

Letting Your Property To A Refugee Family

Frequently Asked Questions



1. What does RRN do?

Rural Refugee Network (RRN) operates in Hampshire and was set up in 2016 in response to the Syrian crisis, its founding members were a collection of local families who were inspired to make a positive contribution to the lives of those fleeing conflict. It is a registered charity and aims to help those who have been displaced from their own countries by providing support in several different ways, one of which is by working with private landlords to secure accommodation. Our services provide emotional and practical support to refugee families thus ensuring they have the best chance to adjust to their new circumstances.

2. How does RRN find a property for vulnerable refugee families?

RRN relies on the generosity of private landlords who are interested in offering a safe and secure home to a refugee family. Some of our landlords already own a property, some have just inherited property whilst others are looking to purchase a property as an investment. We also work with established organisations such as churches.

3. What kind of property does RRN need?

We look for flats and houses with between one and four bedrooms.

It is important that properties are close to amenities such as shops, schools and transportation links. Suburban or urban areas are ideal. Rural locations can work but they need to have good links to services. Houses that have been adapted to meet the needs of tenants with mobility issues are of particular interest.

Suitable properties will be rented out for a sum equivalent to the Local Housing Allowance and will have their own entrance. RRN does not work with refugee families placed in a room or rooms within your own home but there are charities that do work this way e.g. Refugees At Home (www.refugeesathome.org).

4. When a property has been identified what is RRN's role?

RRN will work closely with the relevant District County Council and Hampshire County Council to check that the property meets all the relevant criteria. This will involve looking at the layout of the property and its location amongst other things.

Following approval of the property RRN will help to prepare the property for occupation working alongside the landlord, the relevant district council and Hampshire County Council.

At this stage Hampshire County Council will work with the Home Office to identify a family that will best suit the property. Several factors will be considered at this stage of the process, e.g. the location of the property and its proximity to schools, services and shops. A pertinent factor might be that there are family members settled close by. There is no scope for individuals or agencies to make representations during this stage, however, the landlord will be given information about the family once the decision is made and before the family move in.

Once a family has been allocated to the property further preparations will be made so that the individual needs of the family can be met. At this point there is scope for RRN to work with the landlord in this process. In the past RRN has contributed to the cost of decorating and making the property compliant with regulations. Under the Resettlement Scheme Hampshire County Council has the responsibility for furnishing the property. There may be some items that are not covered by the Council and again RRN may be able to help contribute to the list of things required.

5. How is rental income calculated and received?

The family receives rent in the form of housing benefit and this is forwarded to the landlord by the family. The amount will be set at a specific rate and is calculated by reference to the Local Housing Allowance rate. LHA rates are based on private

market rents being paid by tenants in what is known as the Broad Rental Market Area. This rate varies depending on the location of the property taking into account local factors. Invariably the monthly housing benefit rate will be lower than the full market rental income, however, there may be other advantages such as longer rental terms and payment when the property is empty, these payments are known as 'void payments'. The Local Authority will arrange a deposit equal to one month's rent and payment of a month's rent in advance if required.

6. How can I find out what the LHA rate would be for my property?

The LHA rates are available by looking at the government websites:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-housing-allowance>

<https://lha-direct.voa.gov.uk/Secure/Search.aspx>

7. Can I get any financial support to cover the difference between the LHA rate and the full market value rate?

It is common for there to be a gap between the sum that the local authority will pay and the amount the landlord could receive if the property were to be rented on the open market. In our experience landlords willing to rent their properties to refugee families are aware that they may not be maximising their rental income but are often content to do this as they are motivated by persona/charitable reasons.

Whilst RRN cannot make any contributions towards the rental cost of a property there may be other ways in which RRN can help e.g. RRN has the capacity to make modest grants which could help towards the ongoing cost of maintaining the property. Whilst RRN does not act as a managing agent in any capacity it can provide general support to the landlord and the family. With our involvement and oversight issues that may arise are often resolved swiftly and easily.

8. How long would a refugee family occupy my property?

We ask that a family is offered at least a two-year contract in the first instance, but longer tenancy periods are obviously welcome. If you are considering a longer rental period you may wish to discuss the possibility of a break clause in the tenancy agreement with your legal advisor. In our experience landlords are often happy to extend tenancies beyond the first two years as they are happy with their tenants and appreciate the regular income. RRN's aim is that refugee families have progressed to a level of independence whereby they can support themselves and feel part of the community before they move.

9. What happens to the maintenance of the property while the family is living there?

The process is the same as if you were renting the property out privately. You may choose to manage the property yourself by organising any maintenance and repair work through your chosen contractors or you may prefer to engage a letting management agency for a monthly fee.

A modest contribution of up to £250 can be made by RRN towards the cost of maintaining the property.

10. What support will the family have whilst living in my property?

When the family arrives, they will receive practical support from the local authority, Two Saints and RRN's community team. This support takes many forms including getting the property ready and a hot meal on arrival, welcome packs are also provided introducing the family to the property and the local area. RRN can organise language lessons if needed and assistance with finding employment and job training. Help may also be available by way of grants for particular pieces of equipment that may be needed.

11. If my circumstances change, how can I get my tenancy back before the end of the tenancy?

RRN cannot give legal advice and the law on this subject is complex. We recommend that landlords take advice from the Citizens' Advice Bureau or from a solicitor about what options may be available to them in these circumstances.

You might want to discuss the possibility of a break clause in the tenancy agreement that is drawn up.

12. I already own a property that I'd like to offer the RRN. How do I go about this?

In the first instance please contact us on hello@ruralrefugeenetwork.org. We will then put you in touch with our Housing Team who will contact you for further information.

13. I would like to invest in a property as a sole owner to then offer it RRN. How should I go about this?

Please contact us on hello@ruralrefugeenetwork.org. We can then work with you to identify a property that would be suitable for a refugee family. RRN cannot give investment advice but can help find a suitable property within your budget. In some circumstances it may be possible to view properties jointly with you in order to ensure that it they meet with the relevant criteria.

You would be responsible for solicitors' fees, surveyors' fees and estate agents' fees in the normal way.

For more information about the work of RRN please refer to our website: www.ruralrefugeenetwork.org or contact us on hello@ruralrefugeenetwork.org. We are always looking for more volunteers to join us either to help with fundraising or supporting those that we help so please do get in touch if you are interested in joining us in any capacity.