



Notice of Decision of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council's Fitness to Practise Committee

**REDACTED
SUSPENSION ORDER REVIEW HEARING**

Name: Conor Paul Steele

SCR No: 6004089

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT the Fitness to Practise Committee of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, at its meeting on **02 May 2025**, made the following decision about your registration with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council:

The Committee found that your fitness to practise is currently impaired;

The Committee decided to make an Order for removal of your registration from the Register ('a Removal Order').

Procedure

The hearing was held under the fitness to practise procedure.

Preliminary Issues

The fitness to practise review hearing was held remotely by way of video link. The Registrant was not in attendance and was not represented. The Council was represented by Mr Kevin Hegarty, Solicitor, Tughans Solicitors.

Declarations of Conflict of Interest

The Chair confirmed that none of the Committee Members had any conflict of interest with this case.

Service

Mr Hegarty advised the Committee that a Notice of Review Hearing and hearing bundle were sent to the Registrant's registered email address on 28 March 2025, and that an electronic delivery receipt was received on the same date.

The Committee heard and accepted legal advice from the Legal Adviser. She advised that the Notice of Review Hearing had been served in accordance with Rule 3 and Paragraph 33 (5) of Schedule 2 of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council Fitness to Practise (Amendment) Rules 2019 (the Rules’).

Accordingly, the Committee was satisfied that the Notice of Review Hearing had been served in accordance with the Rules.

Proceeding in the Absence of the Registrant

Mr Hegarty invited the Committee to proceed with the hearing in the Registrant’s absence. He said that the Registrant had been appropriately served, and referred the Committee to the various emails between the Council and the Registrant regarding his attendance today. He told the Committee that the Committee Clerk had placed a telephone call to the Registrant’s registered telephone number on 23 April 2025, and left a voicemail asking him to return the telephone call or to confirm by way of email if he would be attending the Suspension Order review hearing. As the Registrant did not respond, the Committee Clerk left a further voicemail for the Registrant on 29 April 2025, and sent an email to the Registrant asking him to confirm his attendance at the hearing. The Registrant responded by way of email on 29 April 2025, confirming that he would be attending. Shortly after this email was received, on the same day, the Registrant sent a further email asking if the hearing could be held on a different date as he was struggling to re-arrange appointments.

Mr Hegarty referred the Committee to the email correspondence between the Council and the Registrant regarding his request to postpone the hearing. Mr Hegarty highlighted the Chair’s decision not to grant the postponement application and the reasons for this decision.

In particular, Mr Hegarty drew the Committee’s attention to the subsequent email to the Registrant, dated 01 May 2025, in which the Registrant was given three different options on how to engage with the hearing. He further highlighted the Registrant’s email response on 01 May 2025, in which he confirmed that he would send a letter to the Committee outlining what he has done since the Suspension Order was imposed.

Mr Hegarty suggested that the Committee should consider with caution the Registrant’s references in his emails to obtaining legal representation, and noted that the Suspension Order was imposed almost two years ago. Mr Hegarty submitted that the period of suspension provided the Registrant with the possibility of obtaining legal representation but that this never materialised. He said that the Council had not received details as regards the identity of a solicitor, or any correspondence from a legal representative.

Mr Hegarty submitted that the Registrant has clearly been advised of the hearing today and has voluntarily absented himself, and that it is the Council’s view that it is entirely appropriate to proceed in his absence. He said that the current Suspension Order expires on 30 May 2025 and must be reviewed before expiry to avoid the risk of the Registrant being restored to the Register unrestricted.

The Committee heard and accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser, who reminded the Committee that the decision to proceed in the absence of the Registrant should be exercised with the utmost care and caution. She

referred the Committee to the cases of R v Jones, Adeogba and Visvardis v GMC. She reminded the Committee that in exercising its discretion to proceed in the Registrant's absence, it must have regard to all of the circumstances with fairness to the Registrant being of prime consideration, although fairness to the Council and the public interest must also be taken into account. She reminded the Committee to avoid reaching any improper conclusion about the Registrant's absence and not to accept it as an admission in any way. She said that the Committee was satisfied that the Registrant had been served with the Notice of Review Hearing, which notified him of the date, time and venue for this hearing and his right to attend the hearing.

