

# Local authority case study:

## How can local authorities successfully recruit and retain childminders?

A deep dive into how Thurrock is prioritising and supporting childminders in an everchanging childcare market.



Early years children at a childminder setting in Thurrock

## Introduction

In Thurrock, childminding support sits within their School Effectiveness Team. They understand the important role childminders play in their area to support children and families and provide a balanced childcare market. Childminders help the local authority to deliver the expansion of funded entitlements and have an important role in providing wraparound and holiday provision. Thurrock's support goes above and beyond to recruit and retain skilled childminders in their area, which has seen the number of childminders in Thurrock stabilise in 2025 amid the 4% national decline.

2025



Thurrock's School Effectiveness Team consists of:

- A School Effectiveness and Early Years Manager
- Two Early Education Improvement Officers (EEIOs)
- Two 0–3 Development Officers:
- Three Welfare Requirements Development Officers (WRDOs):

**Two officers focused on ongoing childminder support (One leading on registration support and guidance, both providing post-registration support and guidance).**

- One SENCO and SEND Support Assistant
- Three Early Years Entitlement Officers

## Context

Thurrock is a small unitary authority with a population of approximately 176,000 (2021), and a relatively young average age of around the mid-30s. It has a mixed working and non-working population with employment rising year-on-year, but there are particular wards in Thurrock with longstanding unemployment and lower-income households.

A significant proportion of local employment is shift-based, including early, late, and weekend work. This creates a substantial demand for flexible childcare across the borough for early years and school-aged children.

## What can significant childminder support deliver for local authorities today?

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Thurrock's childcare provision consists of 142 childminders, 54 PVI group settings and 39 primary schools, with a growing number showing interest in offering school-based nursery provision for 2-year-olds. A significant challenge is a growing number of schools taking on younger children in their nurseries and the wraparound childcare programme, putting strain on the PVI sector – including childminders – to review and potentially remodel their business models and childcare offer.

## Why are childminders so important to children, families and the childcare market in Thurrock?

Thurrock childminders and the general childminder sector play a vital role in the childcare market by providing flexible, home-from-home care with smaller adult-to-child ratios, allowing them to build strong, trusting relationships with children and families. By knowing each child and their family individually, childminders can tailor activities, outings, and learning experiences to meet children's needs, including visits to libraries, shops, community groups, and experiences of local transport and road safety. These personalised approaches support consistency, reinforce routines, and promote social, emotional, and cognitive development, and provide the children with the skills, development and readiness for their next stage in learning.

Close partnerships with parents ensure that care aligns with family expectations while offering flexibility and choice, often at a lower cost than larger settings due to fewer overheads. Furthermore, childminders help to alleviate pressure on nurseries and schools, particularly for wraparound care, ensuring that local families have access to high-quality, adaptable childcare even in areas where group settings face space limitations. Childminders play an important and crucial role in ensuring sufficient funded childcare places within local authorities



### Recruitment

#### Recruitment of childminders in the last two-three years

Thurrock have seen consistent success in recruiting new childminders over the past 2–3 years. In two years, they gained 40 new registrations - averaging around 13 new childminders per year.

Recruitment has been supported through a range of channels, including:

1. Regular articles and information within the council's residential newsletters and social media communications.
2. Thurrock council staff weekly updates and information email and communications
3. Specific childminder recruitment social media campaigns
4. Partnerships with Jobcentre Plus and REED Employment who actively promote childminding as a viable career pathway.
5. Part funding the Thurrock Childminder Induction Training.
6. Word of mouth and recommendations from newly registered childminders

These combined efforts have helped maintain a steady flow of new joiners into the profession.

#### Specific childminder recruitment strategy and successful initiatives in Thurrock

The team regularly promotes childminding as a flexible and viable career route, and feedback shows that consistent messaging helps potential applicants keep the option in mind until they feel ready to choose this career. Childminding Induction Training runs termly and the ongoing communications provide a clear pathway for individuals to access more information and sign up for the course.

