The fallout of the UK European Referendum on the 23 June is still reverberating and the consequences of the BREXIT decision are still being evaluated. I suspect that in five years’ time we shall look back at BREXIT as a momentous and significant decision in our lives; the starting point of ending over 43 years membership of the European Union while the UK remains geographically part of Europe. Certainly the political fallout has been swift and unpredictable; some may say well that is just the geo-political landscape and has little effect on CIBSE and our members. If that is your view I would suggest a re-evaluation because even in the leafy avenues of Balham the Referendum result is already looking to produce momentous changes. Having said that we have assessed direct risks to the Institution and we are well placed to handle these.

Our President, John Field, immediately has seized the initiative and CIBSE has tried very hard to provide an appropriate focus and communication channel for raising and discussing the issues. Just assessing the impact on the regulatory framework within the built environment and how our UK Government will respond to climate change is a mammoth task. I suppose in a pragmatic way the benefits of membership and the CIBSE network are now even more important in this period of uncertainty. As well as our own webpages on the topic, I feel I should draw your attention to work outside CIBSE that may be helpful; the Construction Industry Council, of which CIBSE is a member, is providing regular updates through “BREXIT Digest” encompassing updates, opinion and issues (probably easier just to “Google it”). The Royal Academy of Engineering will be issuing a report in the next few weeks entitled “Engineering a future outside the EU-securing the best outcome for the UK” leaning heavily on the People & Skills, Finance & Funding, Standards & Regulations area of our profession, and to which CIBSE is contributing. The report will explain that Engineering turns ideas and research into wealth-creating innovation that improves lives and drives economic and social progress. Annual investment from the UK’s private and public sectors in engineering research and development totals around £12 billion. However, engineering-related sectors contributed £280 billion in Gross Value Added to the UK economy – 20% of the total. It is therefore critical that government, in negotiating the UK’s exit from the EU, is fully conversant with the key issues that affect the UK’s engineering performance. In my opinion, this is serious stuff.

As an indication of some of the unforeseen consequences I am sure many of you have followed the debate on EU funding of research, certainly the impact of BREXIT in the area of academic research in our Universities could be cataclysmic. While I am sure we all welcome the government’s announcement that EU funding will be supported until 2020, it hardly gives our research community confidence for the medium-term, especially as so many researchers are non-UK Europeans. We all know that research is so vital in maintaining our competitive edge and the engineering related contribution to the economy.

Professional Reviews. While on the subject of change I understand John Uff’s report on the future of the engineering profession will be shared with the “stakeholder community” in early November. You will recall this has generated a huge amount of interest and also concern. In parallel another group has formed to carry out market research, discussion and seek views to scope the opportunities and risks for the future of 21st Century Professional Engineering Institutions (PEIs). At this stage it is almost impossible to determine what the conclusions and opportunities may be. At the same time CIBSE is involved in an initiative with the bodies within the building service sector, primarily but not exclusively Building Engineering Services Association (BESA), BSRIA, FETA & ECA, to try and create a “single voice” for the Building Services Sector so that market related research and views on such issues as skills and training could be argued that they have the support of the whole sector.
Governance Review  Your Board has also been busy. The major review into our governance is almost complete, Phase 1 specifically. The Board approved in-principle the recommendations of the Governance Task Force and in September the embodiment of the majority of the recommendations were approved by the Board with some additional work streams to continue. I would personally like to say a huge thank you to our volunteers who have done so much to make this happen; Graham Manly and his Task Force who produced a very thick tome and Nick Mead and his team who then went through the detail with a fine tooth comb. I suspect governance is very similar to many tasks; it is never ending. Even the most casual of observers can see that this is a huge effort and yet, based upon the Charity Commissioners general views, creating harmonious and effective charities is ever more difficult. While we do have those who express their discontent, I personally welcome it, and I think it is important to listen and have an open communication channel, there is a balance to be struck and I would always prefer for members to feel that they can raise issues. Individual issues should not dominate discussion and obstruct progress. I am always keen to hear from members and happy to share views with the senior officers, as I and the staff serve the Institution and do not lead it.

IT/CRM  While still on the subject of momentous change I need to turn to our new IT system; the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system went live at the end of July. The human disposition is to believe that when we achieve the next goal/target “all will be well”; of course, it is a deception for the reality is that even more goals/targets are ahead. While the new CRM is definitely a huge step forward and the integration into our Content Management System (CMS) essential, there are still significant challenges ahead. The first is to get the system to work as it should; the staff have worked very hard but we have had about eight weeks of settling-in which has been frustration, annoying and a distraction. We think there is positive light ahead and we believe the new system will be more effectively operational by the end of the month. We then have another round of enhancements and improvements to make. I am sure some of our volunteers have found the new IT system frustrating and challenging too – for which I apologise but we have to make progress and we are all sure that we will have an outstanding IT system, we just have another hill or two to climb yet.

ASHRAE  Today we welcome the ASHRAE President Tim Wentz to our Council Meeting plus Jeff Littleton, ASHRAE Executive Vice President. Time served Council members will know that this is a regular and long held tradition, CIBSE and ASHRAE have been “liaising” for a long time - at least forty years according to the records. Of course, it may be just “business as usual”, however on the 12th October to mark this event we are holding a special 40th Anniversary Conference at UCL followed by a Dinner. As I write, the plan is also to sign a new Strategic Partnership Agreement. In some ways this type of agreement is not new but I think it does mark a new beginning and a new opportunity. CIBSE and ASHRAE are the only two professional engineering societies with a global reach. Our aims and ambitions are similar, naturally we are also very different, but given the challenges and opportunities that the engineering profession faces, it must be sensible to try and work together. Of course, there are risks, but equally “No risk, No gain” which I recall is from a Hong Kong comedy film set in Macau – I will ask our President Elect, Peter Wong, to explain that one!

Premises  We continue to reflect and consider what the future options are for the CIBSE HQ and staff in terms of accommodation. The Balham site is tired and no longer fit-for-purpose but thus far all the possible options appear to be too expensive. Into the mix has recently come the possibility of a new Balham station for Crossrail 2; the impact on the value of our freehold site could be significant we understand. Therefore we await two decisions, firstly, whether it is to be a new Balham or Tooting Bec station and secondly, the overall go-ahead (or not) for Crossrail 2, which is not expected before the end of 2017 at the earliest. The Board directed that no decision on premises would be made before then and we are now in the process of drawing up a maintenance plan for the site for the next five years.
Events  Echoing John’s theme of “getting CIBSE to the next level”. I feel I need to plug our forthcoming Building Performance Conference at the QE2 Centre, 17-18 November. The theme is “Boosting Performance through Cooperation”. May I really encourage you to attend – I do think you will have a very worthwhile Conference and there has been a big effort in trying to get this right for you. At the very least do come and see the Exhibition, which is free, if you are in the Westminster area then.