The Committee took into consideration the details in the Notice of Review Hearing, and the subsequent telephone calls with the Registrant regarding his attendance. The Committee noted the Registrant's initial intention to attend the hearing, and his subsequent change of mind in this regard. The Registrant subsequently requested a postponement of the hearing on 29 April 2025 and this was considered by the Chair, who refused the request. The Committee took into account the email dated 01 May 2025 from the Council to the Registrant, advising him of options as regards his attendance today, which were as follows:

- *Send a written submission for the Committee's consideration;*
- *As you have indicated that you will not be able to attend in person – the hearing will now be held by way of video link. You may wish to join remotely;*
- *Your solicitor may attend on your behalf or address the Committee to seek a postponement of the hearing.*

The Committee noted the Registrant's response to these options when he indicated that he would provide a written submission.

The Committee considered that the Registrant was given sufficient notice of today's hearing, and agreed with the Chair's decision not to postpone the hearing. The Committee considered that every opportunity had been given to the Registrant to engage with the proceedings and attend the hearing today. In all of the circumstances, the Committee was satisfied that the Registrant had voluntarily waived his right to attend the hearing, and that no useful purpose would be served by adjourning the hearing to a future date to enable the Registrant to be in attendance and / or be represented. The Committee considered that the Registrant's references to obtaining legal representation were vague and without substance. Whilst the Committee acknowledged that the Registrant would be disadvantaged in not attending the hearing today, it decided that his interests are outweighed by the public interest in the expeditious disposal of the case. The Committee noted that this was a review of a Suspension Order, relating to an inappropriate relationship with a service user in his care. The Committee noted that the Order will expire on 30 May 2025.

In these circumstances, the Committee decided that it was fair, appropriate and proportionate to proceed in the absence of the Registrant.

Council's Submission on Fitness to Practise

Mr Hegarty told the Committee that this is a review of a Suspension Order that was imposed by a Fitness to Practise Committee on 31 May 2023 and which is due to expire on 30 May 2025.

By way of background, Mr Hegarty said that the Registrant is registered on Part 1 of the Register as a qualified social worker. The Registrant was employed as a social worker by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust during the time of the misconduct in 2020 - 2021. The Registrant was based in Arches Wellbeing and Treatment Centre, and had been employed by the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust since 2016, holding the post of Senior Practitioner since January 2020. His work focus was working with families and children in need, children on the child protection register and Looked After Children.

Mr Hegarty said that during the relevant period, the Registrant was the appointed social worker for a service user and her child. The Registrant engaged in an inappropriate relationship with the service user and sent the service user materials, in the form of text messages, images and videos, which were explicit and inappropriate.

Mr Hegarty said that the Fitness to Practise Committee in May 2023 found the following Particulars of the Allegation proved:

That, whilst being registered under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (as amended), and whilst working as a Qualified Social Worker - Senior Practitioner for Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (employer): -

- | | |
|----|--|
| 1. | On or between 27 September 2020 and 9 November 2020, you exchanged explicit and inappropriate text messages with a Service User. |
| 2. | You sent an explicit and inappropriate image, which is dated 04 June 2020, to a Service User on a date unknown. |
| 3. | You sent five further explicit and inappropriate images to a Service User on dates unknown. |
| 4. | You sent three explicit and inappropriate videos to a Service User. |
| 5. | You conducted an inappropriate relationship with a Service User. |

And your actions as set out above show that your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your misconduct.

Mr Hegarty said that the Fitness to Practise Committee in May 2023 found the Registrant's fitness to practise to be currently impaired by reason of his misconduct on public protection and public interest grounds. Further, the Fitness to Practise Committee imposed a Suspension Order on the Registrant's registration for a period of two years.

Mr Hegarty told the Committee that following the fitness to practise hearing, the Council, on 12 June 2023, informed the Disclosure and Barring Service ('DBS') of the decision. He said that on 15 August 2023, the DBS advised the Council that from 31 July 2023, the Registrant had been barred from working with children and adults

in any regulated activity. Mr Hegarty said that the Registrant advised the Council that he had appealed the DBS decision and provided a copy of an appeal form, dated 02 October 2023.

