

# INSIDE HOUSING



## Do we need a new almshouse for refugees?

**COMMENT** 17.03.22 **BY NICK PHILLIPS**

Could the almshouse model provide new stability for housing refugees? *Nick Phillips* considers how the model could benefit those fleeing Ukraine and other conflicts



Picture: Getty

For centuries, almshouses have been the safe, warm refuge for those in need of a home and a community. Traditionally, almshouses have been provided by philanthropists for those in the community most at need at the time.

Those founders have often seen a need in their parish, town or even specific industry. The founders of almshouses may have seen a housing need among widows of the parish, miners, soldiers or fishermen – all the benefactors identified and enshrined in the founder's wishes for centuries.

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I wonder if today's philanthropist may see the local need reflect the global changes afoot: families fleeing desperate situations in Afghanistan, Syria and now Ukraine. Having gained rights to remain in their new community, they may be today's most desperate families, and there is no better home and sanctuary than the almshouse community.

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Almshouses have survived with their founders' intentions because they are uniquely protected. They are the oldest charities and the oldest form of community housing, going back 1,000 years even to the original acts of mercy that include giving shelter to the traveller.

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An almshouse charity established today could be providing homes for refugees in housing need for hundreds of years to come. Over its lifetime an almshouse could change the lives of thousands of people in need of a safe place to live.

Almshouses offer a proven community housing model for which it seems there is a growing, desperate need. Anyone looking to establish a new almshouse charity or seeking to expand their current provision can reach out to The Almshouse Association for advice on how to achieve this.

We may not be able to replace everything that these people have lost, but almshouse charities can provide a strong foundation from which to rebuild through the provision of a stable home.

*Nick Phillips, chief executive, The Almshouse Association*