

# BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

## REPORT TO – CABINET COMMITTEE - EQUALITIES

6 DECEMBER 2012

### REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES

#### EQUALITIES – LOCAL INVESTMENT FUND

##### **1. Purpose of Report.**

The purpose of the report is to provide an update on equalities issues in relation to the operation of the Local Investment Fund (LIF). LIF is a regional, mainly European funded, grant support scheme for small and medium sized enterprises to encourage capital investment and job creation. It started in 2009 and will run until the end of 2013.

##### **2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities**

LIF supports the corporate improvement objective of supporting and investing in our communities to promote economic growth, physical renewal and sustainability.

##### **3. Background.**

LIF was introduced in 2009 to offer financial support to small and medium sized enterprises to encourage capital investment and job creation. It is a regional scheme which runs across six local authorities in south east Wales with Rhondda Cynon Taff County Borough Council (RCT) as lead. The other partners in south east Wales are Caerphilly, Merthyr Tydfil, Blaenau Gwent and Torfaen. Similar consortia also run LIF schemes in north west and south west Wales.

Part of the agreement between the Welsh European Funding Office (WEFO) and the six authorities was compliance with WEFO's Equal Opportunities Guidance. Also, a specific condition was included in the approval stating that the applicant must work with WEFO on the development of a robust signposting and monitoring process in order to maximize its contribution to cross cutting themes.

Processes were subsequently agreed with WEFO and have been evolving over the period of LIF's operation.

In the Bridgend context the equalities issue was taken up in the Corporate Equality Scheme 2009 – 12 where the following desired outcome was set out:

“Women and men will have more opportunities to choose non-traditional employment and business routes”.

##### **We will:**

Work with our partners in the south east Wales Local Investment Fund to promote enterprise opportunities to women and men and other equality groups by:

- Encouraging applications from small businesses owned by women and other equality groups.
- Assisting small businesses to adopt or improve their equality and diversity strategies.
- Encourage small businesses to recruit people who experience disadvantage.
- Gather base-line data to measure progress against equality and diversity targets.

#### **How we will:**

- Increase awareness of LIF through the Welsh Government's (WG) "Flexible Solutions for Business" service (FS4B) and business support organisations for women, e.g. Chwarae Teg.
- Applicants will be encouraged to adopt or improve equality and diversity strategies. A draft policy statement to be supplied to those businesses without one.
- By signposting small businesses to WG's FS4B support and advice service on equality and diversity.
- Using the grant assessment scoring criteria to take into account applications benefiting deprived areas.
- Each applicant will be required to complete a diversity questionnaire. "

#### **4. Current situation / proposal.**

The following actions have been taken:

- At the time of the launch of the scheme, and subsequently, information has been provided to WG and other business support organisations such as Chwarae Teg on LIF. FS4B has now changed its branding to the Regional Centre Service but it continues to refer to LIF on its web pages and its staff will make referrals to LIF operators as appropriate. Due to the extent of take-up, publicity and awareness raising have recently been scaled down (89% of the available finance for Bridgend has now been committed to SMEs). Current targeting is aimed primarily at new business start-ups where the scheme has under-performed to date.
- Applicants are encouraged to adopt or improve equality and diversity strategies. Draft "model" policies are supplied to businesses on request. With the businesses permission they are also referred on to the Regional Centre Service for appropriate advice and guidance on equalities issues.
- A database of all referrals made to WG for environmental and / or equal opportunities advice is maintained. WG follows up these referrals. (At the start of the project there were set targets for businesses encouraged to adopt or improve equal opportunities and environmental policies. However, it was agreed by all parties, including WEFO and WG, that this was unnecessary as the referrals were also being counted by WG and it would have amounted to double counting).
- The scoring criteria for grant applications give extra weight to those from Communities First areas.
- The scoring criteria for grant applications give extra weight to businesses with equality policies already in place.
- Each successful applicant is required to complete a diversity questionnaire at monitoring stage.
- Regular meetings are held between RCT (as lead) and WEFO, between the six partner organizations in south east Wales and between the three consortia, WEFO

and WG on a pan-convergence basis. Equalities issues are a regular feature of agendas.

One action that has not been taken is to encourage small businesses to recruit people who experience disadvantage. Although this was considered in the early development of LIF it was felt that this was a matter for each business to consider in the light of their recruitment needs. It did not therefore become a part of the regional business plan and has not been operated by any of the six local authorities. Extra weighting, however, is given to businesses operating in a Communities First area.

**5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.**

None

**6. Equality Impact Assessment**

This report relates to a regional project led by RCT and commenced in 2009. This report addresses equality impacts of the scheme.

**7. Financial Implications.**

None

**8. Recommendation.**

It is recommended that the actions set out in paragraph 4 be noted.

**Louise Fradd**  
**Corporate Director - Communities**

**Date: 3 October 2012**

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**Background documents** None