Mr Hegarty referred the Committee to the Council's correspondence with the Registrant on 06 March 2025, requesting details as to whether he:

- fully appreciated the gravity of the concerns which had led to the finding of impairment and the imposition of the Suspension Order;
- had not repeated the behaviour which led to the finding of impairment;
- had taken steps to address the concerns raised by the Fitness to Practise Committee;
- had sought to maintain his knowledge and skills during his period of suspension; and
- would not place service users at risk if his practice was resumed.

Mr Hegarty noted that the Registrant did not respond to this correspondence. However, he referred the Committee to the recent submission from the Registrant, which he submitted did not present any meaningful evidence as regards the maintenance of the Registrant's skills and knowledge, or understanding of the gravity and impact of his misconduct. He submitted that the Registrant's reference to training courses does not relate to his misconduct, and that no references or testimonials have been received.

Mr Hegarty submitted that the Registrant's fitness to practise remains impaired. He said that the Registrant's submission focused on the impact of the Suspension Order on himself rather than the service user and the profession. He said that there was no evidence presented to show that the Registrant had addressed the concerns raised by the previous Committee.

In addition, Mr Hegarty confirmed to the Committee that other than the Registrant's references to counselling and GP attendances in his submission, there was no medical evidence received by the Council.

Registrant Submissions

The Registrant provided a written submission on the morning of the hearing for consideration by the Committee as follows:

'To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to you with deep sincerity regarding my current suspension. I fully acknowledge the seriousness of my actions that has led to this consideration and understand the paramount importance of maintaining public trust and upholding the ethical standards of the Social Work profession. Since this matter arose, I have dedicated myself wholeheartedly to a process of profound reflection, learning, and proactive change. I have worked tirelessly to not only understand the factors that contributed to this incident but, more importantly, to demonstrably evidence significant positive development in my practice and understanding. I am confident that a thorough review of the steps I have taken will clearly illustrate my unwavering commitment to the principles of Social Work and the tangible progress I have made. Therefore, I respectfully request that you carefully consider

the evidence of positive change I have diligently compiled and reconsider the proposed suspension from the professional register.

Building on my commitment to demonstrate positive change, I would now like to outline the specific efforts I have undertaken since my suspension. These actions reflect a deep engagement with the issues raised and a proactive approach to strengthening my professional practice. More importantly, I want to restore trust, and prove to the Council that they can be confident that such an incident would not occur again. I have taken steps to learn, grow, and reaffirm my dedication to the ethical standards of social work.

Following my suspension, and with a deep commitment to addressing the concerns raised, I reached out to the Fitness to Practice Officer. My intention was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the expectations that NISCC holds for practitioners in similar situations and to seek guidance on how best to demonstrate dedication to the principles and practice of social work. I also requested a meeting to explore specific areas of development or engagement that NISCC might suggest would be particularly relevant and beneficial in my case. While I fully appreciate the unique nature of each situation, my aim was to engage with any and all processes that would provide assurance of my ongoing fitness to practice. I accept that the Fitness to Practice Officer was unable to offer any guidance so I have tried to address all of the areas raised during my initial hearing.

During this time however, in July 2023 an article was published in a local newspaper of my case. The publication of this article had a devastating and far-reaching impact on my life. Professionally, it resulted in the immediate loss of my job, severing my livelihood and career prospects. Beyond this, the fallout extended into my personal life, fracturing cherished relationships with family and friends who struggled with the public scrutiny and the negative portrayal of me. The ensuing humiliation and distress were not mine alone to bear; my family also endured significant hardship and pain as a direct consequence of this article. The experience has been profoundly damaging, leaving a lasting scar on both my personal and professional life. While many people have been understanding, including former colleagues, I have still had no contact from some friends and have fractured relationships with some extended family members. Some of this was also due to my mental health at the time of the incident as I stopped speaking to people and stopped engaging with anything positive in my life at the time. From the article was published, I withdrew from my engagement with NISCC and the DBS. This was to focus on repairing relationships and finding employment.

Employment:

When I lost my job, I found work in the royal mail delivering post and have had several office jobs including a cemeteries office and working in the courts taking payments for fines. I continued to work relentlessly to obtain jobs to support my family. Finding a job was very difficult at times. There were occasions when I was successful in obtaining a permanent post but this was rescinded once I discussed my past.

