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Thank you Chairman and good morning everyone. I am delighted to be with you today, and I am honoured to have been invited to address this important conference.

One of the advantages of being President of the CIH is having the opportunity to talk to colleagues from across the world about the challenges we are all facing, as housing professionals, and the contribution we can make to the well being of communities.

Indeed in the first few months of my presidency I have added to my own knowledge of housing through meeting representatives from Canada and the United States of America at a recent Tri-Country Conference in Scotland. In October I visited South Africa; this week I am here in Hong Kong and I'm looking forward to visiting Beijing next week. All the time I am learning more about the issues we are all grappling with: and all the time I am impressed by the determination and commitment shown by each of you in bringing about real change in your own countries and in your communities.

In my address this morning I'd like to share with you what appear to me to be some of the common themes in housing policy and management; to outline how the CIH sees its role in leading and supporting the profession; and - hopefully - to stimulate a few thoughts to help today's debate and discussion.

The first obvious point to recognise is that housing cannot be considered in isolation. In an era of instant communication we are increasingly aware of the interdependence of national economies and markets, so that even the strongest countries cannot consider themselves insulated from pressures and tensions elsewhere.

Fundamental to all our countries' efforts to maintain peace and prosperity has to be that of tackling poverty and equality - including ensuring that everyone has a roof over their head.

But what makes a decent home?

Building form and design vary significantly across the world.

In Europe - and elsewhere in the world where land is not at a premium - we are more familiar with low rise housing estates, whereas in places such as here, in Hong Kong, high rise homes are more prevalent – and create their own problems of management and maintenance. But there are even sharper differences across the world.

In South Africa, where the scale of the problem is immense and public finance is limited, basic homes are shells of perhaps 30 to 40 square metres with water and sanitary services – often provided outside the building.

And in too many countries it is a fact that we still have too many people living in informal settlements for whom permanent housing – of any type, is an unrealistic aspiration.

Resources are still often outpaced by need. At the same time improved communications mean that people are increasingly aware of how other people live – and raise their own aspirations accordingly. So, against a climate of rising expectations we need to continue to make the case for investment in housing based on the fundamental importance of providing a decent home for all. We need to make the case, directly and convincingly, to the politicians and others who control the purse strings.

A decent home is necessary – but it is not enough.

The work of housing professionals everywhere extends beyond bricks and mortar.

Whatever differences there may be between us, in how we ensure adequate housing for those in greatest need, we need to do so in a way which helps create sustainable communities.

This isn't just a responsibility for Governments at a central *or* local level.

The CIH's Mission Statement is “to maximise the contribution that housing professionals make to the well being of communities” and so I start from the premise that housing policy and practice cannot exist in isolation.

Housing needs to be linked explicitly with other policy objectives. Just to give one example, the opportunities that housing construction and development provide to help tackle other issues like employment and training can be the starting point for adopting broader policy objectives.

Housing professionals have always had an interest in wider social policy. We know intuitively that poor housing contributes to poor health, low educational attainment and both economic and social exclusion – and each one of us has experience of where improvements in housing have acted as the catalyst for change.

In the past in the UK our focus was primarily on building homes and managing the subsequent relationship between landlord and tenant. That relationship is still important but many people have growing concerns about the quality of the place where they live - so our focus has to change to embrace a neighbourhood perspective and that introduces a whole new set of relationships which we have to develop and nurture if we want to contribute positively to the well being of communities.

As a profession we have a responsibility to make this more holistic approach work - and we are well placed to do so - we have a unique mix of property based and people skills, much of our work is focused around estates or neighbourhoods and we have experience of working with residents either as individuals or through tenants and residents groups.

We need to use our knowledge and experience to engage with Government and other agencies at both a national and local level to influence policies so that we can create healthier, more successful communities.

We also need to use our knowledge and experience by gathering together and promoting examples of good practice, so these do not exist as isolated beacons of excellence, but as part of a process to turn good practice into common practice.

As housing professionals the first thing we have to do is to contribute from a position of strength – in the sense that we need to perform our own job well – so that we are credible partners. This involves providing homes that meet people’s housing requirements, and providing *responsive* services that meet people’s individual needs.

