



**Paper for contribution to conference:  
Retrofitting of Social Housing: Financing and Policy Options,  
Thessaloniki November 2006**

**Title of paper:     **SHARE: Local Forums as a new means of dialogue**  
Presented by:     **Catrin Maby, Director, Severn Wye Energy Agency****

### **Background**

***The SHARE project: Social Housing Action to Reduce Energy Consumption.***

The SHARE project is a partnership linking regions in eight different countries (UK, Bulgaria, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, Slovenia, Sweden). It is funded under the Intelligent Energy Europe programme, and runs from January 2006 until June 2008.

The project aims to increase the level of sustainable energy in terms of retrofit activity, and in renovation and refurbishment, as well as to impact upon behavioural change in energy use.

It consists of parallel but linked programmes with local partners in each of 8 European regions. The work is led in each case by energy experts who are energy agencies or consultancies, but with an inbuilt project structure of local social housing energy forums as a framework for us to work in close partnership with the social housing organisations and residents in each area, as well as other relevant people, such as local authorities, fuel utilities, contractors, building services designers and architects working in this sector.

The forums are at the core of the project, and through them we will organise and provide training, awareness programmes and energy advice to residents in each of the eight partner areas. We aim to disseminate this approach to interested parties in each country and through European networks.

We have interesting similarities and differences to share, and are in the early stages of what promises to be a valuable project.

## Project Partners

We deliberately chose a range of partners from the north and south, east and west, and representing urban and rural situations. The consortium partners are all energy specialists (either energy agency NGOs or consultancies), with sustainable energy aims. This gives us the drive to develop and facilitate the forums, and the enthusiasm and knowledge to engage and support the key actors within social housing in our regions.

Although there is a base level of common knowledge between these sustainable energy experts, there is also a degree of skills exchange between the partners, in that some are more experienced in communications and advice work, while others have in-depth technical expertise in specific technologies.

Organisation		Country
Severn Wye Energy Agency	SWEA	UK
Tipperary Energy Agency	TEA	Ireland
Energy Agency for South East Sweden	ESS	Sweden
Sofia Energy Centre	SEC	Bulgaria
B.&S.U. Beratungs-und Service Gesellschaft Umwelt mbH	BSU	Germany
Building and Civil Engineering Institute ZRMK	BCEI ZRMK	Slovenia
Prioriterre (Energie-Environnement 74)	EE 74	France
Sihtasutus Regionaalsad Energakeskused (Regional Energy Centres - Estonia)	REC-E	Estonia



**The SHARE consortium is welcomed by the Mayor of Cheltenham, UK, February 2006**

### **The concept of local social housing energy forums**

The idea of the local social housing energy forum is a simple one. It brings together stakeholders in each region to discuss common issues, share knowledge and information and develop common solutions.

In order to ensure a genuine responsiveness to local needs, we have set a relatively flexible programme of work, with enough defined targets to drive the programme forward. The defined areas are that each forum will:

- identify local training needs and agree a training programme
- develop a local awareness campaign, backed up with specialist advice

Forums are attended by a variety of stakeholders, and this varies in each region. The range of attendees includes:

- social housing providers (companies, housing associations, local authorities)
- residents/ residents' representatives
- local council members/local politicians
- health and social care professionals
- energy suppliers

It should be noted that in some regions there are several social housing providers that come together in these forums, while in others there may be one or two main providers. In some countries there is little or no rented social housing and the groups consist of associations of owners and departments or agencies concerned with their needs.

In addition to the core members, others tend to be invited to some meetings with relevance to particular topics, such as:

- insulation installers
- heating controls manufacturers
- renewable energy technology suppliers

The idea of the forums is that the role of the energy agency 'animateur' should diminish over time, as the usefulness of the group results in it finding its own momentum. It is also possible that these groups may have a 'task-and-finish' life, by being very active for a period of time in achieving solutions and then terminating. This is not foreseen within the life of the project, however.