I was able to work as a trainer with encompass, learning the new electronic system to then teach to others. This involved teaching the system to social care workers. At times this was very difficult, training people that I had at times worked alongside. At times people wouldnt speak to me and at other times politely acknowledged me.

Losing my job as a social worker has deeply impacted my sense of identity, as the profession was so intrinsically linked to how I defined myself and my contribution to the community. It wasn't merely an occupation; it was a vocation rooted in a desire to help others and uphold core social work values of social justice, respect for others, and professional integrity. Despite this loss, my commitment to these values remains the same. From all my temporary post following this, I still treat all individuals with dignity, advocating for fairness where possible, and striving to make a positive contribution, however that may now manifest.

Counselling:

In September 2023, I engaged in REDACTED, a process that has provided invaluable insights into the origins and patterns of my thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Through this therapeutic work, I have been able to explore my past experiences and how they have shaped my current self, fostering a deeper understanding of my core emotional needs and the maladaptive coping mechanisms I may have developed during that period of my life. A significant focus of these sessions has been on acquiring practical techniques for effectively managing stress and emotional upset. This has included the consistent practice of mindfulness and various breathing exercises to anchor myself in the present moment and regulate my emotional responses. I have utilized problem statements and goal setting to develop constructive strategies for dealing with issues. Understanding the neurobiological aspects of stress, particularly the concepts of the "old brain" and "new brain" and the activation of flight or fight responses, has provided a crucial framework for recognising and consciously intervening in these automatic reactions.

My participation REDACTED represents a proactive and sustained effort to address REDACTED and gain a clearer understanding of the factors that led to my suspension. By delving into my past and present patterns, and by actively learning and implementing techniques to manage stress and emotional dysregulation, I am committed to developing greater self-awareness and resilience. This therapeutic journey has equipped me with practical tools and a deeper understanding of my emotional landscape, directly addressing areas that may have been vulnerabilities in the past. My ongoing engagement in this process, I hope helps to demonstrate my sincere commitment to personal growth and to ensuring that I am better equipped to navigate future challenges in a healthy and responsible manner, thereby mitigating the risk of similar incidents occurring.

In addition to this, REDACTED.

Training courses:

I have tried to continue my learning in different areas in the hope that should I be allowed to practice again, that I continue my personal and professional development.

Belfast recovery college: *Stress management training session.*

Training for Encompass: *New software used by all Trusts which I then helped to train other health care professionals.*

Elearning through BSO: *Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety.*

NISCC learning resource centre: Mental Health Awareness in the Workplace for Managers (September 2024).
The aim of the course was to help notice, where possible, changes that might indicate that someone is experiencing stress or poor mental health and what these changes might look like.

Mental Health: relates to thinking, feeling, and acting. It controls the management of day-to-day life and stressful situations.

I also attended a conference on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls in March 2025. The conference discussed the topic 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework', which looks at a whole range of gender-based violence, abuse and harm which is disproportionately experienced by women and girls, and which is rooted in gender inequality. During this session I also asked a question to the panel on what men can do to proactively help this issue. They discussed how it's crucial for men to actively participate in ending violence against women and girls. For example, speaking out against sexism and misogyny, question rigid gender roles and stereotypes, reflect on my own behaviours. Men must educate ourselves, amplify women's voices and very importantly for myself to teach the next generation.

After my initial contact with DBS and asking for an appeal, I stopped engaging due to my focus being on my family, trying to restore friendships and to ensure I have always had a job to continue to support my family. I am now determined to appeal the DBS decision and have the decision overturned. I have spoken to my solicitor and will be appealing their decision. As the DBS decision was made without any involvement from me (I did not engage with them or give any statements etc), I want the opportunity to prove I am trustworthy and should be allowed to move on from this isolated time in my life.

Thank you for your time.'

