

REPORT TO: Climate & Environment Advisory Committee 30 June 2020

LEAD CABINET MEMBER: Lead Cabinet Member for Climate Change

LEAD OFFICER: Head of Shared Waste Services and Environment

Solar Together Cambridgeshire Solar PV Group-Buying Scheme

1. This report outlines plans for Solar Together Cambridgeshire - a solar pv group-buying scheme which the Council is promoting in partnership with Cambridgeshire County Council and neighbouring city/district councils.

Recommendations

2. CEAC is requested to review the plans detailed within this report and contribute suggestions or insights as to how to maximise the success of the project.

Reasons for Recommendations

3. This recommendation enables CEAC to have sight of the Solar Together Cambridgeshire project and contribute to its success.

Details

4. The Council have agreed with Cambridgeshire County Council, through a Memorandum of Understanding, to participate in the delivery of a group buying scheme for solar pv panels, led by Cambridgeshire County Council, in partnership with Dutch group-buying company, iChoosr. Battery storage systems for solar pv will also be available through the scheme. The scheme will run this autumn and will go by the name Solar Together Cambridgeshire using the logo below.



5. The scheme will contribute towards the delivery of the Council's Zero Carbon Strategy by increasing local generation of electricity through solar pv and reducing reliance on grid

electricity. It will also provide significant benefit to residents, local businesses and community groups by providing an easy, good-value route to high quality solar pv installations.

Background

6. The scheme came about following a presentation by iChoosr to local authority officers at a Cambridgeshire Energy Partnership meeting in November last year. iChoosr have partnered with Cambridgeshire County Council to run the Cambridgeshire Switch collective purchasing scheme for cheaper energy bills for many years. They have also run solar pv group-buying schemes with local authorities in Manchester, London and Suffolk. iChoosr presented their model, which is well established, and is to partner with local authorities to promote group buying, and then run a reverse auction to identify a delivery partner.
7. Following the presentation Cambridgeshire County Council entered into a contract with iChoosr to deliver the Solar Together Cambridgeshire scheme having followed all necessary procurement practices. The Council, along with the City Council and the other Cambridgeshire district councils then entered into MoUs with Cambridgeshire County Council.
8. iChoosr require the local authority/ies to commit to promoting the scheme through a targeted mailshot to a minimum number of residents. The local authorities cover this cost and receive a commission for each installation.
9. The cost to the Council will be approximately £3,400. This figure covers direct mailing costs and a share of the cost of data provision to identify target addresses. No advertising costs are included in this figure.
10. The cost of solar pv has fallen dramatically making it more affordable, but it is difficult to predict sales due to recent changes in the policy landscape for solar pv with the withdrawal of the Feed-in-tariff scheme last March and the introduction of the Smart Export Guarantee in January. Previous schemes run by iChoosr have been approximately cost-neutral for partnering local authorities.
11. The group buying scheme work in five steps, shown in the iChoosr graphic below:

The Solar Together process

5 EASY STEPS



1. Registration

Households are called upon to register online, for free, and without obligation. By answering a few questions about their roof, such as size and orientation, they are presented with an early estimation of costs and savings.



2. Auction

The auction is a reverse auction - so the lowest bid wins. The winning bid sets the price for all solar systems in scheme. All suppliers are pre-vetted by iChoosr and must comply with criteria to guarantee the quality of the offer.



3. Personal recommendation

After the auction, all registrants will receive a personal recommendation with information about the winning supplier, the complete package, and a breakdown of costs and savings.



4. Decision

Through the website, helpdesk and info sessions participants will have access to all the information need to make a well-informed decision whether to accept the offer, or not. If they decide to proceed, residents will need to pay a conditionally-refundable deposit of £150.



5. Savings on electricity

After installation you will start saving money on your electricity by generating your own green energy.

12. The timetable for the Cambridgeshire scheme is shown in the table below:

01 September 2020	Launch, local and online campaigning begins
14 September 2020	Direct mail lands on doormats
06 October 2020	Auction takes place
26 Oct – 07 Dec	Decision phase
14 Dec – 31 May 2021	Installation phase

13. iChoosr put suppliers through a rigorous qualification process to ensure their suitability for the scheme. They oversee the delivery process and inspect approximately 5% of installations. They also provide a helpline for customers.

14. Installations of up to 50 panels are available through the scheme, making it potentially of interest for premises larger than typical homes including small businesses, village halls and community buildings. Proposals for this year's Zero Carbon Communities grant will be considered at Cabinet on 29 June. If agreed, these will include funding for solar pv under the Community Buildings theme, and applicants will be strongly encouraged to consider the Solar Together Cambridgeshire scheme for delivery of these panels.

Implications

15. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, the following implications have been considered:-

Legal

16. The shared Legal Service have had sight of the MoU with Cambridgeshire County Council and confirm there are no legal issues of concern.

Staffing

17. This project will be staffed from within existing resource.

Climate Change

18. The scheme will contribute towards the delivery of the Council's Zero Carbon Strategy by increasing local generation of electricity through solar pv and reducing reliance on grid electricity.

Effect on Council Priority Areas

Growing local businesses and economies

19. The scheme is likely to be of benefit to local solar pv installation companies. These will be invited to take part in the reverse auction to become the scheme installer. Even if the appointed installer is from outside of the area, previous experience of iChoosr schemes is that local companies are subcontracted to deliver at least some of the work.

Being green to our core

20. The scheme will contribute towards the delivery of the Council's Zero Carbon Strategy by increasing local generation of electricity through solar pv and reducing reliance on grid electricity.

Background Papers

None.

Appendices

None.

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