

Northern Ireland

Social

Care

Council

OBSERVING A NORTHERN IRELAND SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL (SOCIAL CARE COUNCIL) FITNESS TO PRACTISE HEARING

Most of the Social Care Council's fitness to practise hearings are being held online using 'Zoom'. Zoom is video conferencing software which enables people to meet virtually either through a video-call or an audio-call.

Members of the public and the media are allowed to attend hearings which are being held in public. Hearings normally start at 9.30 am. Please note that hearings can be subject to last - minute postponement or cancellation.

There is a limit as to how many people can attend and places are allocated on a first-come, first-serve basis.

These guidelines explain how you can observe a Zoom fitness to practise hearing and the restrictions which are in place.

Before you Attend:

Please let us know if you have any hearing or visual impairment that we need to be aware of, and what assistance you may require.

You should ensure that you have downloaded and installed the free Zoom app at: <https://zoom.us/>. We also recommend that you have the appropriate equipment and IT connectivity to attend a virtual meeting, which may include the use of a smart phone, tablet, laptop or computer and Wi-Fi access to connect to the meeting. We regret that we are not able to facilitate attendees joining by telephone.

You will be emailed the Zoom joining link and password one working day before the hearing. The link is for your use only. You should not share it with anyone else.

Prepare in advance by setting up 10 - 15 minutes ahead of the hearing start time so that any potential connection issues can be resolved ahead of the meeting. **Please note that we cannot delay the start time of the hearing if you are having difficulty joining, and will be able to provide only limited support.**

During the Hearing:

You will initially join a 'waiting room' in Zoom, and your identity confirmed before being admitted into the hearing.

If you are accidentally disconnected from the meeting, please call 028 9536 2932 to enable you to reconnect.

All attendees are asked to mute their microphone on joining the hearing. The host of the Zoom meeting (which is a member of staff from the Social Care Council – and not the Chair) may force your microphone on mute if you have forgotten to do so.

You may also be asked to turn your video camera off.

If you have a smart speaker in the room, we would ask that you turn it off.

Members of the public are asked to abide by any requests from the Clerk or Chair to leave the hearing, for example, if the Committee needs to go into private session. The Committee may go into private at any time if, for example, health issues are being raised or to protect the identity of third parties. Where this happens, you will be placed in another virtual meeting room until the issue has been dealt with. You do not need to do anything as the host will do this automatically, and will enable your return to the hearing when the Committee goes back into public session.

Additionally, the Committee will deliberate in private at several points throughout the hearing, and the private deliberations may last for any time between 10 minutes and three hours depending on the type of decision they are making. If the private deliberations are going to be short, you will be placed in another virtual meeting room. If we anticipate that the private deliberations will last for longer than 10 minutes, you will be asked to leave the Zoom meeting and we will call you on the number which you provide us with to let you know that you can re-join. If we are unable to contact you, the hearing will re-commence without you and you will not be able to re-join until the next break.

Protocol for Attendance:

While we want to ensure that you are able to attend a public fitness to practise hearing, you are required to adhere to the following:

Only those who are authorised to attend will be admitted into the hearing. You should not share your link with anyone else. If you do, they will not be admitted into the Zoom meeting.

Members of the public or media are not permitted to speak during the hearing, nor to use the 'Chat' functionality within the Zoom software.

You may not screenshot, photograph or record any person or any part of the hearing, including the audio. We will require you to agree to this in writing prior to the hearing.

You should ensure that other devices within the vicinity of the device you are using to connect to the hearing are muted, as this may cause interference in the quality of the sound you are experiencing.

Refusal to adhere to any of the above may result in the host ending your connection to the hearing.

Following the hearing:

If you would like to provide feedback on the service you received from the Social Care Council, we would be pleased to hear from you. Please email niscc.committee@hscni.net or call Caroline Cumberland on 028 9536 2932.