

To: PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE	Subject: EQUAL Community Initiative Staffing Requirements
From: DIRECTOR OF PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT	
Date: 20 March 2002	Ref: Rep835

**1 Purpose of Report**

1.1 This report seeks approval to establish an EQUAL team for the delivery of theme A of the EQUAL Community Initiative.

**2 EQUAL - Background**

2.1 The EQUAL Community Initiative aims to test and promote new ways of combating discrimination and barriers faced by those groups most disadvantaged in the labour market, both those in work and those seeking work. The EQUAL Community Initiative derives its funding from the Structural Funds and will fund ESF activity. Unlike mainstream Structural Funds, the EQUAL programme has a transnational dimension.

2.2 The groups targeted by EQUAL include women, young people leaving care, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, older workers, refugees, ex-offenders, drugs, alcohol mis-users and asylum seekers. EQUAL will have a budget in Scotland of £20 million for the period 2000-2006. The funding is for pilot projects and innovative actions that can not be funded from the European Structural Funds such as Objective 2 or 3. There is a funding intervention level of 50%. Activity under EQUAL has been split into nine thematic priorities.

2.3 The thematic priorities are:

- A. Facilitating access and return to the labour market
- B. Opportunities to provide potential for ethnic minorities within the world of work
- C. Opening up the business creation process to all by providing the tools required for setting up in business
- D. Strengthening the social economy (the third sector), in particular the services of interest to the community, with a focus on improving the quality of jobs
- E. Promoting life-long learning and inclusive work practices
- F. Supporting the adaptability of firms and employees to structural economic change
- G. Reconciling family and professional life
- H. Reducing gender gaps and supporting job desegregation

(NB: The GB programme is not participating in Theme G)

Following the withdrawal of COSLA as the co-ordinator for local authority activity in EQUAL, North Lanarkshire Council, through the European Section of the Policy and Economic Development Service, agreed to act as Lead Partner for Theme A.

## 2.4 Current Timetable

The current timetable for Action 1 is as follows:

Workshops	21-28 February
Meeting with transnational partners	11-12 March
Submission of Draft Development Partnership Agreement (DPA)	2 April
Draft Transnational Co-operation Agreement (TCA)	2 April
Submission of DPA	24 April
Submission of TCA	30 April
Start of Action 2 activities	15 May

## 2.5 Action 1 Activity November 2001 - May 2002

North Lanarkshire Council, in its capacity as lead partner, has been awarded a small amount of funding (ca. £64,000) for the development phase of the EQUAL Theme A programme. During this initial six months, it is the Council's responsibility, along with the 9 other core partners, to develop a set of proposals for the main EQUAL programme which will last for up to 3 years from May 2002. The total budget for the second phase of activity (known as Action 2) is ca. £5.2m. Of this budget £2.6m will be funded by EQUAL and the remaining £2.6m is to be provided in the form of match funding from the partners.

The Council has begun the work of consulting with organisations and agencies interested in participating in Action 2 of the EQUAL programme. Workshops have been organised to take place in Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness at the end of February. At the same time, "key players" in the Scottish Executive, Scottish Enterprise, the New Futures Fund and other agencies will be approached to ascertain the role which they might play in the second phase of the EQUAL programme. A consultant has also been engaged to assist with the research and monitoring and evaluation of the project.

In addition, North Lanarkshire Council has approached a number of European Development Partnerships with a view to establishing the required Transnational Co-operation Agreement (TCA). It is hoped that the NLC led EQUAL programme will have a maximum of three European partners, one from the Basque Region, one from the Czech Republic and one from Germany or Sweden. The first two have confirmed their willingness to work with NLC and the third partner will be decided upon by mid-March. A meeting of all four partners has taken place in Brussels on 11 and 12 March to finalise the details of the TCA.

## 2.6 Action 2 Activity May 2002 - April 2005

The exact nature of the projects and initiatives to be undertaken in Action 2 is not yet clear. The workshops planned for February 2002, the research to be carried out by the consultant and the interests of our transnational partners are all likely to influence the final work programme.

However, from the perspective of North Lanarkshire Council, some discussions have already taken place both internally and with local partners in Lanarkshire as to the types of initiatives which might be piloted under the EQUAL programme.

NLC's Social Work Department have already expressed a strong interest in using the EQUAL programme to develop the supported employment model currently being used for those with learning difficulties to other client groups and to engage more effectively with the private sector. Staff in the Social Work Department have already been working with the Basque partner on these issues and are currently developing a project proposal for inclusion in the EQUAL Action 2 bid.