Social housing energy forums provide several benefits to the stakeholders:

- **Common issues**

Social housing providers (and residents) face a number of common issues, and can benefit a great deal from working together on these:, such as:

- rising energy prices
- energy inefficient housing stock
- condensation damp
- government targets (eg for carbon emission reduction or housing standards)
- the problem of finding capital for improvements and major maintenance works

- rights and responsibilities for works in a changing housing market

- **Reliable information**

SHARE forums are a good way to share reliable information that is un-biased and commercially neutral – with the technical support of the energy expert to help interpret and explain information from suppliers and installers. They also provide an opportunity to develop a balanced perspective, with the views of both staff and residents presented.

- **Problem solving**

The forums offer an ideal opportunity for common problem solving, possible examples being the issues around metering of individual homes in a district heating network or particular behavioural issues (perhaps around use of heating controls or ventilation).

- **Bargaining power**

Grouping together housing providers has significant potential in increased purchasing power, for example for energy efficiency products, renewables technologies, controls or insulation. As a group they can also command more attention from technical sales personnel to offer information and quality of service.

- **Commitment**

The participative nature of the forums, aiming for debate and interaction rather than lectures, tends to develop greater participant commitment, allowing the target group to define the activity according to their own requirements, but with expert support readily available.

- **Time saving**

Housing professionals have to deal with many issues every day – the forums can help avoid several providers researching the same issues, or even making the same mistakes.

## **Some examples of activities so far**

### **In Bulgaria**

The municipalities are responsible for the construction, management and refurbishment of social housing. The SHARE project focuses on the municipality of Sofia (with about 16% of the population of the country) and more especially districts Izgrev, Iskar and Mladost. The experts from municipalities are also representatives of the tenants of rental social housings.

A specific aspect of the dwelling sector in Bulgaria is the fact that 97% of the dwellings are privately owned. The SHARE forums include representatives of owners of flats in big multi-family dwelling buildings, and depending on the issues plan to involve architects, engineers, experts from district heating companies, installers of insulation and windows, and social workers. Two forums have been held so far, and future topics will include additional insulation on external walls and roofs at building refurbishment, possibilities for improvement of heating installations, assessment of users' behaviour, how to choose new appliances, and financing of refurbishment.

### **In Estonia**

The energy agency has developed a partnership with the flat-owners association, which represents the residents of what used to be municipal housing, and the City of Tallinn, which is developing a small new rented sector for very specific groups.

The forums have met several times and discussed training needs, awareness rising program planning and typical problems and solutions for energy saving in dwellings. Training needs identified include using new equipment, adding insulation, ventilation after additional insulation is installed, heat system regulation requirements, what the energy label is and what use it can be, and how doors and windows renovation influence internal climate conditions, mistakes to avoid.

Typical problems identified are the understandability of materials on the level of decision makers and that some existing awareness materials are not understandable or are not available.

### **In France**

As part of the SHARE dissemination, the housing forums are working with EDF and GDF in order to produce a 'bill mask'. These masks will fit around the resident's bill and highlight the important areas and explain the more complicated issues. A training programme for social workers is planned, to enable them to identify energy efficiency issues when working with clients.

### **In Ireland**

As well as holding quarterly forums, housing professionals can also share ideas, issues, knowledge and problems on an online forum.

## In Germany

Materials are being translated into Russian and Turkish and efforts are being made to use the best lines of communication to make sure that minority communities in Remscheid are reached.

Experts visit properties to discuss issues about heating and damp with residents, and a demonstration flat has been established.



The Remscheid SHARE kick-off event in May 2006, was attended by over 300 social housing residents. Sometimes you have to be ready for a big response!

