

NORTH SOMERSET COUNCIL DECISION



DECISION OF: COUNCILLOR ANNEMIEKE WAITE. THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR CLIMATE, WASTE AND SUSTAINABILITY

WITH ADVICE FROM: THE DIRECTOR OF PLACE

DECISION NO: 23/24 DP 87

SUBJECT: SOLAR TOGETHER ROUND 2

KEY DECISION:

No

REASON:

The decision is below the financial threshold and is not significant in terms of the impact in two or more wards.

BACKGROUND:

The Combined Authority has an agreement in place (August 2021-August 2025) with iChoosr administers of the Solar Together scheme. A turn-key collective buying scheme for owner/occupiers wishing to invest in a solar panel system on their home, with the option of adding a battery. 'Solar Together - West of England' Round 1, delivered in 2021 and achieved 842 solar PV installations and 105 batteries equating an estimated carbon reduction of 18,000 tonnes over 25 years. See Annex for breakdown (in Section 3 - Details).

The Regional Low Carbon Delivery team propose working with iChoosr to run a second round of Solar Together - West of England by joining Cohort 4 along with seven other authorities across England. This proposal is being discussed with the Local Authorities on 23 June at the Climate Working Group.

DETAILS:

Cohort four timetable:

1. Set up & coordination with Local Authorities: June – end of August
2. Two direct marketing maildrops: week commencing 28 August & 2 October
3. Customer decision period: October to December
4. Installations to completion: mid-June 2024.

iChoosr has improved the customer service based on feedback from previous rounds. The customer information online seminar is available on demand and a more robust process is in place to handle customer queries and complaints more efficiently.

The Solar Together scheme is designed to be cost neutral to the Combined Authority with the investment in marketing and promotion being recouped through referral fees, on a per installation basis.

Contractors wishing to take part in a cohort round to deliver the installations on homes must qualify or re-qualify each time. iChoosr have a pre-qualification process to ensure that contractors meet qualification, certification, and customer service criteria. In Round 1, to market the scheme with targeted direct mailing and wider promotion, the West of England Combined Authority spent £32,000, with an additional £9,000 contribution from North Somerset in order to participate. The break-even point of six hundred installations was exceeded. Referral fees from Round 1 totalled £66,300, with a portion of these due to North Somerset. It is proposed that this is reinvested to cover the costs of Round 2, which is estimated to cost a total of £47,947. This will be split between the Combined Authority (£35,623) and North Somerset council (£12,324). This is based on sending out a direct mail to 135,061 addresses across the region.

Annex

Delivery stats from Round 1, 2021:

See below for a breakdown of PV installations by district:

Community	# Accepted	# Total installations	# Panels installed	Total KW installed	Installed Co2 reduction Kg	Total investment	# Battery installed	Total kWh installed battery
Bath and North East Somerset Council	367	278	3,050	1,113	207,518	1,954,223	176	1,062
South Gloucestershire Council	321	228	2,589	945	211,640	1,958,796	225	1,516
North Somerset Council	285	214	2,749	1,003	209,643	1,687,054	166	1,043
Bristol City Council	184	122	1,143	417	84,539	786,437	73	410
Grand Total	1,157	842	9,531	3,479	713,340	6,386,510	640	4,031

See below for a breakdown of retrofit storage (adding storage to an existing PV installation) by district:

Community	# Accepted	# Total installations	Total kWh installed battery	Total investment
North Somerset Council	52	32	196	116,126
South Gloucestershire Council	42	39	209	125,623
Bath and North East Somerset Council	33	16	110	61,606
Bristol City Council	26	18	109	61,887
Grand Total	153	105	623	365,241

DECISION:

To join with the second round of the WECA led scheme to partner with a Solar Panel collective purchasing scheme provider (iChoosr) for private householders.

