

Classification: Public

Key Decision: No

Gravesham Borough Council

Report to: Climate Change Advisory Board
Date: 8th April 2024
Reporting officer: Climate Action Delivery Manager (Corporate Services)
Subject: Solar Together Scheme Update

Purpose and summary of report:

To present Members of the Climate Change Advisory Board with the progress updates on the Solar Together Scheme.

Recommendations:

This is an information-only report.

Key Implications:	
Item	Implications
Legal	None
Finance and Value for Money	N/A – this is an information-only report.
Corporate Plan	One Council: a well-run and innovative authority, defined by its skilled and valued workforce, committed to developing its local social impact. Climate Action: as a socially responsible and carbon literate council, deliver on our corporate climate pledge for net zero by 2030.
Climate Change	Solar Together Kent Scheme addresses one of the action items in the delivery plan. <i>Work with partners to promote and deliver initiatives to enable local residents to improve the efficiency of their homes. Inform and support local residents to reduce their own energy usage and consider renewable energy sources.</i>

1. Background

- 1.1 Solar Together Kent is a collective buying scheme to help able-to-pay households get a reduced-price installation of solar panels. It relies on large numbers of

- households signing up to negotiate a better deal for everyone taking part. Any homeowner, landlord or small business in Kent can register. The scheme also offers Battery Storage and Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Points to residents at additional costs. Applications are limited to 50 solar panels per property. The scheme is administered by iChoosr.
- 1.2 iChoosr has been organising group-buying schemes with councils and other community leaders in the UK since 2008. The first Solar Together scheme was piloted by iChoosr in Norfolk in 2015 and since then they have run successful collective solar buying schemes across the UK including Cambridgeshire, Devon, Essex, London, Manchester, Suffolk and Sussex.
 - 1.3 The main objectives for this project were:
 - To increase the number of solar panels installed in Kent and Medway.
 - To provide access to reduced price quotes to make solar energy more accessible to residents.
 - To help reduce carbon emissions in the domestic sector.
 - To stimulate the local solar economy by raising public awareness and interest in solar technology and supporting the mainstreaming of roof-top solar as a household improvement.
 - To reduce carbon emissions by around 777 tonnes per year.
 - 1.4 Kent County Council (KCC) coordinated the scheme on behalf of the participating councils: Canterbury, Dartford, Dover, Gravesham, Maidstone, Medway, Swale, Thanet, Tonbridge and Malling, Tunbridge Wells. This involved signing the contract with iChoosr, preparing a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between participating organisations, arranging a direct mailing to 100,000 homes and other communications activities, and monitoring project delivery.
 - 1.5 The main method of communication to residents was through a direct mailing to 100,000 homes. The addresses were obtained using MOSAIC data based on profiles that had previously taken part in schemes elsewhere (this information was provided by iChoosr), and the addresses provided by KCC's business analytics team.
 - 1.6 The communication plan included direct mail, press releases, social media posts, promotion on web pages, leaflets, newsletters, contacting communities and parish councils.
 - 1.7 Direct mail has been proven to be the most effective way to reach residents followed by social media posts according to the survey conducted.
 - 1.8 The Council did not participate in Phase 1 but has participated in Phase 2 and Phase 3 which commenced in years 2022 and 2023 respectively.

2. Cost to the Council

- 2.1 The only expenses that the council will have to pay to KCC are those shown below for the mailouts which we are able to recover at the end of each phase based on the referral fee achieved for each successful installation (please refer to the table of Referral Fees below). The scheme's internal promotion costs were handled internally and were quite minimal.
- 2.2 Phase 3 was launched in two parts last year to manage operational demands and decision periods for residents.

