

## **CIH Hong Kong delegation visit to Leicester City Council - 29 June 2018**

When I was contacted by CIH head office to ask if Leicester City Council were prepared to host the annual Hong Kong delegation following the Manchester conference, we jumped at the chance. What an excellent opportunity to share knowledge and best practice with housing colleagues from the other side of the world.

I was then even happier when I learned that the delegation wanted to discuss both fire safety and refurbishment in tower blocks – this is ideal for us at Leicester as we are three quarters of the way through a major refurbishment project to our tower blocks on the St Peters estate, and have a systematic approach to fire safety in all our blocks.

Following a tour of one of Leicester's shopping centres, the delegation arrived at 12 noon and were met by Chris Burgin, director of housing, and Councillor Andy Connelly, assistant mayor for housing. After a brief welcome and introduction to the City, Chris was presented with a gift from the delegation, which now sits proudly on his desk.

Suki Supria, head of housing then gave a presentation on the refurbishment project on the tower block which included a really interesting set of maps from the 1950s, 60s and 70s which showed the clearance of the old St Peters area and the building of the system built estate. Suki set out what our learning points had been and how we had made our decisions on what to do. This was followed by a visit to St Peters, where the delegates were invited into a newly refurbished flat by one of our tenants. We also spend some time looking at the external environment of the area

Whilst on the tour, we took the opportunity to discuss some of the differences in high rise management between the UK and Hong Kong. We thought our block of 21 floors was tall, until we discovered that accommodation block in excess of 40 storeys high are common place in Hong Kong.

We then returned to Leicester City Hall, where Simon Nicholls, head of service gave a presentation on Leicester City Council's approach to fire safety in all blocks and communal areas. Simon gave an overview of the work undertaken over the past five years, and gave some examples of our best practice.

The final presentation of the day was given by Nick Griffiths, district manager which looked in more detail on the decant process employed when refurbishing tower blocks, and particularly the concentrated on the individual tailored serves which is needed. Nick went over some of the pitfalls we had encountered and gave the message that you "always need to have plan b, c and d".

The day closed with a lively Q&A session on a wide variety of topics including rent setting, security of tenure and refurbishment planning.

Final thoughts? An excellent day, both the delegates and staff from Leicester learned a lot. If you are asked to host this next year, seize the opportunity.

Nick Griffiths  
CIH East Midlands Board member