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HARBOROUGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO THE CABINET MEETING OF 11th OCTOBER 2021

PUBLIC REPORT: Y

EXEMPT REPORT: N

Report Title	Solar Together Collective Solar Procurement Scheme
KEY DECISION	No
Report Author	Elaine Bird Regulatory Services Manager
Purpose of Report	To inform the Cabinet of the opportunities for the Council to assist local residents to install solar panels through a collective solar procurement scheme and to seek approval to join the scheme procured by Blaby District Council through a concession contract as there is only one provider of this scheme.
Reason for Decision	Collective solar procurement offers an opportunity to residents to install solar panels at reduced costs and supported through the process. The installation of solar panels provides excellent carbon reduction possibilities across the district.
Portfolio (holder)	Cllr Bateman
Corporate Priorities	The scheme would support all three of the Councils current priorities <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Place: A safe, enterprising and vibrant place• The People: A healthy, inclusive and empowered community• Your Council: Creative, proactive and efficient
Financial Implications	There is no specific budget for the marketing of a scheme. The main marketing will be undertaken through existing channels including social media and web site. However, there is a requirement to undertake a direct mail out targeted to certain demographics across the district – it is anticipated this will occur in early 2022/23 at an estimated cost of £3.6k. It is difficult to estimate the number of householders that will participate in the scheme, but for each household that takes up the offer, the Council receives £75 – at this rate, the Council will break even after 48 referrals. To meet the cost of the direct mailing; the 2021/22 Health Services budget is currently forecasting to overachieve; the excess income will be ring-fenced and carried forward.

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Risk Management Implications	Not supporting a collective solar procurement scheme could be a reputational risk to the Council in relation to its commitment to reducing carbon emissions through the declaration of a Climate Emergency.
Environmental Implications	The collective solar project supports the Council's commitment to reducing carbon emissions across the district. A typical solar panel saves approximately 900kg of carbon per year and over the lifetime of a panel could save around 23 tons of carbon.
Legal Implications	The Council will need to enter into a memorandum of understanding with the lead authority to take part in the scheme.
Equality Implications	<p>It is recognised that this scheme is aimed at those homeowners who can pay for improvements to their homes and as such would be out of reach of some residents. There is the potential in the future to work with social and private landlords with Solar Together to open the scheme benefits to a wider range of residents, but we are currently not in a position to offer this service.</p> <p>However, the council does offer a number of energy efficiency schemes to support improvements for people on lower incomes. The current volatility of the energy market is pushing up energy prices, and this support will help to insulate residents from future increased costs.</p>
Data Protection Implications	The Council will enter into a data sharing agreement with the supplier and lead authority as required.
Consultation	Members will be advised when iChoosr are about to contact residents regarding the scheme to ensure that they are aware that iChoosr are operating in the district.
Options	The Council could choose not to support the collective solar procurement project.
Background Papers	None
Recommendation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To note the principles of collective solar procurement and agree to a scheme to be developed in the district 2. Delegate authority to the Director, Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer following consultation with the Cabinet Member to enter into the necessary legal agreement and take such other steps as are necessary to implement recommendation 1 above.

1.Introduction

- 1.1 Collective Solar procurement offers an opportunity to householders, who may be interested in installing solar PV panels and battery storage but are concerned about finding appropriate installers, to be supported through the process. Solar PV and battery storage offer excellent carbon saving opportunities for homeowners.
- 1.2 iChoosr, who currently operate the successful Collective Switching project, also offer a collective approach to purchasing solar panels and battery storage, using an auction model with qualified installers.
- 1.3 iChoosr, through Blaby District Council have approached Leicestershire authorities to work together to provide this offer to residents across Leicestershire.
- 1.4 Blaby District Council will be the lead authority for the procurement, via a single source concession with iChoosr and have and have invited other districts to join their agreement through a Memorandum of Understanding.

1. Key Facts

2.1 The Council has declared a climate emergency and one area of action is to ensure that residents are advised and supported to reduce their own emissions.

2.2 Harborough District Council has been working with iChoosr since 2019 through a Collective Switching project to support residents to switch energy suppliers on mass and possibly obtain lower energy tariffs, thereby saving them money on their energy bills. Since the first auction in October 2019, 4000 residents have registered for the scheme of which 825 switched tariffs following the auction, saving approximately 790 tonnes of carbon.

2.3 Collective Solar procurement works on the same principles as collective switching and allows for residents to get a good price on solar installs and be assured of the quality of the installation. A community champion, such as the Council, provides a level of reassurance about the process. This is aimed at homeowners, with sufficient funds to make the investment themselves, but who may be concerned about finding a good quality installer on their own.

2.4 iChoosr (as Solar Together) offer the service alongside the collective switching. iChoosr would target residents in the district who were likely to have the resources and interest in a solar installation with a direct mail, co-badged with Harborough District Council. iChoosr would negotiate prices with local installers, making use of economies of scale to improve the deal for the homeowner. The service would be a concession type procurement, with only a single supplier in the market. iChoosr also undertake various quality checks to ensure that only highly reputable installers, with

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the appropriate certifications are included in the auction. iChoosr also offer support to residents throughout the process.

2.5 The Scheme will commence in 2022. There are potentially three auctions during the year which the council could be part of once signed up however the Council will only sign up to one auction each year. As with collective switching, residents can register an interest in an auction and will be provided with all the relevant information following the auction and there is no commitment on them to take up the offer. Homeowners who join the scheme would have full support and information and the suitability of their home would be assessed prior to any installation They would also receive industry guarantees after the install was complete. The price of the installation should be lower than market price (the previous auction returned 30% savings), but the actual saving cannot be advised on until after the auction.

2.6 The Council would need to meet the cost of the direct mailing, which at is expected to be around £3,600 but will be dependent on the number of households targeted. Following the installation completion, the Council will receive £75 per install as a referral fee. It is expected that the referral fee will make a fair contribution to the costs of direct mailing; however, the costs of the direct mailing will have to be met early in 2022/23. To finance this “upfront” cost; the 2021/22 Health Services budget is currently expected to overachieve (i.e. income > budget). This overachievement will be ring-fenced and carried-forward to meet next year’s direct mailing cost.

2.7 There are also several added benefits to the Council by taking part in the collective purchase scheme.

- Significant measurable carbon reduction driven by resident investment in green energy
- Group buying is an extremely cost-effective option.
- Small investment of council resource to drive significant private investment
- Supplier vetting and engagement handled by iChoosr.
- Customer support handled by iChoosr

2.8 iChoosr has run this project for a number of years and has successfully worked with a number of councils including Norfolk, Suffolk, London Boroughs, Essex, Cambridgeshire and Devon. All district and borough councils in Leicestershire have already committed to the project or have given an expression of interest in participating.