



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

REDACTED

Name: Ailish Maire Griffin

SCR No: 6008669

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT the Fitness to Practise Committee of the Northern Ireland Social Care Council, at its meeting on **10 November 2025**, made the following decision about your registration with the Northern Ireland Social Care Council:

The Committee found the facts proved;

The Committee found that your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your inclusion on a list maintained by the Disclosure and Barring Service;

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

Particulars of the Allegation:

That, whilst being registered as a social worker under the Health and Personal Social Services Act (Northern Ireland) 2001 (as amended):	
1.	On 17 th May 2022, the Disclosure and Barring Service included your name in the Children's Barred List using barring powers as defined in Schedule 1 of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 (SVGO);
2.	On 17 th May 2022, the Disclosure and Barring Service included your name in the Adults' Barred List using barring powers as defined Schedule 1 of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007 (SVGO).
And on the basis of the decisions of the Disclosure and Barring Service, as set out at 1 and 2 above, your fitness to practise is impaired by reason of your inclusion on the barred lists maintained by the Disclosure and Barring Service as per Rule 4(1) (f) of the Fitness to Practise (Amendment) Rules 2019.	

Procedure

The hearing was held under the fitness to practise procedure.

Preliminary Issues

The fitness to practise hearing was held at the Northern Ireland Social Care Council ('the Council') offices at James House, Belfast. The Registrant was in attendance, and was represented by Mr Michael O'Brien, Barrister, instructed by John Fahy and Co Solicitors. The Council was represented by Ms Sinead Owens, Solicitor, Directorate of Legal Services.

Declarations of Conflict of Interest

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

Application to Admit Hearing Bundle

The Committee accepted the hearing bundle into evidence, and marked it as Exhibit 1.

Findings of Fact

Mr O'Brien told the Committee that, on the basis of the Registrant's inclusion on the barred lists maintained by the Disclosure and Barring Service ('DBS'), the Registrant admitted the facts as set out in the Particulars of the Allegation.

Ms Owens provided the Committee with a background of the case. She said that the Registrant is registered on Part 1 of the Register.

Ms Owens told the Committee that this case first came to the Council's attention by way of Employer Referral Form ('ERF') from Ms Katie Lavery, Principal Social Worker for Residential Childcare, Western Health and Social Care Trust ('the Trust'). Ms Owens referred the Committee to the content of the ERF, and said that the concerns related to disclosure of confidential information to a third party and the Registrant leaving her place of work during a shift at a care home.

Ms Owens referred the Committee to the Final Decision letter as provided by the DBS, informing the Council that the Registrant had been barred from working with children and vulnerable adults as of 17 May 2022.

Ms Owens referred the Committee to Paragraph 12 of Schedule 2 of the Rules, and submitted that the Registrant had not provided any evidence as set out at Paragraph 12 (7) to prove that she is not the person named in the correspondence from the DBS, nor had she provided any evidence to show that she had appealed her current DBS status.

Ms Owens submitted that the correspondence from the DBS should be regarded as *prima facie* evidence with regards to the Registrant's current DBS status. She, therefore, invited the Committee to find that the facts had been proved on the balance of probabilities.

On the basis of the admissions, the Committee found the facts as set out at paragraphs 1 and 2 of the Particulars of the Allegation proved.

Fitness to Practise

Ms Owens submitted to the Committee that the Registrant's inclusion on both DBS lists was evidence of impaired fitness to practise. She submitted that being banned from working with children and vulnerable adults falls far below the standards to be expected of a social worker. As a consequence, Ms Owens submitted that it was appropriate to make a finding of current impairment to protect the public and to uphold the public interest, and she submitted that the Registrant breached the following provisions of the Standards of Conduct and Practice for Social Workers ('the Standards'): 1 – 1.8, 2 – 2.4, 2.6, 2.7, 5 – 5.1, 5.3, and 5.8.

Ms Owens referenced that there had been no evidence of remorse, insight or remediation. She said that there is a risk of repetition. She also said that it would be a criminal offence for the Registrant to work in a regulated activity whilst on the barred lists, and that this was relevant when considering the public interest.