But we also need to become advocates for other services like refuse collection and environmental maintenance, to be delivered properly at a local level. In the UK, Government is urging service providers to work more closely together – to provide 'joined up' or 'seamless' services which better meet the needs of individuals and communities.

People who work in housing are at the sharp end of where these changes are taking place and we really do need to use our knowledge and experience to influence both the development of policy and how those policies are then implemented on the ground.

But if we are to be successful, we also need to shape policy and practice to meet local needs. Solutions cannot be parachuted in. Communities differ and have different requirements at different points in time. So we need to understand the dynamics of individual communities.

How can they be sustained and nurtured?

When is intervention necessary?

What works?

In which circumstances?

And

How best can housing organisations intervene in helping both *create* and *maintain* sustainable communities?

There are many differences in the way housing needs and aspirations are being met across the world. But, what binds everything together is the recognition of the need for increasing professionalism in all we do.

At the CIH we strongly believe that the people working to deliver the vision for housing, whatever that might be, in whatever country, should have appropriate education and training so that what is delivered is the best achievable within the constraints that exist. Also, that they are equipped with the necessary skills to ensure that homes and neighbourhoods are properly maintained so that they continue to provide for future generations.

Across the world there are lessons that can be learned, especially in relation to failures which have resulted from fragmented social policy and under investment. In many countries this has led to marked and widening differences between people who are in employment and those who are increasingly socially excluded. And this is most clearly visible through sharp differences - not only in access to decent housing but in the adequacy and state of repair of the housing stock.

So let me say something about the way the CIH is working to support housing professionals in meeting these challenges and promoting debate about how we provide and manage good quality housing.

Like many of you I have spent all of my working life in housing – and that's 25 years next month - but my main credential for being asked here today is that in June I was elected, as the President of the Chartered Institute of Housing.

In the past many aspects of housing work were carried out by people trained in different disciplines and involved in housing as administrators or managers.

The profession began to develop on the back of large scale intervention in housing through central and local government and the recognition that responsibility for delivering housing programmes and their ongoing management needed to rest with a single agency.

From these beginnings the profession has developed to the point where our members are involved in every aspect of housing activity.

At the Chartered Institute of Housing we provide an independent voice which represents the interests of housing professionals as individuals. This is a different role from other bodies which may represent the interests of organisations from a particular sector or a geographical area. As a professional body we are frequently consulted by government before they introduce housing legislation because we offer a non-partisan and non-political view - drawing on the knowledge of the people that do the job. This is respected by politicians and government departments who have come to trust the professional judgement of the CIH.

Our members work in the provision and management of social housing - and these make up the core of our membership. Many join the Institute as students or begin courses as part of their employment and are employed at all levels from caretakers to the Chief Executive or Directors of Housing. We also have people who work for private developers, as consultants, as academics or as specialists, for example in housing finance.

The one thing we have in common is the commitment to develop our knowledge and skills as a housing professional.

As a professional body we set standards for our members through our Code of Conduct which sets out broad principles covering the responsibilities of a housing professional and the standards of conduct expected. All CIH members sign up to the standards of behaviour embodied in the Code of Conduct.

Another way in which the CIH formally sets standards is through the accreditation of education programmes.

Each accredited course is linked to a grade of CIH membership which is conferred on people who successfully complete the programme. This helps to create a common understanding of what can be expected of people at the different grades of CIH membership.

There are a number of important points about this process. Firstly, we want to ensure that Housing education is focussed on improving housing practice. We do this by asking the housing industry what it needs and converting this into a number of outcomes which universities and colleges can then use to design their courses.

Secondly, the CIH acts as the intermediary between the housing sector and education providers. We are able to advise on the best way for universities to include elements which will develop a critical perspective and yet still meet the needs of the industry. In this way the CIH is able to bridge the gap between practice and theory and to develop courses which, in turn, will create the kind of reflective practitioners that are needed to solve the complex problems that we face.

And we do this not only in the 4 countries of the UK, but in Australia and Hong Kong - and last year accredited our first undergraduate housing qualification at Wuhan University in China.