Mailout costs		
Phase 2 Year 2022	Phase 3 - Spring Year 2023	Phase 3 - Autumn Year 2023
£3,830.91	£1,473.80	£1,342.22

3. Referral Fees

- 3.1 As part of the contract, iChoosr expects to receive a fee from the winning Supplier for each resident that accepts the winning Supplier's offer and enters into a contract with them. iChoosr will share this fee with each participating Council, by paying the Council a Commission.
- 3.2 The council has received referral fees from Phase 2. As the mailout costs were utilised from the Climate Change Reserve, the referral amount has been added to the same reserve.
- 3.3 Referral fees from Phase 3 (Spring and Autumn) will be received in the financial year 2024/25.

Referral Fees		
Phase 2 Year 2022	Phase 3 – Spring Year 2023	Phase 3 – Autumn Year 2023
£6,585.00	£2,955	£150 so far

4. Scheme Progress Summary

- 4.1 Solar Together Kent 2022 (Phase 2)
- In total 87 Gravesham residents from Phase 2 installed Solar PV which includes 1,000 panels, 83 batteries, 5 EV chargers and 2 retrofit storage resulting in a reduction of 86,255 kg CO2 from the environment.
 - It is estimated the installations delivered through Solar Together Kent 2022 will deliver over 39,000 tonnes of carbon reduction over 25 years.
 - The scheme has delivered private resident investment in renewables of over £13.8 million.
 - The scheme had an excellent result with 1,576 installations with 93% also including battery storage. Customer satisfaction with the installer 'Home Smart Energy' installer was extremely high with 79% of customers reporting overall satisfaction.
- 4.2 Solar Together Kent 2023 (Phase 3 – Spring Auction)
- In total 44 Gravesham residents from Phase 3 (Spring) installed Solar PV which includes 546 panels, 40 batteries, 2 EV chargers and 2 retrofit storage resulting in a reduction of 45,545 kg CO2 from the environment.

- It is estimated the installations delivered through Solar Together Kent 2023 (Spring Auction) will deliver over 20,770 tonnes of carbon reduction over 25 years.
 - The scheme has delivered total private resident investment in renewables of nearly £8 million.
 - Due to higher than-anticipated acceptance rates, iChoosr appointed a reserve installer 'Eco Green Energy Solutions' to deliver the scheme on time and without capping.
 - The scheme had an excellent result with 782 installations with 90% opting for battery storage. Average customer satisfaction with the 'Home Smart Energy' installer was 79% and 'Eco Green Energy Solutions' was 87%
- 4.3 Solar Together Kent 2023 Phase 3 Autumn Auction is at installation stage and it will be completed by June this year.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 The Scheme has been proven to be useful to residents at a time when UK energy prices and the cost of living were increasing significantly, and more residents were seeking ways to reduce their bills, reduce their dependence on the grid and generate their own clean energy.
- 5.2 As a result of the growing popularity and increasing demand from previous phases, the Solar Together Kent 2024 Phase 4 Spring Auction will be launched in April this year and the Council will be participating in this phase as well.

6. Appendices

- 6.1 There are no Appendices.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 There are no background papers.

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Secondary Implications	
Risk Assessment	N/A – this is an information-only report.
Data Protection Impact Assessment	<i>A data protection impact assessment (DPIA) should be carried out at the start of any major project involving the use of personal data or if you are making a significant change to an existing process.</i>
	a. Does the project/change being recommended through this paper involve the processing of personal data or special category data or criminal offence data ? A definition of each type of data can be found on the Information Commissioner’s Office website via the above links. No
	b. If yes to question a, have you completed and attached a DPIA including Data Protection Officer advice? N/A
	c. If no to question b, please seek advice from your nominated DPIA assessor or the Information Governance Team at gdpr@medway.gov.uk . N/A
Equality Impact Assessment	a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against different groups in the community? If yes, please explain answer. No
	b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality? If yes, please explain answer. No
	<i>In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above</i>
Crime and Disorder	There are no crime and disorder implications resulting from this report.
Digital and website implications	There will be a requirement to promote the scheme on the website and council’s social media platforms.
Safeguarding children and vulnerable adults	There are no safeguarding children and vulnerable adults implications resulting from this report.