

Title: Hearings Evaluation Report

Date: 19 June 2024

Presented by: Caroline Cumberland

ACTION REQUIRED

This Paper is	For approval
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SUMMARY

The Social Care Council has evaluated its position on the delivery of its regulatory Committees and hearings in order to put in place a clear and transparent decision-making process in regards to the format by which hearings will be conducted.

BACKGROUND

Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, all of the Social Care Council's Committees and fitness to practise hearings were held in person in the Social Care Council's offices in Belfast. In order to ensure continued delivery during the pandemic, we adopted the default position of all proceedings being held online via Zoom, with measures in place to enable registrants to attend and participate. The Social Care Council has continued to maintain the delivery of fitness to practise proceedings mostly using online services. By exception, a small number of cases have been held face-to-face in order to meet specific needs of the people involved, or the circumstances of a case.

In 2023, the Social Care Council identified the need to establish a small working group to review and evaluate Committee and hearing delivery to assess its continued appropriateness in the post-pandemic environment, and to identify a fair, balanced and flexible approach to meet the needs of all stakeholders involved in proceedings. This report sets out the key findings and recommendations.

KEY ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

The Social Care Council, like the other healthcare regulators in the UK, have a duty to ensure that their hearings service going forward supports integrity and fairness. The overarching considerations when identifying a fair, balanced and flexible approach must be the public interest alongside fairness for registrants, also taking into account the needs and

experiences of Chairs, Committee Members, Legal Advisers, Hearings Officers, other participating Council staff and witnesses. There are circumstances in which there are clear benefits to holding online hearings but, in accordance with PSA guidance, the options of in-person and potentially hybrid hearings should remain.

ENGAGEMENT AND CONSULTATION

This Report has been based on the outcomes of surveys with a range of stakeholders, a literature review on the approach of the Courts and other healthcare regulators and on legal advice obtained.

The Report was also shared with the Participation Partnership at its meeting on 4th June 2024.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board review the Report and its recommendations for approval.

ATTACHED DOCUMENTS AND/OR LINKS HERE

Paper K Appendix I- Hearings Evaluation Report

Paper K Appendix II – Screening report