It is critically important that professional education and training develops alongside and helps equip our members to cope with the changes taking place in society.

Last year the CIH embarked on an ambitious review of our professional qualification for Corporate membership in the UK. We invited people working in housing to share their vision of professionalism in the sector and its wider role in the development of sustainable communities and following a comprehensive

consultation process of nearly twelve months a new qualification requirement was published. The new courses which are starting this year have embedded within them the professional practice requirement for membership making the transfer from student to qualified member a seamless process.

Here in the Asian Pacific, we have developed a unique professional qualification requirement which meets the particular needs of practitioners. The content is different, to reflect the different way that housing is delivered in the Asian Pacific, but the standards are the same.

And our education programme in the Asian Pacific is growing. In addition to established courses at Hong Kong University, Hong Kong City University and the Hong Kong Institute of Vocational Education, CIH is starting to accredit courses elsewhere in the Asian Pacific region. We have accredited our first undergraduate course at Wuhan University in China. And we are talking to other Chinese universities about new courses - in Ching Qing and Shenzhen.

We are also talking to colleagues in Macao and Taiwan about the potential to develop CIH accredited courses there.

This programme of new education development will support the work of the Asian Pacific branch and their plans to develop CIH membership across the Asian Pacific region.

On the 40th Anniversary of the CIH Branch here in the Asian Pacific it is appropriate for me at this point to pay a public tribute to my colleagues on the branch committee who have worked tirelessly to nurture and develop links with housing professionals in China and beyond. Their vision and expertise is widely respected within the Institute's governing Council, and we are grateful to them for their hard work. It is important, I think, to emphasise that the Institute is a charitable organisation and so there is no personal gain to be made from their efforts. What they have done has been for the good of the housing profession and the well-being of the CIH and on behalf of the governing Council, I would like to thank them for that - and I do so confident of the future progress of the CIH in the Asian Pacific.

During the few days I have been in Hong Kong I have taken the opportunity to visit housing projects which are managed by CIH members in both the private and public sectors. I have been impressed by the very obvious professionalism, expertise and commitment to high standards of management that I have seen.

I believe that both the Hong Kong Housing Authority and the Housing Society have made a crucial contribution to these high standards - recognising the vital role of housing professionals in actively improving the living conditions of the people of Hong Kong over the past forty years.

Property developers also recognise the importance of professional housing management which will benefit the value of new housing projects and the reputation of their company. Quality management has become one of the effective selling points enhancing the confidence of customers.

As a result of the rapid economic growth in the Asian Pacific I believe that there is great potential for development of the housing management profession and I am particularly pleased at the relationships being forged between CIH and delegates from other countries represented at this conference including Macau, Taiwan, Korea and also of course – our continuing relationship with our colleagues from Australia and South Africa.

I hope that you share my view that whilst we still have much to achieve we are seeing important developments in the housing profession across the world.

Whilst the CIH has the experience to assist others to develop education programmes and to promote standards in housing, we also recognise that we can learn from colleagues in other countries too, and that is why this visit and this International Conference is so important.

So to conclude.

In this increasingly interdependent world we must argue the case for decent housing and its fundamental importance to people's quality of life. We also have to show that as housing professionals we really can deliver consistently high standards.

Professionalism should be about striving for excellence and this includes learning from each other and drawing on the many examples there are of best practice - both in this region and across the world.

It is also the responsibility of all of us in housing, and particularly of a professional Institute, to use our knowledge, expertise and experience of working with people to argue for well thought through and holistic solutions for the communities we serve.

This must mean working more closely with, and supporting, communities to help them develop their own solutions, recognising that people increasingly want to influence their environment, to exercise choice - not only about where they live but also the services they receive.

I believe that the development of a broadly based stratum of housing professionals across the world supports all of us, in our own countries, in creating an authoritative and respected voice in advocating policy options, setting standards and promoting best practice.

Aspirations will continue to rise as technology shrinks the world, but I believe that those of us in housing can respond to the challenges we face - and the CIH will play its part in supporting members and colleagues in achieving our common objectives.