Decision on Current Fitness to Practise

The Committee heard and accepted the legal advice from the Legal Adviser. She referred the Committee to the case of CHRE v NMC and Grant. She referred the Committee to Paragraph 33 of Schedule 2 of the Rules. She reminded the Committee that it was not to review the findings made by the Fitness to Practise Committee which made the original Order, but was instead required to conduct a review of the evidence before the Committee today, and to exercise its independent judgement as to whether the Registrant remains currently impaired. She advised the Committee that it should consider any evidence or information to show that the Registrant has demonstrated remediation or insight. The Committee was reminded that it is assessing current impairment and was required to take into account any evidence of remediation, insight and risk of repetition. The Committee was also reminded of the need to take account of the wider public interest, which includes upholding standards and maintaining confidence in the regulatory process.

The Committee gave careful consideration to the submission from Mr Hegarty on behalf of the Council, the Registrant's submission and all of the documentary evidence. The Committee reminded itself that impaired fitness to practise describes those circumstances which call into question the suitability of a registrant to remain

on the Register, or to be registered at all. In that regard, the Committee noted the findings made by the Fitness to Practise Committee on 31 May 2023, in relation to the question of the Registrant's current impairment. That Committee stated as follows:

The Committee first considered whether the Registrant's misconduct was capable of remedy. In principle, with evidence of full insight and remediation, the Committee accepted that the type of misconduct in which the Registrant had engaged was capable of remedy.

The Committee next considered whether, in fact, the Registrant had remedied his misconduct. The Committee had careful regard to the Registrant's evidence. It was clear that the Registrant understood the very serious nature of the misconduct in which he had engaged. He recognised that his actions had caused harm to the service user and had the potential to undermine the public interest, which included the need to maintain proper standards and the reputation of the social work profession. There was also some evidence that the Registrant was seeking appropriate REDACTED and was now operating within a more positive and supportive environment. Taking these factors into consideration, the Committee concluded that the Registrant had demonstrated some evidence of insight into the gravity of his misconduct. However, whilst he was seeking REDACTED, the Committee noted that the Registrant had provided written submissions only after the substantive hearing had commenced. The Committee concluded that, whilst insightful, the Registrant's insight was still developing.

The Committee also carefully considered the risk of repetition of the Registrant's misconduct. The Committee noted the Registrant's limited insight, and that for a considerable period he had not been in a busy or stressful working environment. He had spent the last year and a half with his daughter and benefiting from appropriate REDACTED. On that basis, the Committee could not be sure that if confronted with similar stressful circumstances in the future, the Registrant would not repeat his misconduct. Accordingly, the Committee was of the view that there was a real risk of repetition in this case.

The Committee concluded that a finding of current impairment of the Registrant's fitness to practise was needed to protect the public in general, and service users in particular.

The Committee also considered the public interest, which included public protection but also comprised broader concepts such as the need to declare and uphold proper standards of conduct and maintain the reputation of the social work profession. Having regard to the seriousness of the misconduct established in this case, the Committee was of the view that a failure to make a finding of current impairment of the Registrant's fitness to practise would undermine the public's trust and confidence in the social work profession. Further, not to make a finding of current impairment on public interest grounds would also fail to declare and uphold proper standards of conduct in the social work profession.

The Committee concluded that a finding of current impairment of the Registrant's fitness to practise was required in order to uphold and protect the public interest.

For these reasons, the Committee has decided, on public protection and public interest grounds, that the Registrant's fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of his misconduct.

The Committee gave full consideration to the previous Committee's decision of 31 May 2023, and exercised its own independent judgment in relation to whether the Registrant's fitness to practise remains currently impaired. The Committee took into account the context of the Registrant's misconduct and the Agreed Statement of Facts presented at the previous hearing. However, the Committee confined its consideration at this stage to current impairment arising from the Registrant's misconduct.

The Committee considered that the Registrant's misconduct was very serious, involving an inappropriate relationship with a service user for whom the Registrant was providing care in his role as social worker. In considering the Registrant's written submission, the Committee did not find sufficient evidence as regards the Registrant's appreciation of the seriousness of his misconduct and its impact on the service user, her family, the wider profession and the general public. In relation to insight, the Committee gave careful consideration to the Registrant's submission, which contained details as regards the impact of the Suspension Order on his life. It is the view of the Committee that the submission failed to give sufficient recognition, or any insight, into the seriousness of his misconduct and how this could be avoided in the future.