REASONS:

The decision supports the delivery of Climate Emergency Action Plan.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED:

A Do Nothing approach has also been considered. This would mean residents in neighbouring authorities would be offered renewable installations at reduced rates and North Somerset residents would not. This is a successful scheme. Most other authorities which have taken part in a reverse auction of this type have found it to be so successful they have taken part multiple times.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:

Fees earned from the four council areas in Round 1 totalled as £66,000, a portion of which is due to North Somerset, based on the number of installations. North Somerset portion of

these fees have been calculated by WECA as £21,000 (includes income from the initial £9,000 contribution to Round 1).

For Round 2 based on the estimated direct mail address volume for North Somerset (34,716 addresses) with the total cost of £12,324.

Therefore, there is no additional financial implications required from North Somerset Council. The surplus of £8,676 will be carried over to the next rounds.

Costs

£12,324

Funding

The West of England Combined Authority hold the funding.

LEGAL POWERS AND IMPLICATIONS

The legal agreement is held between WECA and iChoosr.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

This scheme is part of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and will support residents to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through enabling installation of renewable energy generation.

CONSULTATION

Consultation has been based on feedback from the previous round of the scheme, detailed above in the number of installations and the resulting savings in carbon emissions. The scheme is being led by WECA.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Liability for all solar installation sits between the resident and the selected supplier for all solar installations. The third-party quality assure all suppliers and provide a customer care function for residents to help manage any issues that may arise during the installation process. Neither WECA nor the Unitary Authorities will have any liability over the installation.

A full list of the potential risks and mitigations below. The impact of Covid-19 will be monitored in relation to the scheme and its ability to progress within the timescales outlined and current government recommendations.

Risk	Mitigation
Uptake could be low	While it is impossible to accurately predict the level of interest from residents, uptake levels from previous schemes give reason to be optimistic.
Restrictions could be put in place on construction/installation as part of the continuing Covid-19 response.	Government announcements and protocols will be monitored closely. The scheme will follow government advice and will not go ahead if it contravenes these.
Gov. policy changes may have had an impact on consumer confidence, dampening demand	Homeowner interest in solar is at a record high. The emergence of the Solar Export Guarantee improves the business case with more stability than FiT. Local authority backing also increases trust.
Installer quality presents a reputational	The scheme is designed to improve quality as well as affordability. The platform supplier must specify a recognised, fully accredited installer as a

risk for WECA and unitary authorities	prerequisite. In addition, an independent and specialist third party will inspect approximately one in twenty installations throughout the delivery phase of the schemes to identify any issues with the installer.
The scheme could attract criticism as it is predominantly aimed at the able-to-pay, rather than the fuel poor	Other schemes more focussed at fuel poverty run in parallel across the region (with far larger budgets). PRS landlords could potentially use it as a simple way to comply with the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards. If the scheme helps to grow the supply chain and encourage lower costs, less able to pay households and social housing could be encouraged.
The contract is awarded to a national supplier, pushing out the local supply chain	Evidence shows that the scheme must be open to national suppliers to encourage sufficient competition. In all previous cases local subcontractors have been used to deliver the scheme, it is unlikely that a winning bid would be affordable without this in place. Evidence from previous schemes has shown subsequent growth in local supply chain following successful auctions due to general local awareness raising and neighbour referrals.
High level of listed buildings reduces impact of scheme	Evidence of similar constraints in London (Camden). Impact managed through co-ordinated planning advice. Predicated dropout rates do not deter viability.

EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

Have you undertaken an Equality Impact Assessment? Yes / **No**

The scheme is open to all homeowners across North Somerset, including NSC Staff and Members.

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

This scheme is part of the Climate Emergency Action Plan and is a corporate priority.

APPENDICES

DIRECTOR DECISION_Solar Together_Mar2021.docx
Solar Together 21 – EM_(003).docx

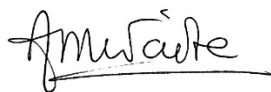
BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Click here to enter Background Papers]

SIGNATORIES:

DECISION MAKER(S):

Signed:



Title: Executive Member for Climate, Waste and Sustainability

Date: 31/07/23

WITH ADVICE FROM:

Signed: *Lucy Shamali*

Title: Director of Place

Date: 31/07/23