Dorset Community Energy Directors Report 2017-18

Summary

The directors are pleased to report a successful year. Activities were mainly focussed on internal management, including members' data management in line with the new GDPR regulations, further developing our website and producing an E-Newsletter, etc. There were no significant asset management issues at our existing 16 community-financed solar panel installations, although setting up wall-mounted solar display monitor screens has been a challenge in some schools. Solar generation in 2017 was 5% above our original projections and cash flow in line with our business model, giving us confidence in recommending a 5.5% interest payment to members for the financial year 2017-18.

Networking with other community energy groups

Dorset Community Energy secretary Pete West has worked with Salisbury Community Energy and Wiltshire Wildlife Community Energy to establish a regional network, the Wessex Community Energy Network. The aim of the network is to share information and experience between members of community energy groups in the Wiltshire/ Dorset/Somerset area. A successful launch event was held in Salisbury and the next meeting on 'Local Authorities and Community Energy' will be held in July. The group plans to meet 3-4 times per year and has received a small start-up grant from Wessex Water.

Educational activities

We have continued to build on our educational activities, working closely with the Dorset County Council Sustainable Schools Project Officer, Alison Jay. Pete West and Alison Jay assisted staff at St. Mary's CE Primary School, Charminster to develop a programme of activities and lesson plans for an 'Energy Day' involving 90 pupils. Dorset Community Energy has received a small grant from the Peoples Postcode Lottery for installing solar PV monitoring equipment in 2 schools without existing monitoring and developing more technical lesson plans based on the solar data and graphs.

We plan to update the education section of the Dorset Community Energy website with lesson plans and links to energy educational resources that may be of interest to a wider range of schools and community energy groups.

Asset management

We are pleased to report there were no significant asset management problems in 2017-18. The solar electricity generation at all sites is monitored remotely via the Internet so any operational problems can be quickly detected. In practice the total solar electricity

generation in 2017-18 was 5% higher than originally estimated, but this may vary from year to year depending on weather conditions.

The directors have decided to change our Feed-in Tariff provider from Good Energy to Cooperative Energy, which also supplies 100% renewable energy to customers, has more customers than either Good Energy or Ecotricity and is a not-for-profit member-owned business. Cooperative Energy also actively supports the community energy sector, including sponsorship of the national annual Community Energy Conference and has published a Community Energy Strategy.

Website and E- Newsletter

Dorset Community Energy director Emily Bullock has recently been appointed as Environment & Sustainability Manager with the South-Western Ambulance Service Trust and has temporarily moved to Bristol. Emily has indicated her wish to remain a director and continue to lead on the website and E Newsletter, which can be managed remotely. Her suggestion was welcomed by the directors. Emily participated in a recent directors' meeting via Skype, which worked well.

New opportunities

The Dorset Community Energy directors set up a sub-group in February 2018 to investigate new opportunities, including solar PV on schools supported by the new Dorset Low Carbon Economy grant programme, which is managed by Dorset County Council, and also opportunities for supporting low energy social housing developments. Funding applications for feasibility studies and project development costs have been submitted to the Rural Community Energy Fund. Further details will be presented at the AGM on 17th July.