and makes recommendations to the Social Care Council on the strength of the evidence against you.

**Preliminary Proceedings Committee**

The Preliminary Proceedings Committeefollows a legal process which is set out in the Fitness to Practise Rules and it has to decide whether to transfer a case to a Fitness to Practise Committee for a full hearing

The PPC must decide whether there is “ *admissible, substantial and reliable evidence to provide a real prospect of a finding of impaired fitness to practise in relation to the allegation*”. We call this the “real prospect test” and it means that the PPC must be satisfied that there is evidence which not only supports the allegation/s made against you, but which is also likely to result in a finding of *impaired fitness to practise* at a subsequent Fitness to Practise Hearing.

**Who sits on a PPC?**

Our Committees are usually made up of three people –two lay members and one social care member. A lay member is someone who does not work in the social care field. One of the lay members will act as Chair of the Committee. The social care member will be registered with the Social Care Council. All Committees have access to specialist legal advice when they are considering a case and medical advice where necessary.

The PPC is independent of the Social Care Council.

**Options open to the PPC**

The PPC can make one of the following decisions about your case:-

* Request further investigation by the Social Care Council
* Transfer your case to the Fitness to Practise Committee
* Refer the matter back to the Social Care Council to seek consensual disposal
* Close the case

Even if the PPC decides to close your case, they may choose to give you advice on your future conduct or practice and may remind you of particular sections of the Standards of Conduct and Practice. A record of your case will be kept and it could be taken into account if any further allegations are received about you in the future.

**What the PPC does not do**

The PPC does not have the power to test the evidence against you. This means that it cannot hear from witnesses and cannot decide whether the allegations against you are true or false.

The PPC simply decides which cases go to a Fitness to Practise Hearing and which do not.

**If you have been referred to a PPC – what should you do next?**

The Committee process is managed by our Committee Management Team. The Committee Management Team will provide you with further information and guidance about the process.

You will receive a *Notice of Referral* telling you when your case is scheduled to be heard and it will set out the actual allegations that the Committee will be considering. You will also be sent copies of any supporting documentation (the “bundle”) which may include witness statements taken by the Council’s solicitor, and a copy of the Fitness to Practise Rules.

It is important that you reply as directed by the Committee Management Team. You can contact them at any time if you have a question about what is going to happen next.

**Attendance & Representation**

You can attend a PPC meeting and argue your case directly to the PPC.

You may find it helpful to discuss your case with your trade union representative or someone from your professional body. You can also ask a solicitor to act on your behalf.

We recommend that your representative comes with you to the Committee meeting. If you do not have a representative, the Chair of the Committee will ensure that that you understand what is happening at all times and the Legal Adviser to the Committee will ensure that the proceedings are conducted fairly

**What if I don’t attend the PPC meeting?**

We recommend that you attend a PPC meeting. This ensures that the Committee hears you side of the story as well. However, a Committee can proceed in your absence if they are satisfied that the Notice of the Referral was sent to you in accordance with the Fitness to Practise Rules.

**Health Cases**

If the PPC transfers your case to a Fitness to Practise Committee and it appears that your health contributed to your actions, the PPC can direct that your case be transferred to the Fitness to Practise Committee under the health procedure. You must agree to be examined by a nominated Medical Adviser who will provide a report for the Fitness to Practise Committee and the Committee will take it into consideration when making their decision. If you do not engage in that process, your case may then proceed in accordance with the normal arrangements.

**Fitness to Practise (FtP) Hearings**

**If you have been referred to a Fitness to Practise Hearing – what should you do next?**

The Committee process is managed by our Committee Management Team. If you are referred to a Fitness to Practise hearing, the Committee Management team will provide you with further information and guidance about the process.

You can contact them at any time if you have a question about what is going to happen next. The Committee Management team take no part in the decision-making process.

**Pre-hearing review**

Depending on the nature of your case, you may be invited to attend a pre-hearing review. This is an opportunity for you and the Council to discuss arrangements for the forthcoming hearing –including what witnesses will be called, how long we think it might take what dates may /may not be suitable. We will also consider whether your health is a factor that has to be considered when the hearing takes place.

If we plan to hold a pre-hearing review, we will provide you with the necessary information.

If we do not plan to hold a review (for example if you case relates solely to a criminal conviction), you can still request one.

**Particulars of the Allegation**

Before the Hearing is due to take place, and usually at a Pre-hearing review, the Social Care Council will prepare formal *Particulars of the Allegation*. These set out the exact allegation/s in the case that the Council is bringing against you. The Council has to prove that what has been alleged in the Particulars of Allegation actually happened.

**Direct Transfer to a Fitness to Practise Committee**

If the case against you concerns a serious criminal conviction, a decision made by another regulatory body or a decision made by the Disclosure and Barring Service, the Social Care Council can transfer your case directly to the Fitness to Practise Committee without first going through the PPC process. If we decide to do that, we will let you know.

**Who sits on a Fitness to Practise Committee?**

Our Committees are usually made up of three people –two lay members and one social care member. A lay member is someone who does not work in the social care field. One of the lay members will act as Chair of the Committee. The social care member will be registered with the Social Care Council. All Committees have access to specialist legal advice when they are considering a case and medical advice where necessary.

The Fitness to Practise Committee is independent of the Social Care Council.

**Who can attend a Fitness to Practise Hearing?**

Fitness to Practise hearings are held in public, this means that anyone can ask to attend including the press or media. If there are any matters that the Committee believe should not be heard in public, (such as personal health matters) they can ask observers to leave the room. You or your representative can apply for all or part of the hearing to be heard in private.

