

## **COUNCIL – 6 SEPTEMBER 2022**

### **QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

#### **QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR M HAY TO COUNCILLOR A WOODMAN**

“Re: Solar Together

As an environmentalist I am 100% behind any initiative that makes renewable energy more accessible, especially in ways in which it can also reduce fuel poverty, which is an issue that will only grow in the current climate. The idea of a ‘bulk buying’ scheme that would give our residents an offer that is keenly priced and also vetted against quality sounds amazing in principle.

However sometimes the principle does not match the reality.

I have seen a few examples of the offers that have been sent to residents, all heavily using the district council’s branding and in at least one case with the name of an NWLDC officer on the bottom. So our reputation is very much on the line with this scheme. So it has to deliver quality systems at a market-leading price. I am also disappointed that the first I heard about it was when I saw an advert for it on social media.

The information given to residents that had applied made it very difficult to understand exactly what was being offered, for example giving system size in “number of panels” instead of the power output of the system. This makes it very difficult to compare prices with others offers they may have received. That being said, there are installers in the market that seem to be offering big domestic systems (3.5-4.0kW – i.e. at the 16A limit suitable for most single phase domestic connections) for far less than that being offered by the winning bidder, sometimes 65-75% of the prices quoted by a scheme with our name on it (even when accounting for battery storage too – so comparing like-for-like as much as possible on the limited information provided). So this bulk-buying scheme does not, on the face of it, look like it is offering best value.

Whilst I understand that the scheme was county-led, given the risk to the council’s reputation if this scheme goes horribly wrong, please can the portfolio holder explain what involvement the district council had in the scheme before offers were sent out with our name on them (e.g. with regards the bidding process and any due diligence around the scheme or potential suppliers) and what, if any, involvement will the council have with the scheme going forward, especially if there is any dissatisfaction with the prices offered or systems installed?

#### **REPOSENSE FROM COUNCILLOR A WOODMAN TO COUNCILLOR M HAY**

“An article was placed on the Member’s Hub on 9 May this year and the scheme was then reported to Corporate Scrutiny on 8 June as part of the Zero Carbon update which was then considered by Cabinet on 19 July.

There was lengthy scrutiny of the scheme before signing up to Solar Together which was led by Blaby District Council on behalf of the eight Leicestershire councils who are all part of the scheme. Blaby has the contract with Solar Together and will hold them to account under the contractual arrangement that is in place for any performance issues on behalf of the eight councils.

iChoosr, the company who we have partnered with have worked with a number of local authorities across the UK with great success with large numbers of solar panels having been installed and significant private investment in renewables. A proven track record was also a key consideration for all parties and this council along with Blaby, Melton and Harborough have also worked with iChoosr for a number of years on the Energy Switch Scheme which

has helped 100's of residents switch to green electricity and save money on their bills and so we have confidence in their ability to deliver an excellent service.

Climate Emergency UK cite the Solar Together Scheme as a good action for councils to join in order to bring about district wide emission reductions.

Regarding the cost of the proposed systems, it is difficult to say whether other companies would provide better value as it is important that when other quotes are obtained they are on a like for like basis.

Residents wishing to join the scheme are not obliged to accept an iChoosr quote and can gain other quotes.

The scheme is very clear that customers are provided with a free, no obligation quote and robust product guarantees, warranties and technical accreditation are also provided See below. <https://solartogether.co.uk/info/guarantees-and-warranties>

What this scheme does provide is a robust due diligence and qualification process to ensure product quality and guarantees are in place and this is summarised as follows.

### ***The Qualification Process carried out by iChoosr:***

*In order to ensure that any installers entering the Solar Together auction can offer the required high level of service to a large group of customers in the required timeframe, iChoosr interrogates the experience, quality, stability and capacity of the installers beforehand through a rigorous qualification procedure.*

*The qualification procedure takes a number of weeks and is designed to ensure that only installers that can successfully execute the group-buying scheme can enter the auction, thus safeguarding the required level of quality.*

*The qualification not only includes a review of all essential certifications and insurance policies, but also covers customer satisfaction and a detailed financial due diligence of the company.*

*The qualification procedure includes provision of:*

- *Evidence of MCS certification plus either HIES or RECC certification*
  - *Evidence of a CRM system that enables them to manage a high volume of customers*
  - *Evidence that the installer can realise an Insurance Backed Guarantee for workmanship*
  - *Evidence of Insurance policies that cover liability, works and indemnity*
  - *Annual Accounts*
  - *Details Of Organisation And Employees*
  - *Evidence of Customer Satisfaction Results*
- Detailed Financial Due Diligence*

*We use an independent expert third party organisation to conduct detailed financial due diligence investigation on all installers progressing through the process.*

### ***Method of Approach & Risk Management***

*iChoosr requests that installers submit a Method of Approach that demonstrates in detail how the installer will organise the process in order to successfully complete the project, this includes a full detailed project risk-analysis.*