Mr O'Brien said that the Committee could make a decision that the Registrant's fitness to practise is impaired on public interest grounds, pursuant to her inclusion on the barring lists. However, he said that her inclusion on the lists should not be taken as evidence of the underlying reasons for the DBS decision. He further said that the Registrant left her place of work to attend to [REDACTED] at home. Mr O'Brien said that the Registrant denied disclosing any confidential information. He told the Committee that the Registrant had initially engaged with an investigation by the Trust. He said that she had admitted some matters and denied others. He said that the Trust investigation did not reach a formal conclusion. Mr O'Brien told the Committee that the Registrant did not engage with the DBS investigation. He said that the allegations had been made by a former partner, with whom the Registrant had been [REDACTED]. He said that the allegations had formed part of [REDACTED] the Registrant.

The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. He referred the Committee to the provisions of Paragraph 24 (3) of Schedule 2 of the Rules. He specifically referred the Committee to the wording of Paragraph 12 (5) – (7) of Schedule 2. He said that the Committee was entitled and obliged to have regard to the underlying facts when considering the DBS decision.

The Committee, in considering the issue of impairment of fitness to practise, took account of Paragraph 24 (3) of Schedule 2 of the Rules, which states that it should have regard to:

- (a) whether it is satisfied as to the reason for the alleged impairment of fitness to practise;
- (b) the Standards of Conduct and Practice issued by the Council under Section 9 of the Act;
- (c) whether the impairment is capable of remediation;
- (d) whether the impairment has been remediated;
- (e) the risk of repetition; and
- (f) the public interest.

The Committee considered the Registrant's inclusion on the DBS Barred Lists, and the events leading to this, to be serious. The final decision made by the DBS, on 17 May 2022, provides detailed information as regards the concerns raised against the Registrant, which resulted in the decision of the DBS to include the Registrant in the applicable barred lists.

In particular, the Committee noted the reasons provided by the DBS in its letter confirming the Registrant's barred status. The letter stated as follows:

'We have considered all the information we hold and are satisfied of the following:

- *That between December 2019 and January 2020 you disclosed confidential information, to your partner, relating to 'looked after' children whom were in your care.*
- *That on 10/01/2020 you left your shift at a children's home on two occasions leaving the home understaffed*

Having considered this, DBS is satisfied you engaged in relevant conduct in relation to children. This is because you have engaged in conduct which endangered a child or was likely to endanger a child.

It is also considered that you have engaged in relevant conduct in relation to vulnerable adults, specifically conduct which, if repeated against or in relation to a vulnerable adult, would endanger that vulnerable adult or would be likely to endanger him or her.

We are satisfied a barring decision is appropriate. This is because we are satisfied that you disclosed extremely confidential information to a man you dated for a matter of weeks including names and offences they may have committed. This potentially could have placed them in danger, you denied doing this and therefore have not demonstrated any acknowledgement or insight into how harmful your behaviour was.

We are also satisfied that you left your shift on two occasions during the same night shift thus placing the home short staffed and one member of staff alone. Whilst this is potentially neglectful behaviour it has been acknowledged that you were placed under an extreme set of circumstances in that the person looking after your children had let you down and you could not leave your children home alone. However, it appears you did not follow procedures, you left a carer alone at the children's home and there were also two children missing at the time.

You have continued to deny your behaviour, have not acknowledged it or demonstrated any insight into how harmful it could be disclosing such confidential information regarding the children. If you were to continue to work in regulated activity with children it is likely that you would have access to confidential information that should not be shared.

Considering the lack of acknowledgement demonstrated by you and the fact you have openly discussed the children with your then partner, the DBS cannot be assured that you would not repeat this behaviour. Therefore it is appropriate to include you on the Children's Barred List.

Whilst the behaviour did not occur in an adults regulated activity setting, we are concerned regarding you working with vulnerable adults. It is not fanciful to suggest that you would have access to confidential information regarding the vulnerable adults in your care, the DBS also cannot be assured that you would not repeat your behaviour therefore, it is also appropriate to be include you on the Adults' Barred List.' [sic]

It was clear to the Committee that the DBS had made findings of fact that the Registrant had disclosed confidential information to her partner relating to 'looked after' children who were in her care, between December 2019 and January 2020; and that she left her shift at a children's home on two occasions, on 10 January 2020, leaving the said home understaffed.

The Committee noted the submissions made by Mr O'Brien on the Registrant's behalf. It specifically noted that no evidence, either documentary or oral, had been put before the Committee in respect of remorse, insight or remediation.

