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### **Campaigner calls for city's help over empty homes**

A Portsmouth Housing Association (PHA) employee working to ease the plight of homeless families has urged city residents to help her project by reporting empty properties.

Tina Hirst says the more empty homes are reported to her, the more PHA can do to give the properties a new lease of life and bring them back into use as family homes for people in need.

PHA, part of the First Wessex Housing Group, works in partnership with Portsmouth City Council on the empty property campaign. In the 18 months the initiative has been running, 50 empty properties – many run-down - have been identified, refurbished to government decent homes standards where necessary and used to provide a new home for rent.

The latest people helped, mother-of-four Geri Daly and her partner, warehouse supervisor Paul Roberts, recently started renting a four-bedroom house at North End following months of uncertainty in temporary accommodation. Ms Daly, aged 30, said: "It gives us security as a family and a place to call home again. It's a wonderful scheme."

Tina, PHA's empty homes coordinator, said: "My aims are to tackle and reduce homelessness. Bringing empty properties back into use helps towards easing the housing situation in Portsmouth, as well as removing a blight from a neighbourhood and eradicating another potential target for arsonists, squatters and vandals.

"This project, as shown by the owner at North End, gives property owners a great opportunity to bring their houses back into use in return for a guaranteed monthly rent from PHA."

Tina said city council compulsory purchase orders were also an option in cases where owners were resistant to bringing their vacant properties back into use.

In the majority of cases so far, the owners have found occupiers themselves after working with the city council and taking out refurbishment grants and loans. Eight of the 50 properties – like the North End house – have come into PHA's residential

leasing scheme, under which PHA manages the let for the owner and tenants are found through the council.

The North End home also marks a new initiative for the scheme – with the owner getting a rent which is below the market rate for the home in return for a city council grant aiding work to upgrade the property to the required standards. The owner has also granted a ten-year lease to PHA, giving Ms Daly and her family potential security for many years.

If you know of an empty home in your area, Tina would like you to write to her at PHA, Peninsular House, Wharf Road, Portsmouth, P02 8HB, giving the property address and any other information you may have.



**For further information, please contact:**

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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.