## In Slovenia

The focus of the work of the forums is on good practice in refurbishment and how to overcome institutional and financial barriers to improving sustainable energy. The simple thermometers and the agony aunt approach have been adopted for the awareness campaign:

**SHARE** "Zmanjšanje rabe energije v neprofitnih stavbah"

PREVROČE – nekoliko znižajte temperaturo; nevarnost vročinskega udara pri dojenčkih.	27°C
PRIMERNA temperatura za dnevne bivalne prostore ŠE UGODNA temperatura za prostore v stanovanju	24°C
NEUGODJE in nevarnost bolezni dihal	21°C
PREHLADNO – povečano tveganje srčnega napada in kapi pri občutljivih osebah	18°C
NEVARNOST PODHLADITVE pri nižjih temperaturah	15°C
	12°C
	9°C

REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA  
MINISTRSTVO ZAROKELJE IN PROSTOR

Intelligent Energy Europa

ZMK INSTITUTE



### **In Sweden**


As a result of the social housing forums, there has been talk with social landlords to investigate the use of 'heat meters' for both heat and hot water in blocks of flats where there is communal heating systems. This will allow for energy bills to be apportioned to more accurately to individual tenants and therefore lead to a greater drive to be more energy efficiency.

### **In the United Kingdom**


Through the SHARE partnership, one social housing landlord has obtained over 200,000 euros in funding from an electricity supplier (under their energy saving 'Energy Efficiency Commitment' programme) to install 'top-up' loft insulation in 760 properties. One landlord is planning to install solar collectors on ten homes.

The forum has been influential in the writing of a new specification for central heating improvements in Gloucester, to be more energy efficient, using the knowledge and experiences from other housing providers who have already been through the heating upgrade process. Examples are to include:

- zonal heating programmers
- hot water tanks suitable for later installation of solar
- ensure higher level of loft insulation at time of heating upgrade



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2006-07**



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Eight local housing associations are actively involved in the forum, and four of them have set up agreements with the energy agency to deliver advice to their tenants.

The training programme has begun, with sessions on condensation and on energy efficient choice and use of electrical appliances. Staff and residents are trained together in mixed groups which encourages understanding of a broader perspective and helps to explode myths.

An awareness campaign has been developed, based on the popular newspaper 'agony aunt' idea. This was selected from a choice of approaches through a focus group with residents. The campaign was launched in October, and is backed up by a freephone advice line and home visits for tenants.



# Ask Penny...

Free and friendly energy  
efficiency advice



**"My husband says we  
need a hot water  
tank jacket.**

**What's this season's  
fashion?"**



**"The fashion this season is  
thick and snug fitting.**

**Next time you put away your  
towels, have a look to see if  
your tank is properly  
insulated and that the  
thermostat is set at 60°C"**



Save energy and money at home. Call free on

# 0800 512012



It doesn't cost you a penny to save £££'s



800 512012



Hi,

Keep this thermometer card in your main living room. Do not place near a heat source or in direct sunlight.

Why not try turning down your room thermostat by 1oC and see if you are still warm enough? - you could save up to 10% on your fuel bill.

And try to make use of automatic timers or programmers to ensure that the heating and hot water are only on when you need them. Very useful if you are forgetful like me and keep leaving your heating on by mistake.

For FREE energy advice factsheets about heating controls, condensation, energy suppliers and more low or no cost energy saving tips please call the Gloucestershire Energy Efficiency Advice centre on 0800 512012.

Take care

**Penny**

The only responsibility for the costs of this wallet are with the person. Some air conditioning plants of the European Commission; The European Commission is responsible for any liability to make other available required items.

For FREE Energy Efficiency Advice call **0800 512012**



**SHARE**

Social Housing Action to Reduce Energy Consumption



Intelligent Energy Europe

**TOO HOT - Reduce heat but stay warm. Babies may over heat.**

**IDEAL living room temperature**

**COMFORTABLE house temperature**

**DISCOMFORT and risk of respiratory illness**

**TOO COLD - increased risk of heart attack and strokes in vulnerable people  
RISK OF HYPOTHERMIA below this temperature**

27°C

24°C

21°C

18°C

15°C

12°C

9°C

For FREE Energy Efficiency Advice call **0800 512012**



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**The SHARE website is at: [www.socialhousingaction.com](http://www.socialhousingaction.com)**