



The Principal Social Worker (PSW) Network welcomes the opportunity to respond to Social Work England's consultation on proposed fee increases and look forward to engaging with Social Work England on this proposal. As a collective of Principal Social Workers, we are deeply concerned about the potential adverse impact these increases will have on the profession, particularly in the current economic climate.

### **Key concerns**

#### **Financial hardship amid the cost-of-living crisis**

Social workers are already facing significant financial pressures due to the ongoing cost of living crisis which makes any additional financial burden particularly difficult to manage. An increase in registration fees adds to this strain and may disproportionately impact lower-paid social workers. For social workers who rely on tax credits or Universal Credit due to lower earnings, a rise in registration fees could have unintended consequences. A higher annual fee could mean the difference between financial stability and hardship, particularly for those working part-time, in the voluntary sector, or those with caring responsibilities.

#### **Local authorities' financial situation**

Unlike some regulated professions where employers routinely cover registration costs, not all local authorities reimburse social workers for these fees. This results in an inequitable system where some social workers bear the financial burden personally, while others receive employer support. With many local authorities struggling with severe financial deficits, leading to budget cuts there is a risk that more LAs will cease reimbursing these fees.

#### **Impact on retention and workforce stability**

At a time when recruitment and retention of social workers are at crisis levels, an increase in fees risks exacerbating workforce instability. Social workers already experience high levels of stress and burnout, with financial pressures adding to their reasons for leaving the profession. A fee increase could further deter new entrants and push experienced practitioners out of the workforce.

**Commitment to continued engagement**

The PSW Network is committed to working with Social Work England to explore alternative solutions that support the financial sustainability of regulation without disproportionately impacting social workers. We would welcome a dialogue with Social Work England to:

- Ensure that any increase is proportionate, phased, and justified with clear evidence of improved regulatory functions.
- Engage stakeholders across the sector to consider a universal reimbursement of fees.
- Explore alternative funding models that do not place the burden solely on individual registrants.

We look forward to continuing to work with Social Work England on this critical issue to ensure a fair and sustainable approach that supports social workers and the profession as a whole.