In addition, discussions have taken place with the Routes to Inclusion Working Group in Lanarkshire, the members of which have expressed an interest in using EQUAL to develop certain initiatives, such as PARTISIPATE, targeted at disadvantaged young people. Other ideas being developed centre around the benefits trap issue and identifying more accurate local labour market intelligence systems. The SIPs in North Lanarkshire have indicated that there is work being carried out there on drug addiction which might also be match funded by EQUAL.

It is intended to develop as many of these ideas as possible for inclusion in the submission for Action 2 to ensure that North Lanarkshire benefits from its involvement in the EQUAL initiative. However, in addition to using EQUAL money to increase in scope or scale existing initiatives, it will be necessary to have funding available to enable us to react to the changing demands of the programme over the three year period and to contribute to some pan-Scotland initiatives around certain themes, such as the benefits trap.

The level of investment committed by the Council to the EQUAL programme will draw down a minimum of 40% funding.

### **3 Resource Implications**

- 3.1 Theme A of the EQUAL Programme is the largest of the seven EQUAL Themes. It is likely that North Lanarkshire Council will remain the lead partner for Action 2 activity. This will mean that the Council will be responsible to the Scottish Executive, the UK government and the European Commission for the total budget of the EQUAL Programme (some £5.2 million). The Council will not only be responsible for ensuring that appropriate financial controls are in place for both its own and its partners' projects, but will also be responsible for monitoring the progress of the EQUAL project as a whole and ensuring that the project delivers the anticipated outputs and impacts.
- 3.2 Given the size of the programme, and the pan-Scotland nature of the activities to be promoted in Action 2, it will be essential to cost an "EQUAL Management Team" into the Action 2 proposal. At this stage it is anticipated that there will be a need for at least four staff, an EQUAL Programme Co-ordinator, an individual to deliver financial support, a Programme Assistant and a Programme Administrator. The intention would be to fund this management team 100% from EQUAL funds. There would therefore be no cost to the Council in the appointment of additional staff, other than the provision of accommodation and overhead costs.
- 3.3 It is likely that the grades for EQUAL management staff will be agreed at a pan-Scotland level by all the DPs to ensure consistency of approach, albeit some allowances will be made to reflect the size of the partnerships.
- 3.4 North Lanarkshire Council are currently in discussion with the Objective 3 management and the Scottish Executive to determine exact team size, grading structures and budget arrangements. While this is being agreed, it is proposed that the Planning & Environment Department begin the recruitment process for the team and have a team in place to begin delivery of the contract in June 2002.
- 3.5 The team will be recruited on a term contract basis which will reflect the Council's agreement with the Scottish Executive for the life of the contract which is envisaged to be May 2002 – April 2005 (3 years of activity).
- 3.6 It is envisaged that the EQUAL initiative will enable North Lanarkshire Council to pilot new and innovative ways to engage with those people most disengaged from the labour market. This will enable existing funding from within Departmental budgets to lend 40% intervention rate from EQUAL providing an opportunity to expand the scale of projects or to use funding to address other priorities. However it is anticipated that a number of new projects may be initiated under Action 2 and the Council will wish to be able to fully participate in these. To enable optimum project development to be achieved as a result of leading the EQUAL Community Initiative the Planning & Environment Department has made a bid to the Council's External Funding Working Group for £150,000 to be used to "pump prime" EQUAL activity

over the 3 years of the initiative.

At a meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> February, the External Funding Working Group approved an allocation of £150,000 Revenue funding for this project.

A detailed output agreement will be submitted to this Group to outline activity areas on completion of identifying the key activity areas under Action 2.

#### **4 Recommendation**

- 4.1 Committee is asked to approve in principle the creation of a team to deliver the EQUAL initiative as detailed in the report, it being delegated to the Director of Planning & Environment and Head of Personnel Services to determine the posts and grades and other matters pertinent to the terms and conditions of the posts.
- 4.2 Note the allocation of £150,000 from the External Funding Working Group Revenue budget 2001/2002 to cover EQUAL activity for the period May2002 – April 2005.
- 4.3 Remit this report to the Policy & Resources (Personnel) Sub-Committee.



David M Porch  
**Director of Planning and Environment**

For further information contact Maureen McConachie, Service Manager – Policy & Economic Development, Tel 01236 616266

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