

Sheffield City Council

Contract description

£4.8 million contract with **Sheffield City Council** to install heat meters and pre-payment units into 6,000 properties.

Project outline

The Customer

Sheffield City Council (SCC) is the city council for the metropolitan Borough of Sheffield in South Yorkshire, England.

Sheffield is home to a district heating scheme which provides energy to 6,000 residential dwellings across the city. 1,000 of these are supplied from a low carbon energy source generated from Sheffield's non-recyclable waste, and the other 5,000 dwellings are supplied from gas and biomass.

The Challenge

SCC was undertaking a major upgrade of the heating systems in 6,000 of their residential properties fed by 135 plant rooms linked to the district heat network across the city. SCC required an experienced company to provide the new hardware and install this into their properties.

A thousand of these properties were currently utilising pay-as-you-go (PAYG) energy technology, and were already receiving and paying for their heating on a metered basis while the others were receiving an unmetered supply and were paying for their heating on a flat rate system. This meant residents paid a set weekly amount irrespective of how much they used. From the available data and customer feedback SCC was confident it could deliver cost savings to residents by installing meters and rolling out PAYG energy technology to the properties on a flat rate. SCC held steering groups to run through the options and ensure the customers supported the transition to PAYG. The feedback was very positive with existing users speaking highly of the cost savings achieved and flexibility offered from the service.

The Solution

Switch2 was awarded the project after successfully demonstrating our experience, expertise and knowledge in metering and prepayment for district heating schemes through an intensive tender process.

The scope of the project was to supply and install 6,000 heat meters and our G6 prepayment system across 120 sites. The G6 unit suited the project as it has the flexibility to operate in PAYG or credit billing mode.

The project included:

- Engagement with residents, starting with an initial meeting informing them of work content and time scales

- Installation and commissioning of the G6 PAYG unit
- Ongoing G6 data administration
- Design and development of a standalone billing software package, allowing SCC to manage and administer their own billing accounts

Our dedicated project team understand the important relationship between the hardware installation, provision of metering and billing services and the control and maintenance of communal energy systems.

To ensure smooth and seamless project delivery we appointed locally based Resident Liaison Officers. Their role includes:

- Availability to provide support to customers
- Door-to-door home visits prior to installation, both in and out of working hours
- Attending local resident meetings and information days
- Meeting the language diversity of Sheffield where possible with multilingual officers

The project

Switch2 prepared an accurate programme of works for each site. Sheffield City Council were provided live access to this information through a secure online SharePoint site to ensure transparency throughout the project.

Our Resident Liaison Officers, based on site, contacted residents to introduce themselves as the key contact for all aspects of the work from that point onwards. We encourage our team to engage fully with the residents to gain their confidence and alleviate any concerns very early in the process as this prevents residents getting anxious about impending work.

The Resident Liaison Officers explained the process of delivery and introduce the next member of the team who will attend and complete an onsite survey at the resident's convenience.

The Resident Liaison Officers visited each property at pre-arranged survey appointments, telephoning the resident prior to the visit to confirm the appointment and provide an introduction. This helps break down any barriers and allows the resident to prepare themselves for the visit. Upon arrival at the property the technical team member will present his identification card without being requested and ensure that the resident is fully briefed on what we have been asked to do by Sheffield City Council. Our Resident Liaison Officers are fully trained in how to identify if residents are vulnerable, working alongside SCC own list of vulnerables, to ensure this is picked up at an early stage, access details accounted for and any special requirements built into the program of works.

The technical team surveyed any areas of the property which will be affected by the work and prepare the relevant survey paperwork. At this visit the resident will be advised of what work will be carried out and its impact with advice provided to the resident to allow preparation for our installation, such as clearing areas or allowing access etc.

A Resident Liaison Officers attended the property at the same time as the survey is undertaken to discuss a proposed install date.

All information from our Resident Liaison Officers and technical team was then passed back to the project team for allocation of resources. Any requirements for a visit which requires 2 engineers or

special access arrangements will be picked up at this stage of the process. The resident received confirmation of the installation date by letter and reminder the previous day by a text message or visit by the Resident Liaison Officers.

On the day of installation the Resident Liaison Officers visited residents to advise of the likely arrival time and 'open' the property for work to take place.

Switch2 is proud of our team approach to customer care and all members of the team are empowered to act without escalation to ensure that we exceed customer's expectations at all stages of the delivery process.

Customer Engagement

We hold weekly and monthly meetings with Sheffield City Council where we review project progress to date, pick up on any issues and give updates on anything raised at the last client meeting. All relevant members of the project team attend these meetings with the SCC staff.

Management information – we provide comprehensive management information to our clients throughout a project.

During the installation process we obtain **live updates from the engineers' handheld terminals** on site, so that we can keep track of the installation process and deal with any problems such as no access issues straight away.

We complete **regular performance monitoring** on site, and all information is submitted to us via our electronic handheld terminals, so a full record of works can be included on our service management systems.

Once installed, **meter readings and credit status information** are sent from each G6 unit at least once a day. These readings are validated by our data management team to make sure they are accurate then used to create client reports including:

- Meter reading reports
- Site and property level consumption reports
- Exceptional consumption reports both high and low
- Credit status reports
- System validation reports

We make this information available through our **client web portal** so SCC are able to check the installation status of properties and run 'live' reports.

Escalation procedures

Pre-contract commencement all parties need to exchange:

- Organograms
- Key staff

- Contact details in and out of hours
- Full escalation with clear mapping demarcation points

We will take the lead in ensuring the inter-reliance of all parties for the delivery and adherence to SLAs, providing excellent customer service and a seamless approach to site management.

Our development of a seamless integration of services is reinforced by the longevity and renewal of contracts and vast partnership experience.

Implementation and overcoming barriers

A couple of problems which were overcome are listed below:

1. Accessing properties

There was a problem accessing properties to be able to replace and fit the new equipment. This was in part due to the residents' concern about change and 'fear of the unknown' with the new meters. We approached this issue by holding resident meetings to explain the process and benefits to the residents. We also produced helpful materials which outlines the process step by step and cleared up any concerns.

2. Technical problem

There was a differential pressure control issue on the heat interface units in a small number of properties. This was rectified by working closely with Sheffield to resolve the issue.

The Outcome

To date 5,400 installations have taken place with all 6,000 completed in September 2018. The project has been run and managed effectively and the customers are enjoying the benefits of their new PAYG system.

Figures released by SCC from the first 227 homes on the new system for a full year, show that households are saving an average of £238 on their heating bills per year. Further to this council tenants are expected to save more than £1.4 million from their annual heating bills. Switch2 is working very closely with SCC throughout this project. SCC is pleased with the cost savings the new metered system is providing to its customers.

"I am paying less. I'm paying around half of what I was, £30 per month rather than nearly £60. I'm very happy because I'm definitely saving money."

Sheila, Pedley Estate resident, Sheffield

"Because the whole family are out at work all day, only paying for what we use is beneficial to our family. We are spending less on energy."

Michelle, Pedley Estate resident, Sheffield

"I am very happy with the new meter and it is costing me less to heat my home."

James & Debbie, Pedley Estate resident, Sheffield

“Heat metering gives customers greater choice over the amount of heat they take and therefore the size of their heating bills. Used sensibly we anticipate customers will have the potential to make real savings in their heating bills in the future.”

Stephen Parker, Sheffield City Council