

RECORD OF DECISION MADE UNDER DELEGATED AUTHORITY

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

Any interest to declare/ or conflict and any dispensation granted *[if applicable]*

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: *LEGAL AND COMMUNITY*

1. DECISION TAKEN

For the Authority to participate in a Joint Authority (Hertfordshire/ Buckinghamshire/ Berkshire) 'Solar Bulk Buy Scheme' scheme, which will enable residents to participate and purchase at a reduced rate (due to multi-purchase discount resulting from larger residents participation).

2. DECISION TAKER

Jeanette Thompson, Service Director – Legal and Community

3. DATE DECISION TAKEN:

23 November 2021

4. REASON FOR DECISION

- 4.1 In keeping with energy consumption norms across the UK, Hertfordshire is a carbon-based economy, heavily reliant on fossil fuels. A significant portion of this consumption is residential energy usage. Decarbonisation of residential energy usage is key to dealing with the climate crisis and to enabling local authorities to meet the net zero targets they have set for their wider district areas. North Herts' net zero target for the district is 2040.
- 4.2 With regards to this context, the HCCSP'S (Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership) Carbon Reduction Strategic Action Plan contains the following priority: 'To increase deployment of renewable energy in Hertfordshire'. The relevant action which sits under this priority seeks 'To examine options to establish bulk purchasing schemes that facilitate deployment of renewable energy across domestic, commercial and industrial sectors'. This project looks to fulfil this action.

5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 5.1 The alternative option would be not to participate in the scheme, though this would mean declining an opportunity to take steps towards the decarbonisation of the district.

6. CONSULTATION (INCLUDING THE EFFECT ON STAKEHOLDERS, PARTNERS AND THE PUBLIC)

- 6.1 Consultation has been carried out with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure – Cllr Steve Jarvis – via email and at the Environment Briefing meeting.
- 6.2 Papers on the scheme have also been taken to Political Liaison Board (PLB) on the 2nd of November. (PLB is comprised of North Herts Council's Leader, Cabinet Members, Managing Director, and Service Directors).
- 6.3 Papers will also be taken to the 20th January 2022 meeting of HCCSP for approval, following referral from the Hertfordshire Sustainability Officer Group (HSOG)

October meeting. (HCCSP is comprised of elected members representing each of the Hertfordshire local authorities, plus the Local Enterprise Partnership)

7. FORWARD PLAN

- 7.1 This decision is not a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan as the Council has already identified this in our approved Climate Change Strategy and the participation will be a matter for residents, without any financial costs to the Council.

8. BACKGROUND/ RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 The proposed solar group buying scheme looks to targets home-owners and private occupiers, offering them the opportunity to sign-up and pay for installation of solar panels, as well as energy storage and electric vehicle charging (EV) if they choose, at a discount to the market rate. This offers considerable savings and incentives to homeowners to benefit at a faster rate compared with individuals purchasing and installing the panels themselves. The main involvement for the authority is the letter campaign to homeowners/ private occupiers, although generally Local Authorities (and residents generally) would also benefit from de-carbonising the local electricity supply and retrofitting of existing private housing stock to have renewable energy, which would otherwise be difficult to secure. The infrastructure at the home, for e.g. panels, would be paid for by the homeowner and the timeframe for homeowners is six to nine months between signing up and having the panels installed.
- 8.2 The interested households are collated and the scheme operator, iChoosr, after vetting potential suppliers, goes out to auction for the best price supplier. iChoosr then contracts with the supplier to complete the installation process directly with the homeowner. There is no compulsion for a resident who initially expressed interest in the scheme to proceed if they are unhappy with the price that the scheme operator has been able to secure at auction.
- 8.3 The cost of running the county-wide scheme is around £30,000. This will be used to co-ordinate a targeted mailshot to residents who it is deemed will be most likely to sign up to the scheme. The scheme operator will require details of households within the county, so as to be able to complete the mailshot. This will be a GDPR compliant process as only addresses rather than names of occupants will be given. This information is available centrally from Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and so will not require input from North Herts Council.
- 8.4 The £30,000 for the mailshot is being contributed by Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) who have funding which is to be invested into sustainability initiatives as part of their development programme. These costs will be recouped through the successful installation of solar panels through the scheme, and if desired, can be recycled to re-run the scheme in order to benefit more residents. As such, participation in the scheme will require no financial contribution from North Herts Council.
- 8.5 Given that HGC are looking to fund the project, and that HGC sits within Dacorum Borough Council (DBC), it was agreed that DBC would be best placed to manage the procurement and sign the contract with iChoosr. The other Hertfordshire local authorities will not sign a contract with iChoosr, but will be viewed as 'partners' and given foresight of and opportunity to 'approve' of the contract that DBC enter into with iChoosr.
- 8.6 HGC have met with the UK Energy Hub, who have endorsed the use of iChoosr as the only local authority led solar bulk-buy back scheme in the UK. DBC's procurement team are satisfied that using iChoosr is considered best value as there

are no comparable scheme/single source concessions, and this product supports and recognises Local Government procurement rules.

