

Guidance notes provided by LBRuT Early Years Daycare

Locating Premises for under 8s day care and childminding

Finding suitable premises can be one of the biggest hurdles to overcome when planning to set up a day nursery. The lack of suitable sites and the high cost of property can mean that finding premises in some areas is a long and difficult task.

It is worth spending some time in the early stages of planning thinking about the size and type of building you require and taking into account the age range and number of children to be cared for. Also, think carefully about any plans that you have to develop the service further once you have become established and what type of demands this might place on the premises, e.g. increase the number of childcare places you have on offer or introduce new services such as out-of-school care.

It is important to be aware of the likely requirements in Richmond upon Thames before looking at premises. For many childcare providers the conversion of an existing building is the starting point. Before assessing what adaptations a building will require to meet both planning and registration requirements and if they are feasible it is crucial to ascertain whether there is an identified childcare demand in the area.

Whether you are buying land or a building, converting an existing building or erecting a modular construction, you would normally require planning consent from the local authority. However properties involving 6 or less children (including those living on the premises) generally do not require planning permission.


It is important to contact the Planning Support Centre 020 8891 7300 in the local authority in order to find out what considerations are taken into account when assessing the potential suitability of a property for conversion to a day nursery. At this stage it is useful to become familiar with the considerations listed under Policy CCE 11 of the Council's Adopted Unitary Development Plan and can be found www.richmond.gov.uk/dept/env/envplanning/policy

It states:

CCE11 Provision for Early Years

10.67 The Council will encourage provision of facilities for early years, including day care, but in considering proposals it will have regard to the need to protect the amenities of nearby residents and the effect on highway conditions.

10.68 The Council considers that suitable child-centred play groups and other pre-school provisions have an important social and development value to children, particularly those with special needs. Childcare is also essential in households where the parent(s) is /are working. As a result the Council will give its support to playgroups, holiday play facilities and after-school care schemes, and encourage the provision of nurseries. The provision of these services can be acceptable in residential areas, although the Council is aware that problems can arise if facilities are inappropriately located. When considering proposals, the Council will take into account the garden and location of the rooms to be used, together with the type of property, its location, and any potential effect on the highway conditions. It will be normal practice for the Council to restrict the numbers of children and, where necessary, hours of use. Projects involving six or less children (including those living at the premises) are not



generally felt to require planning permission. Such projects may include an assistant to the childminder. The Children Act 1989 requires that the Council registers and annually inspects all facilities provided for the day care of children under 8 years of age. **(Since Sept 2001 this responsibility has transferred to Ofsted Early Years Directorate)**. The Act now provides defined criteria and inspection requirements for the Social Services Department to ensure high standards of care and welfare for the children.

Any application for conversion is then assessed against the criteria listed under this policy which include:

1. Ensuring that while the ground floor of detached houses and semi-detached houses and corner properties may be suitable for conversion the application may need to retain the upper floors for residential use. The upper floors are usually intended for occupation by the registered person.
2. The provision of adequate soundproofing;
3. The impact of the use on neighbouring residential amenity;
4. The impact on road safety, traffic flows and travel plans;
5. The concentration of similar facilities in the surrounding area;

While terraced houses are not usually ideal for conversion every case will be considered on its merits.

If you think planning permission will not be required, you should still check to verify that this is the case by writing to the Local Planning Authority. In some cases it may be possible to take over a previous nursery site but this is extremely rare.

Property that already has D1 class of use i.e. non-residential does not require change of use planning permission, unless there are restrictions limiting the use to a particular activity or person. D1 uses include doctor's surgeries, day centres, schools, church's and community halls. If you do find such property do contact the Local Authority to check if there are any restrictions.

In addition opportunities may exist to lease or purchase properties under the control of the local authority or other organisations such as churches and housing associations. If you decide to register with local estate agents make sure you give them clear indications of the type of property you require. It's also advisable to explore an area yourself and look for likely vacant buildings and try to find out who owns them.

A number of day nurseries are established in residential property and if you are considering doing the same it is worth taking the following points into account:

- The nearest neighbours to the property will be informed of your proposal and invited to comment on it. Concerns about children making noise will be taken into account, therefore it may be wise to meet with the neighbours and talk through your plans in an attempt to allay any concerns they may have.
- The building should be made accessible for people with disabilities and you must check your responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act.