

Report to: Lead Member for Resources

Date of meeting: 28 January 2020

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Carbon reduction opportunities:
iChoosr and Warmer Sussex schemes for residents

Purpose: To decide whether the County Council should support and promote two new Sussex-wide energy schemes for residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) note the details of the iChoosr and Warmer Sussex energy schemes;
 - (2) agree that the County Council supports and promotes the iChoosr and Warmer Sussex schemes, for the reasons set out in paragraph 3.1
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1 Background information

1.1 In October 2019 the County Council declared a Climate Emergency. This included a commitment to ‘*sharing best practice across East Sussex and more widely through other partners*’. Since then, County Council officers have been working in partnership with Local Authorities, and others, across Sussex to explore ways that we can work together. Two schemes have come forward that provide an opportunity for the County Council to enable and assist local residents to improve the energy efficiency of their homes (‘Warmer Sussex’) and/or to install solar photovoltaic (PV) panels at a reduced rate (‘Sussex Solar Together’). These schemes require little to no financial commitment from the County Council, thereby making best use of resources whilst supporting residents to help themselves.

2 Supporting information

2.1. The ‘Sussex Solar Together’ project provides a means for residents to join a Sussex-wide bulk buying scheme to purchase solar PV for their home, enabling them to cut their carbon footprint and domestic energy costs. This would be done through a company called iChoosr, which has organised over 200 similar bulk buy schemes across 4 countries. It has carried out bulk purchase schemes for solar PV for local authorities in a number of locations across the UK, including in Greater Manchester, two in Suffolk and Essex and three in London. Some Local Authorities in Sussex have used iChoosr previously to enable residents to switch collectively to cheaper energy suppliers. The model is based on encouraging a large number of residents to choose to participate so that iChoosr can seek a significant discount, of about 20% on standard market rates, from suppliers of solar PV due to the volume of installations that iChoosr can offer to suppliers.

2.2. The success of the scheme, and the scale of savings achieved by residents, depends on encouraging enough residents to want to take part. The role of Local Authorities is to promote the proposition to residents to encourage them to register their interest, which carries no obligation. All the other local authorities across Sussex have agreed to take part in the scheme, which entails paying for direct marketing to targeted households, who will have been selected based on a standard set of criteria, for instance the size and orientation of their roof. If this

marketing cost is split equally between all Local Authorities then the maximum cost per authority will be about £3,000, which is then recovered by way of a referral fee paid by the installation company for each domestic property that has a solar PV installation. West Sussex County Council has offered to co-ordinate the marketing, which would avoid each local authority having to have a separate contract with both iChoosr and with the direct marketing company. WSCC's procurement and legal teams are both satisfied that their contract with iChoosr can be approved as a single source tender as iChoosr is the only supplier of its kind.

2.3. A critical aspect of such schemes is ensuring that both the consumer and the reputation of participating local authorities are protected. This is achieved by iChoosr having a rigorous procurement and qualification procedure for the main contractor appointed to install the solar PV schemes, supported by insurance-backed guarantees for equipment and installation. This approach has been tried and tested through a number of similar bulk buying proposals that have been run successfully elsewhere in the UK.

2.4. The 'Warmer Sussex' project is funded by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. The project provides a means for local residents to get independent advice on how best to improve the energy efficiency of their home and, if they wish to act on any of the advice, can assist residents to choose energy efficient equipment and local suppliers to carry out the work. 'Warmer Sussex' is run by Retrofit Works, which is a not-for-profit co-operative that is currently contracted by the County Council's Public Health team to deliver the Winter Home Check service, which is designed to assist those in fuel poverty.

2.5. A key feature of the 'Warmer Sussex' programme is that it aims to enable residents to see which energy efficient measures would deliver the best cost and carbon savings, and provides hand-holding throughout the process of procuring contractors and ensuring the work is completed to the appropriate standards. It would be targeted to the able-to-pay market, which is not currently well-served since the advent of the national 'Green Deal' scheme a few years ago.

2.6. As with the iChoosr scheme, the role of Local Authorities would be to promote 'Warmer Sussex' to residents, to maximise take up, through existing marketing routes. There would be no costs to Local Authorities, unless they choose to carry out activities such as paying for direct marketing, which is not being proposed for the County Council. Quality assurance, to protect consumers and the reputation of supporting local authorities, will be achieved by the 'Warmer Sussex' programme complying with industry quality assurance standards (e.g. PAS 2030 and 2050). In addition, the approach has been tried and tested elsewhere, for instance in London, where Retrofit Works runs a similar scheme in partnership with the Greater London Authority.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. The 'Sussex Solar Together' and 'Warmer Sussex' schemes are timely, in view of the County Council's recent declaration of a Climate Change Emergency. They provide a low and no-cost means for the County Council to support local residents to take practical action to cut their energy bills and carbon footprint, and build on our partnership work with other Local Authorities across Sussex to deliver measurable change. Therefore, it is recommended that the Lead Member agrees for the County Council to support and promote the two schemes by marketing them to local residents.

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LOCAL MEMBERS: all.

BACKGROUND PAPERS: none.