- 8.7 The primary involvement required from North Herts Council would be the contribution of our branding to the targeted mailshot to those within North Herts District. The branding of the HCCSP will also be used on the mailshot. This contribution is to enable residents to have trust in the legitimacy of the scheme. As such, there may also be minimal officer time required to signpost residents to further information about the scheme if asked.
- 8.8 The risk to the Council is therefore a reputational one rather than a financial one, though the reputational risk is considered to be minor and mitigated prior to auction (commitment to proceed) as each provider is vetted for financial stability and their customer relations standards. Due diligence checks have also been made with councils who have already delivered or are currently delivering this scheme with iChoosr, including Suffolk County Council, and Cambridge County Council.
- 8.9 It should also be noted that HGC have been approached by Buckinghamshire Council on behalf of themselves and parts of Berkshire local authority to join the scheme as they do not have the minimum number of eligible households to pursue the scheme by themselves. Buckinghamshire and Berkshire are able to enter into their own contract with iChoosr, making us severed for the point of risk. Their participation is therefore subject to there being no legal tie-in between parties, and presents an opportunity for cross-border working on environmental issues. In addition, their involvement through the combining of household numbers will afford better buying power at auction.
- 8.10 The relevant papers for the project have been seen by the Hertfordshire Sustainability Officers Group (HSOG) at their October meeting and the decision was there made to refer the item to the HCCSP for approval. The item will go to the meeting of HCCSP on 20th January 2022. Ideally all Hertfordshire local authorities will agree to participate in the scheme, though it will still be possible to proceed if a minority choose not to. The papers have also been seen by PLB and discussed with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure – Cllr Steve Jarvis.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Under terms of reference 14.6.8(a)(i) of the Constitution, the Service Director Legal and Community has delegated authority to; manage, direct and control all resources allocated to the Directorate in accordance with the Council's policies and procedures. Climate Change and green issues fall under the directorate by virtue of 14.6.8(b)(i). There are no other direct legal implication to this report-other than those identified above.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are no specific revenue implications arising from this decision. The funding to deliver the scheme as explained above is via mail-outs and provided by HGC through their existing base budget; no funding is therefore required from other LA's.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 The primary risk to the Council is a reputational one in the event that the installation of the product does not provide the best customer experience, as we would be contributing our branding to the scheme. However, it is expected that this risk be minor and mitigated prior to auction (commitment to proceed) as each provider is vetted for financial stability and their customer relations standards. Due diligence checks with other councils who have worked with iChoosr on this scheme (Suffolk and Cambridge) have provided positive feedback.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2 There are no equalities implications identified as arising from this decision.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1 Whilst there are contractual implications, as detailed above, DBC has been considered best placed to manage the procurement and sign the contract with iChoosr and shall consider any relevant social value implication as part of that process.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. An Environmental Impact Assessment has been undertaken. There are positive environmental implications arising from this decision as it supports the deployment of renewable energy within North Herts, and takes steps towards helping residents to decarbonise their homes energy usage, and therefore towards meeting our net zero by 2040 target for the wider district.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no human resources implications arising from this decision.

16. BACKGROUND PAPERS

16.1 Solar Bulk Buy Scheme
Solar Bulk Buy Presentation

17. APPENDICES

17.1 None.

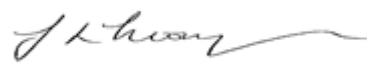
NOTIFICATION DATE

26 November 2021



Signature of Executive Member Consulted

Date23rd November 2021.....



Signature of Decision Taker

Please Note: that *unless urgency provisions apply* EXECUTIVE decisions cannot be implemented until 5 clear working days have elapsed after the decision has been taken to allow for scrutiny call-in.

Call-in does not apply to NON-EXECUTIVE DECISIONS. This is a NON-EXECUTIVE DECISION.