The Committee took into account the Registrant's information as regards to counselling. However, it had insufficient evidence to demonstrate that he has remediated his misconduct, nor any evidence to reassure it that the misconduct would not be repeated in the future. The Committee noted that the Registrant failed to address his ability to work in a stressful environment. Although the Registrant provided details of courses and training that he has undertaken, the Committee did not consider these to be targeted to the Registrant's misconduct.

The Committee, in the absence of evidence of sufficient insight and remediation, also concluded that it was necessary to make a finding of current impairment on public interest grounds. The Committee considered that a failure to make such a finding in circumstances such as these, in which the Registrant had failed to put before the Committee evidence of insight and remediation, would fail to declare and uphold proper standards and would undermine the public's trust and confidence in the social care workforce. The Committee noted that the Registrant remains in breach of the same standards as found by the previous Committee.

For these reasons, the Committee found that the Registrant's fitness to practise remains impaired.

Sanction

Having found that the Registrant's fitness to practise remains impaired, the Committee then considered what sanction it should impose. The Committee noted the powers as set out in Paragraph 33 (8) of Schedule 2 of the Rules, and took into consideration the NISCC Indicative Sanctions and Use of Interim Orders: Guidance for Fitness to Practise Committees 2017 ('the Guidance'), bearing in mind that the decision on sanction is one for the Committee's independent judgement.

Mr Hegarty told the Committee that it was the Council's position that the Suspension Order should not be allowed to lapse, and that a Conditions of Practice Order would be insufficient in the circumstances and would not protect the public or be in the public interest. He said that the Registrant is barred from working with adults and children, and that it would therefore be an offence for the Registrant to do so. He submitted that, in light of the Registrant's barring status and the absence of evidence of insight and remediation, he would invite the Committee to consider imposing a Removal Order on the Registrant's registration.

Mr Hegarty noted that the original Suspension Order was imposed two years ago, and the Registrant has had more than enough time to demonstrate sufficient insight and has failed to do so. He noted that the previous Committee stated that *'a future reviewing Committee would be assisted by the Registrant providing medical evidence to demonstrate his remediation and ability to cope appropriately in a stressful working environment. Any such review would also be assisted by a written reflection undertaken by the Registrant in relation to the seriousness of the misconduct in this case, and steps put in place by the Registrant to prevent repetition'*. Mr Hegarty said that the Council does not consider that the Registrant's recent submission sufficiently demonstrates full insight or provides sufficient medical evidence as suggested by the previous Committee.

Mr Hegarty submitted that the Registrant had been afforded more than enough time to address the deficiencies in his practice and his misconduct and that, therefore, an extension of the Suspension Order would neither be appropriate or proportionate. In all of the circumstances, he submitted that the appropriate sanction was one of removal. He further submitted that a Removal Order would be the only sanction which would sufficiently address the severity of the concerns arising from the Registrant's misconduct, along with maintaining public confidence in the Council as a regulator.

The Committee heard and accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. She referred the Committee to its powers as set out at Paragraph 33 (8) of Schedule 2 of the Rules. The Committee, in addition to the powers set out in this Paragraph, may allow the Suspension Order to run its course and expire on 30 May 2025.

The Committee took into account the need to act proportionately, and that the purpose of sanction is not punitive. Taking into account the findings of the Fitness to Practise Committee which made the original Order as regards the Registrant's serious misconduct and the risks identified above, the Committee did not consider it appropriate to allow this Order to expire.

The Committee noted the findings of the Fitness to Practise Committee which made the original Order on 31 May 2023 and, in particular, its recommendations that any review hearing would be assisted by the Registrant providing medical evidence to demonstrate his remediation and ability to cope appropriately in a stressful working environment. The previous Committee also recommended that any such review would also be assisted by a written reflection undertaken by the Registrant in relation to the seriousness of the misconduct in this case, and steps put in place by him to prevent repetition.

The Committee considered, and took into account, the mitigating and aggravating factors which the previous Committee had considered when making the original Order. The Registrant has not availed of the time since the

Suspension Order was put in place to provide evidence of full insight and remediation, despite being requested to do so by the Council. The Registrant failed to provide this Committee with any independent and verifiable evidence in relation to any medical treatment or training relevant to his misconduct. The Committee took into account that subsequent to the imposition of the Suspension Order, the DBS confirmed that the Registrant has been barred from working in any regulated activity with children and adults, from 31 July 2023.