Thurrock delivers childminding pre-registration briefings that explain the expectations and requirements of the role. This ensures individuals can make an informed decision about whether childminding is the right career for them. It also means that those who go on to complete the course and register do so with a full understanding of the commitment involved in becoming an Early Years Educator and childcare provider.

Having a dedicated Lead Officer as the first point of contact who delivers the briefings, tutors the course, and provides ongoing support offers consistency and reassurance throughout the registration process. This personalised, continuous support not only builds confidence but also contributes to strong retention once childminders are registered.

*"The Start-Up Grant was a valuable incentive for new childminders. The upfront costs of training, the health declaration, and the DBS, combined with the expenses of preparing the setting, can deter individuals who do not have sufficient savings. This financial barrier may exclude enthusiastic candidates who are passionate about early years and childcare. Given the current cost-of-living pressures, we risk missing out on talented individuals who could make excellent childminders. During the childminding pre-registration briefing, questions about the availability of a Start-Up Grant are asked very regularly."*

### **What is the team noticing about the new childminders that have recently joined the profession?**

The majority of registered childminders complete the full Thurrock registration process; attending the pre-registration briefing, completing the nine-week Childminder Induction Training, and having a home pre-registration visit. As a result, they enter the profession fully aware of their responsibilities, confident in good practice, and equipped with the knowledge to build a sustainable business. They also know how and when to reach out to the local authority team for guidance and support. There has been evidence that the impact of this process is recognised by Ofsted inspectors. A quote from a newly registered childminder reflecting on the visit states that: "The inspector said that she has found that the people she visits who have attended Thurrock's training are always really prepared".

Newly registered childminders who complete the Thurrock process are able to quickly attract families and start their business from a strong, well-prepared position. In contrast, individuals who do not take up the full Thurrock offer often lack a full understanding of the childminder role, the responsibilities of an early years educator, and the requirements for supporting children's development.

On the reinstatement of the requirement for childminders to carry out formal training to join the Early Years Register

*"As childminders can be individuals with little or no prior experience in early years education, it is essential that formal training is in place. This training should provide a thorough explanation of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, including how to work towards, evidence, and meet each section...."*

*...Even for those with prior experience in early years settings or teaching, the transition to childminding can be significant, as the context, responsibilities, and approach differ in many ways. Formal training ensures that everyone new to childminding, including assistants working with children, develops a consistent understanding of high-quality early years practice. It also helps position childminding as a professional and valuable part of the early years sector, and provides increased confidence with parents looking to use a childminder to provide care for their child”.*

### Pre-registration

Once an individual expresses interest in becoming a childminder, they are contacted by the Lead Officer for childminder recruitment and booked onto the pre-registration briefing and/or the Childminder Induction Training. Following the briefing, the Lead Officer checks in with attendees to confirm who wishes to continue. Those progressing are supported to register on the Thurrock training and resource website and to book their place on the induction course, ensuring a smooth and guided entry into the childminding pathway.

A few weeks before the course begins, preparation emails are sent to confirm key details and advise attendees to download and familiarise themselves with the Statutory Requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the Birth to 5 Matters guidance. One week before the course starts, a reminder email is issued containing the session link, followed by a final reminder on the morning of the first session to ensure all participants are ready to join.

### Childminder Induction Training Programme (Nine Weeks)

Each weekly session includes a homework task designed to prepare individuals for their Ofsted registration visit and the start of their childminding practice. The course is structured around nine hourly sessions on topics including; legislation and an introduction to the EYFS, keeping children safe and starting up your childminding business.

During the final session, individuals are introduced to key members of the Early Years team, including the second Childminding Officer, the Entitlements Officer, and a representative from the Family Information Service, who supports practitioners in accessing and entering entitlement data on the portal.



### Pre-Registration Home Visit

Once a “proposed” childminder is identified via the Ofsted download, the Lead Officer arranges a pre-registration home visit. This visit provides a detailed review of Section 3 of the EYFS statutory framework and Childcare Register requirements. The visit report also functions as an action plan, setting out any Actions for Requirement and Actions for Good Practice to be completed prior to the Ofsted visit.

