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STATEMENT FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION FOR FAMILY SUPPORT CHARITY

After a partnership spanning 20 years originating with Portsmouth Housing Association, First Wessex Housing Group and the EC Roberts Centre are pleased to announce a celebration commemorating the Roberts Centre becoming an independent charity.

The EC Roberts Centre is a unique, child focused family support charity based in Portsmouth which offers assistance to families in dealing with issues of relationship breakdown or homelessness.

It's hard to know what it must feel like to lose the roof over your head unless you've been there. The knock-on effect of losing the stability and security that comes with having a home is perhaps even harder to appreciate. But at The Roberts Centre, that's what they see and deal with on a daily basis, and helping to pick up the pieces in one of their most important functions.

The charity also supports families to prevent them from being made homeless in the first place. This has become increasingly important over the years, and the credit crunch could mean many more families will need help over the coming months. .

Over the past two decades the centre has helped thousands of families from the Portsmouth and Havant areas through its numerous schemes. The local support the charity receives are amazing, says Carole Damper, Roberts Centre Manager. "People in the Portsmouth area are incredibly caring, and over the past two decades their contributions have enabled us to help thousands of local families. We are extremely well supported by churches, schools, local organisations and individuals. Every year in October we receive donations from Harvest Festivals, and at Christmas time we get presents for the children which we distribute. The kindness people show really is overwhelming at times!"

First Wessex will continue to be involved with the charity once it leaves the group, epitomised by the 2 year lease the Roberts Centre has recently agreed at one of the First Wessex offices in Aldershot, North Hampshire, allowing the charity to expand their work into other areas of the region.

To mark their growth and progression, an 'Independence Day' celebration event is to be held at the Lord Mayor's Banqueting Room at Portsmouth Guildhall on June 30th. Hosted by the Lord Mayor, among the guests will be past and present supporters of the charity.

Carole said: "This event is a great opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of everyone involved in the charity throughout the years, and their contribution towards our success.

"It may not appear to be the best time for a charity to become independent, but we feel the time has come for us to step out on our own. This move has been very carefully planned, and I can confidently say that it's 'business as usual' for us. We will maintain an uninterrupted service which we will continue to develop and improve. We have restructured the way the organisation is managed and strengthened our senior team, to make sure we have all the necessary expertise in house.

"Everyone at the centre is very excited and ready to embrace this challenge. After such a long time as part of First Wessex, we'd be lying if we said we weren't nervous, and a little sad of course, but this feels like a natural evolution for the Roberts Centre."

Carole's sentiments are echoed by those at First Wessex, commented Troy Henshall, Director of Corporate Services at First Wessex: "This really is great news. It's fantastic to see the results of the hard work by employees within the Group and we are certain that the Roberts Centre are well positioned to maintain their track record of developing innovative services within Hampshire. We are delighted to have had the opportunity to support the move to independence and will continue to work with the Roberts Centre in the future."

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Notes to Editors

First Wessex Housing Group manages around 17,000 affordable homes primarily in Hampshire and with some activity in Surrey.

The group comprises Atlantic Housing Limited, First Atlantic Housing, Pavilion Housing Association, Portsmouth Housing Association, Fernhill Care Limited and Wessex Property Limited.

Portsmouth Housing Association: provides homes in Portsmouth, Fareham, Gosport and Havant. It also provides a wide range of community regeneration services across South East Hampshire.

Atlantic Housing and First Atlantic Housing: provide a full range of affordable housing including rented, supported, shared ownership and key worker housing. A large support portfolio includes housing for older people, extra-care housing, dementia care housing, housing for people with learning disabilities, people recovering from mental illness and some specialist accommodation. They cover a geographic area spanning Eastleigh, Southampton, Winchester and the New Forest.

Pavilion Housing Association: the largest provider of housing association homes for rent in the Aldershot, Farnborough, Ash and Farnham areas.

Fernhill Care: provides care services for tenants of First Wessex Housing Group and other landlords and for individuals in the community with support needs. It specialises in domiciliary, extra- and dementia care.

Wessex Property Limited: the group's in-house repairs and maintenance organisation.

www.firstwessexhq.co.uk
www.portsmouthha.co.uk