

A housing guide for refugees in Scotland

Renting from a private landlord

Leaflet 6 – November 2009

If you have received leave to remain and are thinking of renting from a private landlord, this leaflet is for you. It gives you general advice on

- what is available
- how to find a place to rent from a private landlord
- what to consider
- how to get a tenancy

The tenancy agreements available from private landlords offer you less security than those offered by councils or housing associations. You should always get advice before renting from a private landlord. There are some contact details for advice at the end of this leaflet.

How do I find private property I to rent?

A private landlord may be an individual who owns property, a letting agency that manages several properties, or a company. Different private landlords can offer different kinds of accommodation:

- a house or flat of your own
- a house or flat you share with others
- a room or rooms in their own home

There are several ways to find private property for rent. You can:

- check advertisements in shop windows, and on notice boards in supermarkets, community centres or at colleges and universities
- check advertisements in local papers and magazines
- search online: there are many websites listing rental properties
- ask your local council if it has information about private landlords

- approach letting agencies – they have offices in most shopping areas, or you can search online
- ask your family, friends or work colleagues if they know of somewhere to rent
- check if there is a local rent deposit scheme, if you are currently homeless. In Glasgow phone 0141 550 7140
- ask your Student Accommodation Office for a list of landlords who rent to students, if you are a student.

Safety first!

When you go to see a place, make sure you follow these safety rules:

- Don't go on your own. Always take someone with you when you visit a house or a flat.
- Let someone you trust know where you're going, who it is you're meeting and when you should be back.
- Arrange to call them afterwards to let them know you're safe.
- Be especially careful if you arrange to meet someone over the internet to view a property

I like the look of this place. Is there anything I should think about before renting it?

It is important to check with your local council whether the landlord has registered with them.

Seek advice if they are not registered.

If you still wish to rent the house or flat, there are several things you should consider that will help you make the right decision and avoid problems later on:

o Make sure you can afford the rent.

Here is a checklist you can use:

- o Will the landlord require a deposit? If so, how much?
- o When is rent due?
- o If you receive local housing allowance, ask the landlord if they accept this as payment.
- o How much council tax will you need to pay?
- o Ask to see the property's energy performance certificate so that you have an idea of whether heating it will be expensive.

You may be able to get help with paying rent through local housing allowance. Determining your eligibility is complex so you should contact the housing benefit office at your local council for information. You may also wish to read Leaflet 7 in this series: 'Housing Benefit/rent arrears', which is available on Scottish Refugee Council's website. The council and local money advice centres will be able to help you work out how much you help you would get.

○ **Are you happy with where the house or flat is?**

You should have a look around the area and ask people you know about these things:

- Is it easy for you to get to work or where you study?
- Are the local shops ok?
- Do you feel safe walking about?
- Are there places of worship nearby?
- What support networks are there and what is the community like?
- If you have children, what are the local nurseries or schools like?
- What are your impressions of the neighbours?

○ **Is the property in good condition inside and outside?**

Does the property look as if it's in good condition? Does everything work – for instance, the heating, lights, taps, toilet.

○ **Is there furniture with the property?**

If so, what is supplied? Is it in good condition? Are there safety labels on mattresses and chairs? There should be a list of what is supplied – an inventory. Get a copy of this for yourself and check that it matches the items you find in the property. Let the landlord know if anything appears to be missing, and note it on the inventory.

○ **How safe is it?**

The landlord should be able to show that the gas and electrical appliances receive a proper annual check. Are there working smoke alarms? Are there sturdy locks on doors and windows?

○ **What's it like outside?**

Is it clean, tidy and secure? Where are the rubbish bins?

I like this place. How do I get the tenancy?

The landlord should ask you to sign a tenancy agreement. Before you sign anything, make sure you understand and are completely happy with it. This section outlines the main points, but you should also seek advice if you are unsure about anything. Make sure you get a receipt for any deposit you pay.

There are two main kinds of tenancy agreement:

- assured
- short assured

Each of these gives you different rights, so you should get advice on them. Contact our refugee housing team on 0800 085 6087.

Find out more about tenancy agreements for private tenants on the Shelter Scotland website:

http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/getadvice/advice_topics/finding_a_place_to_live/renting_privately/tenancy_agreements_for_private_tenants

The agreement should include:

- the name of the landlord and your name;
- the address of the property;
- the amount of rent to pay; and
- how long the lease is for (if this isn't in the agreement, it will be one year).

The agreement should also include:

- the kind of tenancy being offered
- whether the rent covers services (such as gas and electricity)
- who is responsible for council tax (usually you, unless the landlord lives in the property)
- when you should pay the rent (for example, the first day of the month) and how you should pay it (for example, by cheque or direct debit)
- the amount of any deposit and the conditions for its return when you leave the property
- whether you are to repair and decorate the property
- whether the landlord provides any furniture
- the conditions for ending the lease: how much notice you need to give the landlord before moving out, and how much notice they must give you before asking you to leave.
- whether you are allowed to take in lodgers, sublet the property, or pass the tenancy on to someone else
- any other conditions of the tenancy

Where can I find further information?

Find further general information on the Shelter Scotland website

http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/getadvice/advice_topics/finding_a_place_to_live/renting_privately

For specific information on your own situation, you can contact:

Scottish Refugee Council's Refugee Housing Team

Phone this number free for advice or to make an appointment with an advice worker: 0800 085 6087

Shelter Scotland

Phone this number free advice: 0800 800 4444

Positive Action in Housing

Phone this number for information about its services: 0141 353 2220