The pre-registered childminder will receive a visit report, which also acts as an action plan to ensure they are fully prepared.

After confirmation of the Ofsted registration, childminders are supported through a cycle of ongoing visits and guidance. This includes Learning and Development visits, pre-Ofsted inspection visits, and a Quality for 2 audit for new childminders. They can access support at any time, and WRDOs provide additional guidance through briefings and childminder groups, ensuring high-quality, personalised care and continuous professional development.



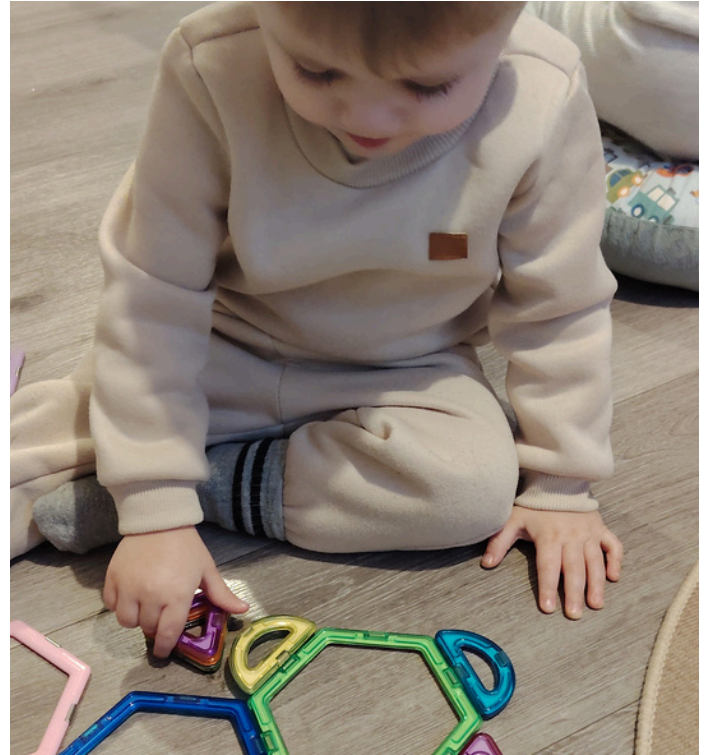
*“Thank you so much for your visit today which was incredibly informative and essential as it has really set my mind at rest. As a teacher, I assumed that I would be fine without further training to become a childminder. So, I enquired before starting the course and I realised then that it was mandatory. I am so glad it was as I needed the training because childminding is so specific! I am in the process of getting registered but I can hold hand on heart that the course is very essential. Without this course, I really think I would have done the children I hope to mind a disservice as childminding is not just about teaching and learning. Even the fact that the teaching and learning is happening in a domestic environment, means there is more to it and adequate training is required. Thank you Jenny for equipping me in the next step of my career pathway. ”*

### Retention

The personalised support and guidance provided by Thurrock from the start of a childminder's journey and throughout their career is a key factor in retention. This begins with their recruitment procedures, which ensure prospective childminders receive clear guidance and support from the outset, including the nine-week face to face Childminding Induction Training and home visit.

Thurrock offers ongoing professional development and training opportunities covering child development, SEND, safeguarding updates, and specialised CPD-focused forums and information briefings. These training opportunities are offered at flexible, childminder-friendly times, including evening sessions.

To encourage peer support and reduce isolation, the team runs childminder groups from their Family Hubs. They also recognise the professional status of childminders by offering them the same quality support visit programme that is available to group settings. Representatives from the childminding community are actively involved in decision-making, for example in developing the Funding Agreement and supporting early years recruitment.



