

Local authority case study:

What can significant childminder support deliver for local authorities today?

A deep dive into the childminder support contract delivered in Cambridgeshire.



School-aged children in a Cambridgeshire childminder wraparound setting

Introduction

In Cambridgeshire, Coram PACEY (formerly PACEY) has held the contract to deliver childminding support services for over 24 years and has to tender at every renewal. This contract includes work to recruit new childminders in the area, provide extensive pre-registration support and ongoing childminder retention support. The Cambridgeshire team also support other home-based childcare professionals such as nannies and wraparound providers.

In a challenging climate for childminders where we continue to see a decline in numbers nationally, why has this support worked so well for the local authority and childminders in their area for the last 24 years, and what can we learn from their approach?

Context

In Cambridgeshire, there are (at the time of writing) 410 childminders with 302 childminders delivering funding entitlement sessions to 1132 children this term.

The team that delivers the contract and supports these 410 childminders consists of one Service Manager and four Development Officers. They are there to support all childminders, whether they are Ofsted-registered or work with a childminding agency, and whether they are members of Coram PACEY or not. The contract requires contact with 100% of childminders in every year of the contract, and this has always been achieved, ensuring that childminders do not feel isolated or unsure where to access support.

Meet the team:



Left to right: Alison Mooney (Development Officer), Carol Grange (Development Officer) Caroline Maryon (Service Manager), Deborah Townsend (Development Officer), Elaine Baker (Development Officer).

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So, what are the key areas of support the team focus on?

Recruitment strategy

A large part of the team's work involves executing a recruitment strategy by first identifying areas of need and working with partners, groups of childminders and family audiences to promote and recruit prospective childminders.

This includes:

- Social media campaigns using the children and family centre contacts, as well as Barnardo's contacts
- Networking with online groups set up by childminders
- Sending information to Jobcentre Plus leads and family liaison officers for the forces
- Using registered childminders in their areas to share marketing collateral on their own social pages
- Sending information to schools to include in their parent communications

The team also have termly meetings with the 0-25 Places Planning team to look at recruitment campaigns including visiting local toddler groups, sending information to local house builders for inclusion in new homeowner packs, speaking to specific schools and children and family centres.

All this work to recruit new childminders to the profession is only beneficial when there is adequate support and structure in place, all the way through pre-registration training, Ofsted registration and beyond.



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How do the team see this through?

Pre-registration support

The Cambridgeshire team are heavily involved in ensuring prospective childminders are aware, prepared and committed.

All childminders registering in Cambridgeshire attend a two-hour pre-registration session PLUS four two-hour 'Ready to mind' sessions. The 'Ready to mind' sessions cover all aspects that prospective childminders need to start their childminding career, including SEND, Child Protection, Observation and Assessment and running a childminding business. This is a significant time commitment but has proven to ensure that prospective childminders are prepared to start their childminding career with both the national and local knowledge they will need.

These childminders are then supported through setting up their new childminding business, and all receive a visit prior to their first graded inspection. This is a commitment beyond what many local authorities do but vital in ensuring that they have everything in place for their childminding business. As a result they feel supported, less isolated and they are clear of what to expect from their first graded inspection.

The team plan this visit when the first children arrive in the setting and gift a welcome pack providing all the information they may need in the early stages of their childminding journey.

2 / 250

Only 2 first graded inspections out of 250 in the last 3 years have received a less than 'good' or 'outstanding' judgement by Ofsted.

46

Cambridgeshire have seen 46 new childminders registering since January 2024 contributing to the number of childminders in their area remaining consistent, instead of the decline we see nationally.

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How do Cambridgeshire retain these skilled and passionate childminders throughout their careers?

Ongoing retention

The contract requires contact with 100% of childminders in every year of the contract. This has always been achieved, ensuring that childminders do not feel isolated and know where to access support. It is evident that this 1-2-1 contact and 'checking in' makes a difference.

Childminders are offered support for all manner of things – including ideas to advertise their setting to fill spaces, early years funding support and using the funding portal, safeguarding, training, business support, Holiday and Food programme referrals and access to grants, including for wraparound childcare.

Additional retention initiatives include:

- Support for childminders working with SEND children – including their own SEND training, telephone and/or visit support and signposting to SEN services or other professionals.
- Monthly newsletter sent to all childminders
- Intervention – intensive support from dedicated support officer. Contact within 24 hours is made, then a support programme designed around the issues raised by Ofsted or LADO.



