



## **Frequently Asked Questions: Landlords for Syrian Refugees in Hammersmith & Fulham**

*In autumn 2015, the Government announced that the UK will resettle 20,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees by 2020 through its Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS). Local authority participation in the scheme is voluntary and any arrangements made will be based on agreements with individual landlords.*

### **Why do we need privately rented homes for Syrian refugees?**

Hammersmith & Fulham Council is committed to resettling Syrian refugees in the borough through the Government's Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) but at no disadvantage to local residents.

Although the Council is working with its local housing partners and exploring all housing options, we also need to look at the private rented sector in order not to impact on the limited supply and existing demand on our social housing.

### **Can I rent just one room to a refugee in this scheme?**

Syrian refugees are classed by Government as 'vulnerable people' so we can't accept a room, or rooms, within a shared home. Home Office guidance is that for the scheme to work best only self-contained accommodation is suitable. Therefore, we can only accept accommodation which has its own lockable door and private bathroom and kitchen facilities.

However, if you'd like to find out more about providing a spare room to a refugee there are a number of organisations that can help you and answer any questions you may have. These include [Refugees at Home](#) and [Room for Refugees](#).

### **What types of property are needed?**

We need all types of property, from studio flats to 1, 2, 3+ bedroom homes. We are hoping to resettle individual adults, couples and small families and are looking at the types of properties that will meet their needs. However, we have been made aware that there are a greater number of larger Syrian refugee families (4 – 6 persons) awaiting resettlement, so larger properties would be especially appreciated.

### **How long do I need to be willing to rent my property for?**

You'll need to be in a position to offer your property for at least 1 year. However 2 years or more is preferable, to ensure resettled refugees are offered as much stability as possible.

It is essential refugees are given safe space and enough time for our local support package to help them integrate better into the community and address any specific needs they may have. If you're only able to commit to 1 year though, that's fine, your offer is most welcome.

### **How much will I be paid to rent my property?**

The rent you'll be paid will fall within the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) bands. LHA payments for different sizes of property are limited within a given broad rental market area (BRMA). The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is covered by three BRMAs (Inner West London, Inner North London, Central London). BRMAs are not aligned with Local Authority boundaries.

The current LHA rates for all three BMRA's are as set out in the table below.

<b>BMRA</b>	<b>One Bedroom Rate</b>	<b>Two Bedrooms Rate</b>	<b>Three Bedrooms Rate</b>	<b>Four Bedrooms Rate</b>
<b>Inner West London</b>	£250.48 per week	£302.33 per week	£365.09 per week	£429.53 per week
<b>Central London</b>	£268.46 per week	£311.40 per week	£365.09 per week	£429.53 per week
<b>Inner North London</b>	£268.46 per week	£311.40 per week	£365.09 per week	£429.53 per week

Our research shows that the larger the property the greater the gap between the LHA and the advertised market rent. A small number of Syrian refugees have been resettled in London boroughs so far and this has primarily been down to concerned and philanthropic landlords who are willing to offer their properties at below market rates.

### **What about deposits?**

We understand deposits provide security and are important to many landlords. We will negotiate with Landlords on behalf of the prospective tenants in order to secure the properties and this will include dealing with requests for deposits. It is important to seek to procure properties at, or close to, the LHA rate for the area that the property is located to ensure affordability.

### **Will the rent be paid direct to the landlord or refugee?**

It will be possible in some circumstances to have the rent paid directly to landlords. This will depend primarily on an assessment of the tenant's vulnerability. Working age tenants in receipt of benefits who move into accommodation in Hammersmith & Fulham are expected to claim Universal Credit (UC) to pay for their housing costs. The housing costs element of UC will be paid directly to the tenant who will be responsible for paying the landlord. In certain circumstances, where the tenant is deemed to be vulnerable, alternative payment arrangements (APA) can be applied for to facilitate payments of UC directly to landlords. If direct payment is an important issue for you in considering whether or not to take part in the scheme, the Council can discuss this with you and are able to make arrangements on a case-by-case basis.

### **What happens if payments are stopped for some reason?**

If payments are stopped for any reason, the landlord or tenant can contact the Council's HB (Housing Benefit) Assist team for assistance in resolving any payment issues and enable reinstatement of the tenant's HB or UC housing costs. Our aim is to make sure that rent is paid in full and on time in all circumstances. The HB Assist team can help tenants with their on-line UC claim and can fast-track claims, subject to the usual Housing Benefit rules.

### **Who will pay the utility bills?**

The refugees will themselves pay the utility bills. Those resettled under the Government scheme will arrive with refugee status. This allows them to work and have full entitlement to state benefits. The local support package will include assistance around improving their English, integrating them into the local community, training, volunteering, and helping adults find employment.

### **How long will it take to organise for an individual or family to move into my property?**

It usually takes about 6 weeks, from the time we contact the Government with a specific accommodation offer, before the refugees arrive in the UK. However arrangements can be made to pay rent to landlords before this, so that landlords will not incur void costs before the refugees actually take up residence.

### **What do I do if I currently have a tenant but would like to help in the future?**

If you have a property that might be available in the future, or if you'd just like to find out more at this stage, please get in touch with us. We'd very much like to hear from any landlords who are interested in taking part in the scheme, whether now or in the near-future. Together we can discuss your particular circumstances, and your property, and go from there.

### **Do I need to be a registered landlord to offer my property to a Syrian refugee?**

No. There is no requirement to 'register' as a landlord although the usual rules on health and safety of the property would still apply and any prospective landlord would be expected to comply with statutory terms and conditions. We can provide further information and advice as needed in relation to specific properties. We're happy to discuss all of this with you if you'd like to find out more. In the meantime, here's a link to the standard health and safety rules that apply to all privately let accommodation: <https://www.gov.uk/renting-out-a-property/landlord-responsibilities>

### **Can I choose who to offer my property to?**

Yes. In matching your property with the needs of the refugees we can discuss options and share basic information with you, such as gender and age range for example. However, there has to be agreement by landlords to participate in the scheme before negotiations with Government can take place and potential individuals and families can be matched with your property.

### **What kinds of checks are made beforehand?**

All refugees in the programme go through a thorough vetting process, where they are screened and considered by the Home Office for suitability for entry to the UK. The checks include medical health and security.

Existing evidence indicates that despite their often traumatic experiences, refugees who resettle in the UK as part of VPRS are able to integrate well.

### **What happens if I have any problems during the tenancy?**

Landlords will be provided with named contacts within the Housing Department to discuss any issues that arise during the tenancy. The Council is responsible for ensuring the housing needs of Syrian refugees are met and if refugees find themselves homeless the Council will reassess their housing needs in accordance with homelessness legislation.

### **I'm interested. What's next?**

Please show your interest with the Council by contacting Zahra Beg – details below.

### **I want to know more. Who can I speak to?**

Please contact Zahra Beg in the LBHF Policy & Strategy Team on 0208 753 4048 or email [zahra.beg@lbhf.gov.uk](mailto:zahra.beg@lbhf.gov.uk)

The Council is working with the Hammersmith and Fulham Refugees Welcome Group in support of refugees as they settle in the borough as part of the VPR programme. To find out more about the Welcome Group, and ask any questions you may have, you can email them at [housing@hfreugeeswelcome.uk](mailto:housing@hfreugeeswelcome.uk)