All hearings are recorded.

**The procedure at a Fitness to Practise Hearing**

The Social Care Council’s solicitor (the presenter) will normally open the hearing by setting out the allegations against you and calling any witnesses that we believe can support the allegations. You or your representative can question the witnesses and the Committee may also have some questions. After we have presented our case, you or your representative will present your case, call your own witnesses or make statements to the Committee.

There are three different stages to the hearing:-

**Stage 1**. **Finding of Facts** – the Social Care Council has to prove the facts set out in the Particulars of the Allegation. If the Committee decides that none of the facts have been proved, the hearing is concluded and the proceedings are at an end. If the Committee decides that some, or all, have been found proved, the hearing proceeds to the second stage.

**Stage 2:** **Fitness to Practise** – the Committee has to believe that the facts found proved amount to impairment of your fitness to practise because of one or more of the following reasons :-

* your misconduct;
* your lack of competence;
* your physical or mental health;
* your conviction or caution in the UK for a criminal offence, or a conviction elsewhere for an offence which, if committed in the UK, would constitute a criminal offence;
* a decision by a relevant regulatory body that your fitness to practise is impaired;
* your inclusion on a list maintained by the Disclosure and Barring Service

In deciding whether or not your current fitness to practise is impaired, the Committee refers to a booklet called : *“Making a determination of Impaired Fitness to Practise: Guidance for Committees on Remediation”*. You can find more information on this on the Fitness to Practise section of the website.

If the Committee decides that your fitness to practise is not impaired, the hearing is concluded and the proceedings against you are at an end. If the Committee decides that your fitness to practise is impaired, the hearing proceeds to the third stage.

**Stage 3: Mitigation & Sanction**– this is your opportunity to provide any information that you believe contributed to your actions before the Committee makes its decision. You can also produce references and testimonials from anyone who knows you or your work.

In deciding what sanction to impose, the FtP Committee refers to a booklet called; “*Indicative Sanctions and Use of Interim Orders: Guidance for Fitness to Practise Committees”,* which is available to read in the Fitness to Practise section of our website.

The options open to the Committee are to:-

* Place a **Warning** on your registration for a specified period of up to five years - you would still be able to work in social work or social care.
* Make a **Conditions of Practise Order** for a specified period of time– you could still work but there would be restrictions.
* Impose a **Suspension Order** – you would not be able to work as a social worker or social care worker for a specified period of time (no longer than 2 years)
* Impose a **Removal Order** – this means that you would be removed from the Social Care Register. You could only apply to come back on the Register after a period of 5 years.

**What if I don’t attend the FtP hearing?**

It is best if you attend a Committee meeting. This ensures that the Committee hears your side of the story as well. A Committee can proceed in your absence if they are satisfied that the Notice of the Hearing was sent to you in accordance with the Fitness to Practise Rules.

**Review of Conditions of Practice Orders and Suspension Orders**

Conditions of Practice Orders and Suspension Orders are imposed for a specified period and will be subject to a review process to see if they are still appropriate. If one of these Orders is imposed, you will be provided with further information on the review process.

**Appealing against a Committee decision**

You have the right of appeal to the Care Tribunal against any decision made by a Social Care Council Committee that affects your registration – either a decision made by a PPC to impose an Interim Order or a sanction imposed by the Fitness to Practise Committee. Information about the appeal process will be provided to you if such a Committee decision is made.

An appeal must be lodged with the Care Tribunal within 28 days of receiving the Notice of Decision from the Committee using the NISCC Appeal Form. The Tribunal’s decision is final.

**Publication of Information**

The Social Care Council *Disclosure Policy*, which can be found in the Fitness to Practise section of our website, provides details of what information we will publish, when we will publish it and how long it will be retained.

It also sets out the circumstances in which some types of information will not be made public. For example, information about a registrant’s health matters or information that could lead to the identification of a child will be redacted.

* **Interim Orders.**

As an Interim Order decision is a temporary one, made without prejudice before the allegation against you has been proved, we will not publish any details of the allegation made against you. The Public Facing Register, which is viewable on our website, will just show your registration status – either suspended/ or subject to conditions. No other details will be released at this stage.

* **Consensual disposal cases.**

The Fitness to Practise Rules require the publication of consensual disposal information. These cases are dealt with in this way because a contested hearing is not necessary. However we are still obliged to serve the public interest by publishing the details.

* **Fitness to Practise hearings**

Details of the scheduled Fitness to Practise hearing will be published in advance of the hearing.

The outcome of a Fitness to Practise hearing is a matter of public interest and the panel’s decision provides valuable information about the standards expected of registrants and helps maintain public confidence in the social work and social care workforce. It also maintains confidence in the Social Care Council as a regulator.

**Referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)**

If, after the conclusion of a Fitness to Practise Hearing, the Social Care Council is concerned that your actions harmed someone or placed them at risk of harm, we will make a referral to the Disclosure and Barring Service (if your employer has not already done so). The DBS has the power to bar you from working with children and/or vulnerable adults in any setting.

**Further information**

Further information about Fitness to Practise process and how it works can be found in the Fitness to Practise section of our website which also shows a list of decisions made about cases to date and a list of scheduled hearings.

You can contact the Fitness to Practise team at any time by telephoning 028 95 362940 or by emailing ftp@niscc.hscni.net