As of June 2025, 19% of Cambridgeshire childminders received an Ofsted 'Outstanding' judgement versus the national average of 12%.

Wraparound

Most recently, the Coram PACEY team has been working on behalf of the local authority to support the National Wraparound Childcare Programme.

They identified the need for increased wraparound provision in the centre of Wisbech and were tasked with finding a childminder who would develop their business to offer wraparound places or increase existing wraparound provision. They identified a provider who was prepared to take on an assistant and start to offer wraparound places for the first time.

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They supported her with taking on her assistant and she started providing wraparound onsite at the local school at the beginning of September 2025. This model has complimented other wraparound provision in that area - the school also applied for funding to increase their wraparound provision after a panel discussion decided that parental choice was important and there was room and demand for both wraparound settings in the town.

Nannies

Whilst there is no specific requirement within the contract to support nannies at present, the team are instrumental in supporting nannies that require further support following Ofsted inspections.

Feedback from Cambridgeshire local authority

"Our contract with Coram PACEY is more than a contract, it is a partnership that is vital to supporting a balanced childcare market to provide choice and flexibility for parents and carers. Coram PACEY team members are part of our whole service team and this brings us great insight into this unique and very important part of the sector.

We value the relationship with the team and benefit from their specialist knowledge, the work we do together is fully integrated and this has a positive impact on childminders in Cambridgeshire.

This collaboration underpins our priority of inclusion for all children and our ambition that all children can thrive."

Annette Brooker, Head of Early Years, Childcare and School Readiness Service- Cambridgeshire



Summary

Nationally, childminder numbers are slowly declining. We know that significant childminder support as evidenced in Cambridgeshire has a positive impact on childminder numbers and the quality of provision.

In Cambridgeshire, the emphasis placed on the importance of childminders and home-based childcare professionals is integral to the successful delivery of early years provision and funded entitlements. This comes at a cost and requires buy in, investment and a collaborative approach from those leading the department.

However, we understand many local authorities face continued pressure to deliver the expansion of the entitlement scheme in challenging circumstances and under financial constraints. Some local authorities no longer have a designated childminding lead. In those circumstances, what can be done?

Coram PACEY is here to support. Whether its advice on your childminder strategy or support with pre-registration and training, we have nearly 50 years' experience supporting and advocating for childminders. Now we are here to support local authorities too.



Policy

Our policy team is working nationally to support local authorities with guidance, gather and analyse data trends and raise local challenges with Government officials. We are passionate about working with local authorities to highlight and celebrate best practice in childminder and local authority relationships.

Contact our policy team for any policy queries or support you might need:

policy@corampacey.org.uk

Coram PACEY connect services

Coram PACEY Connect is a package of services designed to help local authorities, boroughs and other key partners support childcare and early years professionals in their area. Coram PACEY Connect offers support that is: flexible, tailored to your local need, available virtually and delivered by early years and childcare experts.

Services include: Pre-registration support, professional development and training, consultancy support and promotion of quality childcare.

Visit our website for more information: www.corampacey.org.uk/get-involved/pacey-connect/ or [Download our brochure](#)

Childminder support contracts

Coram PACEY can deliver childminder support contracts in other parts of England in the same way we already do in Cambridgeshire. Working for local authorities to recruit and retain a dedicated and passionate workforce in areas of need. We support local authorities to implement a childminding strategy to support the sustainability of childminders in their area for years to come.

If you would like to talk through options of how we can apply a similar service to Cambridgeshire or tailor one more suitable to your area, please contact Claire Protheroe, Head of Contracts and Projects claire.protheroe@corampacey.org.uk

"As a childminder of 25 years, in an ever-evolving role, my love and passion for supporting children in their all-important early years never diminishes. To support, nurture and make a difference - to each child as a unique individual, every family as a unit and the local community. This work could not be achieved without our partnership working with the Coram PACEY team in Cambridgeshire. Their support and training opportunities as well as the hands-on activity days for children are always appreciated. The role the Cambridgeshire team play is key to us as childcare practitioners: being kept updated with legislation and guidance, opportunities to further our career development, provide support to our families and to signpost as needed. This enables us to offer provision where not only the care and education, but also our continuous professional development is of the highest quality."

Sue Smith, Registered childminder - Cambridgeshire