The Committee took the view that the DBS decision was based on findings of fact related to the Registrant's disclosure of confidential information and the Registrant leaving her place of work whilst on shift. The Committee considered the DBS to be a credible and reliable source of evidence. It noted that the DBS decision was consistent with the evidence contained within the ERF. Therefore, the Committee had no basis, nor was there any evidence before it, which would refute the underlying findings of fact as contained within the DBS correspondence.

The Committee was satisfied that the reason for the alleged impairment related to the Registrant's inclusion on a list maintained by the DBS, as per Rule 4 (1) (f).

When considering the Registrant's actions, the Committee had regard to the Standards and the Council guidance entitled 'Making a Determination of Impaired Fitness to Practise: Guidance for Committees on Remediation' ('the Guidance'). By disclosing confidential information and by leaving her place of work during a shift, the Committee was satisfied that the following Standards of Conduct had been breached by the Registrant:

Standard 1: As a social worker, you must protect the rights and promote the interests and wellbeing of service users and carers. This includes:

1.8 Respecting and maintaining the dignity and privacy of service users.

Standard 2: As a social worker, you must strive to establish and maintain the trust and confidence of service users and carers. This includes:

2.4 Respecting confidential information and clearly explaining agency policies about confidentiality to service users and carers;

2.6 Being reliable and dependable; and

2.7 Honouring work commitments, agreements and arrangements and, when it is not possible to do so, explaining why to service users and carers.

Standard 5: As a social worker, you must uphold public trust and confidence in social work services. In particular you must not:

- 5.1 Abuse, neglect or harm service users, carers or colleagues;
- 5.3 Abuse the trust of service users and carers or the access you have to personal information about them or to their property, home or workplace; or
- 5.8 Behave in a way, in work or outside work, which would call into question your suitability to work in social care services.

The Committee considered whether the Registrant's actions are capable of remedy. The Committee considered that remediation in these circumstances, whilst possible, would be difficult and may require a successful appeal of the DBS decision. There was no evidence of any such appeal. There was also no evidence of any insight or remorse by the Registrant into the seriousness of her behaviour. Similarly, there was no evidence of remediation. The Committee, therefore, determined that there is a risk of repetition in respect of the behaviour which gave rise to the DBS decision.

The Committee also decided that a finding of current impairment was in the public interest. The Committee found that the Registrant's inclusion on the DBS lists has the potential to undermine public trust and confidence in the system of registration. The Committee decided that a finding of current impairment on public interest grounds was also required to uphold proper standards of conduct in the social work profession, and to uphold the public's trust and confidence in the profession. In addition, the Committee accepted that the Registrant is currently unable to work in social care by reason of the DBS decision to include her on the barred lists, and that it would be a criminal offence to do so. Accordingly, the Committee considered that a finding of current impairment was needed to protect the public.

For these reasons, the Committee concluded that the Registrant's fitness to practise is currently impaired by reason of her inclusion on the barred lists maintained by the DBS.

Sanction

The Committee heard a submission from Ms Owens on the question of what, if any, sanction to impose. Ms Owens said that, because of the decision of the DBS to include the Registrant on both barred lists, to impose no sanction or a Warning would not be appropriate or proportionate. She also said that to impose a Conditions of Practice Order would not be workable. Ms Owens said that a Suspension Order may be suitable in cases where there has been an acknowledgement of failings and if the Committee had assurances that actions would not be repeated. Ms Owens submitted that, in all of the circumstances, the only appropriate sanction to impose was a Removal Order.

The Committee heard a brief submission from Mr O'Brien on behalf of the Registrant. Mr O'Brien reminded the Committee that any sanction should not be a punishment. He further said that the risk of repetition of the reported behaviour is '*minimal*'. He also said that the Committee should consider a sanction less than a Removal

Order and highlighted that the Registrant has not practised for five years, nor does she intend to practise at present.