*"At Thurrock, we see retention as being about developing trusted working relationships and ensuring that childminders feel valued, supported, and confident in delivering high-quality, flexible childcare".*



### A Thurrock without childminders

#### If childminders no longer existed, what would that mean for children and families in the Thurrock area?

Childminders are essential to Thurrock's childcare market and the childcare sector as a whole because they offer:

- **Flexible and personalised childcare:** Tailored care to families' schedules and needs
- **Home-based environment:** Provides a secure, familiar setting supporting attachment and wellbeing
- **Builds strong attachments:** Strong, responsive attachments in very young children promoting emotional, social, and cognitive development.
- **Small group care:** Allows for greater individual attention and closer observation of the children's development, and tailoring learning to the child's needs
- **Inclusive practice:** childminding supports children with SEND or additional needs, in smaller ratio promoting more tailored care.
- **Parent / childminder working relationship:** Parents and childminders develop strong working relationships, sharing detailed information about the child and family. This enables the childminder to provide a more child-focused curriculum that responds to the child's individual needs and interests.
- **Strong family partnerships:** Childminders work closely with both the immediate and wider family to deepen their understanding of each child, fostering a strong sense of belonging and security for the child.
- **Local community access:** Children gain a wider range of first-hand experiences, and life skills.
- **Flexible childcare needs:** Shift workers, parents with non-standard hours, and families needing wraparound care rely heavily on childminders. Without them, the authority would struggle to ensure adequate flexible provision, impacting workforce participation and family support.
- **Supporting families financially:** Childminding often costs less per hour, as providers have lower overheads, such as staff salaries, rent, and business rates. This affordability is particularly important for low-income families, including shift workers, enabling them to access childcare and maintain employment.
- **Parental Choice:** Parents often prefer that very young children experience a smaller, home-from-home setting, where care is more personalised and nurturing.
- **Vital part of the childcare network:** Complement nurseries and school-based provision to meet local demand.
- **Reduced capacity for early intervention and family support:** Losing this network could mean fewer opportunities for early intervention, placing additional responsibility on the authority's social care and early help teams.

## How can local authorities successfully recruit and retain childminders?

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*"I would like to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude for the exceptional support I received while completing my childminding course with Thurrock Council. From the very beginning, the childcare information meeting provided a clear and reassuring overview of what the course would involve, which immediately helped me feel confident about embarking on this journey. The course content was extremely well-pitched, making it accessible for both those new to childminding and those requiring a refresher on the EYFS. The sessions covering legislation, EYFS and Development Matters, child protection, safeguarding, child development, observation and assessment, and creating a business plan were particularly valuable. Each area was explained clearly and practically, enabling me to develop both my professional knowledge and confidence in applying it within my setting.*

*The individual support I received from you was especially invaluable. Your pre-Ofsted visit to my home, where you offered honest and constructive guidance on what needed to be improved, made a significant difference to my readiness. The mock Ofsted registration interview further prepared me for the real experience, and I felt far more confident and composed because of it. The policy templates and working documents provided also saved me an enormous amount of time and ensured I was meeting the required standards while still allowing me to personalise them for my own setting.*

*What truly sets this service apart is that the support did not stop once I was registered. You guided me towards the correct team to register on the funding portal and set up my funding, which I would have found extremely challenging to navigate alone. A few weeks after opening my setting, the welfare officer's visit provided further constructive feedback, helping me to continue improving my practice.*

*Now, one year into running my childminding business, I continue to feel supported. I regularly receive emails directing me to the support available, which reassures me that help is always accessible. On the occasions I have phoned for guidance or clarity about next steps with the children in my care, I have always received prompt, knowledgeable, and incredibly supportive responses. I truly cannot thank the team enough for their continued encouragement and professionalism.*

*When I compare my experience with others in practitioner Facebook groups — many of whom feel unsupported or are paying private agencies a significant portion of their income — I feel incredibly fortunate. I cannot recommend Thurrock Council's childminding service highly enough. It has been a vital part of my successful start as a childminder, and I am deeply grateful for everything you and your team have done.*

## Coram PACEY connect services

Coram PACEY Connect is a package of services designed to help local authorities and other key partners support childminders 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/](http://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 as [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 how we can deliver 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](mailto:claire.protheroe@corampacey.org.uk)