Conditions of Practice Order – the Committee first considered whether to impose a Conditions of Practice Order to commence on the expiry of the current Suspension Order on 31 May 2025. As referred to above, the Committee noted that the Registrant has been included on the Barred Lists for Adults and Children and, therefore, that it would be an offence for the Registrant to work with children and vulnerable adults. The Committee noted that the Registrant stated that he has appealed the DBS decision, but has failed to update the Council regarding the status of his appeal despite repeated requests from the Council for an update. In all of the circumstances, conditions of practice would not be workable or enforceable.

Suspension Order - the Committee next considered imposing a further Suspension Order to take effect at the expiry of the existing Order. The Committee considered that the Registrant's misconduct and impairment was very serious. The Committee considered that the Registrant's misconduct, if repeated, has the potential to cause harm to vulnerable service users. The previous Committee stated the following as regards the sanction of suspension:

'by a narrow margin, the Committee decided that the Registrant's conduct, while extremely serious, was not such as to be fundamentally incompatible with continuing to be a registered as a social worker. The Committee was of the view that a Suspension Order would properly mark the seriousness of the Registrant's failings. In addition, a Suspension Order would convey a clear public message to the Registrant, the social work profession and the public as to the importance of adhering to fundamental standards of professional conduct at all times in the future.'

The Committee noted that the period of suspension was designed to provide the Registrant with the opportunity to reflect on his conduct, fully develop insight and to ensure that the misconduct would not be repeated in the future. However, the Registrant has not provided evidence of any sufficient insight or steps which he has taken since his suspension to address his misconduct, or to assure this Committee that there would be no repetition. Accordingly, the Committee saw no useful basis upon which to impose a further Suspension Order, as there was nothing to suggest that the Registrant would take any action to resolve or remedy the cause of his misconduct during a further period of suspension, having already had two years in which to take action.

Removal Order – after careful deliberation, the Committee determined to revoke the Suspension Order and impose a Removal Order in accordance with Paragraph 33 (8) (h) of Schedule 2 of the Rules. The Committee concluded that removal from the Register was the only appropriate and proportionate sanction. The Committee concluded that the Registrant's conduct, compounded by his lack of full insight and remediation, is fundamentally incompatible with his remaining on the Register as a registered social worker. The Registrant's misconduct

constituted a serious departure from the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers, and involved a serious abuse of a position of trust whilst caring for a vulnerable service user and their family. The Committee further concluded that to impose any lesser sanction would fail to protect the public, would fail to declare proper standards of conduct and would seriously undermine the public's trust and confidence in the social work profession.

The Committee considered the potential devastating impact of a Removal Order on the Registrant, but concluded that public safety and the public interest outweigh the impact on the Registrant.

The Committee determined that a Removal Order was a suitable, appropriate and proportionate sanction, which will be imposed on the Registrant's registration with immediate effect.

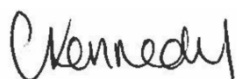
You have the right to appeal this decision to the Care Tribunal. Any appeal must be lodged in writing within 28 days from the date of this Notice of Decision.

You should note that the Fitness to Practise Committee's decision takes effect from the date upon which it was made.

The effect of this decision is that your entry in the Register has been removed.

It is compulsory for all qualified social workers to be registered with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council in order to work. If you practise as a qualified social worker, you will be guilty of an offence pursuant to Article 8 of the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. Article 8 states that if a person who is not registered as a social worker in any relevant Register takes or uses the title of social worker or any description implying that s/he is registered as a social worker, or in any way holds him/herself out as registered, s/he is guilty of an offence.

In accordance with Schedule 3, Paragraph 9 of the NISCC Fitness to Practise Rules, you may not apply to be restored to the Register within five years from the date of removal. This does not affect your right to appeal the Committee's decision to the Care Tribunal. You are prohibited from working in a social care role until a successful application for restoration onto the Register has been made to the Council.



07 May 2025

Hearings Officer
(Clerk to the Fitness to Practise Committee)

Date