The Committee heard and accepted the Legal Adviser's advice. He referenced the range of available sanctions, which are provided for by Paragraph 26 of Schedule 2 of the Rules. In summary, the Committee could impose no sanction, warn the Registrant for a period of up to five years, make a Conditions of Practice Order not to exceed three years, make a Suspension Order not to exceed two years or make a Removal Order. The Committee was reminded that the purpose of a sanction is not to be punitive, although a sanction may have a punitive effect. Instead, in its consideration of a sanction, the Committee should have at the forefront of its mind the need to protect the public and the public interest. The Legal Adviser also reminded the Committee that it should act proportionately, and that any measure taken to limit the fundamental right of the Registrant to practise in the social care setting should be no more than what is necessary in the public interest.

The Committee carefully considered all of the available documentary material, together with submissions from Ms Owens and Mr O'Brien. It also had careful regard to the Guidance.

The Committee considered the mitigating and aggravating factors in this case.

The Committee considered the mitigating factors to be as follows:

- There was no regulatory history in respect of the Registrant.

The Committee considered the aggravating factors to be as follows:

- The behaviour giving rise to the DBS decision involved children; and
- The Registrant is on the DBS barred lists for both children and vulnerable persons.

The Committee considered the Registrant's inclusion on the DBS lists, and the underlying reasons, to be serious matters. The evidence confirms that the Registrant's behaviour fell well short of the expected standards. The Committee considers that a risk of repetition remains. The Registrant's inclusion on the barred lists, and her underlying behaviour, significantly damages the public interest in maintaining confidence in social care services.

Having balanced the aggravating and mitigating factors, and taking into account the interests of public protection and the public interest, the Committee was satisfied that some form of sanction was necessary, and proceeded to consider which sanction to apply in this case.

No Sanction – the Committee had no hesitation in concluding that it would be neither appropriate nor proportionate if no sanction were imposed in this case. In the view of the Committee, if no sanction were imposed, this would not mark the seriousness of the issues or meet the public interest in this case.

Warning – the Committee considered whether to impose a Warning in this case. Having regard to its findings, the Committee considered that such a step would be inadequate to protect the public, would fail to uphold the public interest, and would permit the Registrant to work unrestricted in a social work setting.

Conditions of Practice Order – the Committee next considered a Conditions of Practice Order. The Registrant has been included on the DBS barred lists, which makes it a criminal offence for her to work with children and vulnerable adults. Therefore, the Committee could not formulate any workable, enforceable or verifiable conditions in light of the Registrant's barred status.

Suspension Order – the Committee next considered a Suspension Order. The Committee noted that it had made findings at the fact and impairment stage of the proceedings which were of a serious nature. The Registrant has provided no evidence of insight, nor has she submitted evidence of regret, remorse or remediation, and there is a risk of repetition. The Committee noted that the Registrant is prohibited from working in any regulated activity due to the DBS decision to include her on the Adults' and Children's barred lists.

The Committee considered that, in all of the circumstances, a Suspension Order would be inappropriate and disproportionate to the risk from which the Committee is seeking to protect the public. In addition, the Committee considered that a period of suspension would not meet the high public interest, nor take account of the Registrant being included on the DBS lists.

Removal Order – the Committee, therefore, decided to impose a Removal Order. In so doing, the Committee took into account the Guidance at Paragraphs 4.26 – 4.28.

The Committee considered that public confidence in the social work profession, including the Council as its regulator, would be undermined if a social worker, such as the Registrant, who was barred from working with children and vulnerable adults, was allowed to remain on the Register. The Committee considered that the Registrant's inclusion on DBS lists is evidence of a serious departure from the professional standards expected of a social worker. Whilst there was no evidence put before the Committee, it took account of the inevitable negative impact of a Removal Order on the Registrant. In the Committee's view, this is outweighed by the serious nature of the concerns raised against her, together with the Registrant's lack of insight and remorse, and her ongoing inclusion on the DBS barred lists. The Committee considered that any sanction short of a Removal Order would fail to declare and uphold proper standards of conduct and behaviour, and would fail to maintain the reputation of the social work profession.

The Committee decided, in order to protect the public and in the public interest, to make a Removal Order, with immediate effect, in respect of the Registrant's registration. The Committee also directed that the Interim Suspension Order currently in place should be revoked with immediate effect.

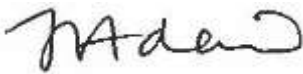
You have the right to appeal this decision to the Care Tribunal. Any appeal must be lodged in writing within 28 days from the date of this Notice of Decision.

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.



14 November 2025

Hearings Officer
(Clerk to the Fitness to Practise Committee)

Date