

Recognition of Inspirational Women

Date: 18th September 2024

Report of: Director of Strategy and Resources

Report to: Executive Board

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

Brief summary

Leeds is a city that is rightly proud of its rich diversity and strives to recognise and value the contributions of people from differing backgrounds.

When Leeds Civic Hall was built in 1933, men were recognised who had a close association with Leeds or who contributed in a significant way to the history of the city. This recognition was achieved through the names of these men being inscribed on the walls of the Council Chamber, along with their significant dates and a brief description of who they were for example 'William Hey Surgeon 1730 – 1819'.

As the city has evolved so too has the recognition that inspirational women should also be honoured in this way and take their place on the walls of the Council Chamber.

A public consultation was undertaken at the start of the year asking people to choose the order in which they believed a selection of inspirational women should be recognised in addition to putting forward names of their own for future recognition.

This paper asks Executive Board to approve the installation of panels commemorating six inspirational women and further asks that consideration be given to how more women can be recognised in the future and how this recognition is increasingly reflective of the diversity in the city.

Recommendations

- a) Executive Board are asked to note the results of the consultation.
- b) Executive Board are asked to approve the proposals for plaques to be installed within the Council Chamber, subject to listed planning consent.
- c) Executive Board are asked to approve proposals for further work to be undertaken to recognise further inspirational women in future years, and that this recognition is increasingly reflective of the diverse nature of the city.

What is this report about?

- 1 Leeds is a city that is rightly proud of its rich diversity and strives to recognise and value the contributions of people from differing backgrounds.
- 2 When Leeds Civic Hall was built in 1933, men were recognised who had a close association with Leeds or who contributed in a significant way to the history of the city. This recognition was achieved through the names of these men being inscribed on the walls of the Council Chamber, along with their significant dates and a brief description of who they were for example 'William Hey, Surgeon, 1730 – 1819'.
- 3 As the city has grown so too has the recognition that inspirational women should also be honoured in this way and take their place on the walls of the Council Chamber.
- 4 A public consultation was undertaken at the start of the year asking people to choose the order in which they believed a selection of inspirational women should be recognised in addition to putting forward names of their own for future recognition.
- 5 The consultation received 1438 responses and the reaction to the proposals was overwhelmingly positive.
- 6 The results of the consultation were announced on International Women's Day on March 8th 2024.
- 7 In addition to ranking the six women listed, over thirty other names were submitted for future consideration. The intention is that this piece of work forms part of a future and on-going programme of recognition to ensure equality and that the diversity of Leeds is reflected within the Civic Hall.
- 8 This paper asks Executive Board to approve the installation of panels commemorating six inspirational women and further asks that consideration be given to how more women can be recognised in the future.
- 9 The six names are listed below in the order of the results of the survey:
- 10 The Barnbow Lasses: These women worked in the Barnbow Munitions Factory, where 35 women and girls were tragically killed in an explosion during the First World War. It remains the single biggest loss of life in the city's history.
- 11 Leonora Cohen OBE: A pioneer of the Suffragette movement, born in Leeds. She was famously arrested for smashing a glass case containing royal insignia at the Tower of London in protest against the government's position on a woman's right to vote.
- 12 Gertrude Paul: A founding member of the Leeds West Indian Carnival and the first black head teacher in Leeds. She also founded the Leeds International Women's Group, the Afro Asian Organisation and the United Caribbean Association.
- 13 Alice Bacon CBE: The city's first female MP, as a minister in the Home Office in the 1960s she oversaw the introduction of substantial societal changes, including the abolition of the death penalty, the decriminalisation of homosexuality and the legalisation of abortion.

- 14 Beryl Burton OBE: English racing cyclist who dominated the sport in the UK and abroad, winning more than 90 domestic championships and seven world titles and setting numerous national records.
- 15 Ivy Benson: Born in Holbeck, Benson was a saxophonist and bandleader, who led an all-female swing band. Benson's band were the first entertainers to be invited to perform at the VE celebrations in Berlin in 1945.
- 16 This report asks for Executive Board's permission for eight plaques to be sited on the walls of the Council Chamber, six to be installed now and a further two installed when additional names have been selected.
- 17 The plaques will be made from plaster and cast in a mould with the gold frame cut into the wood, the plaster is then poured in and layered with fibrous mesh or hessian.
- 18 The board is painted black with letters added and masked over, it is then painted with a textured grey paint with imitation mortar joints added. Gold paint is added to the letters to give the raised effect and the frame is painted gold. This will ensure that the new plaques match the existing ones as closely as possible, both in terms of construction and appearance, to help ensure listed building consent is granted.
- 19 The intention is to hold an unveiling ceremony involving the families of the women to be commemorated.
- 20 Executive Board are also asked to approve future work to be undertaken to commemorate further inspirational women within the Council Chamber at a later date. This future work would be Member-led with a focus on further diversity and involvement of key stakeholders and representative groups.

What impact will this proposal have?

- 21 The proposal will ensure the first steps towards equality and ensuring the diversity of the city is reflected on the walls of the Council Chamber.

How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

Health and Wellbeing

Inclusive Growth

Zero Carbon

- 22 The proposal contributes to the pillar of inclusive growth by ensuring the walls of the Council Chamber better reflect the city as a whole. Women and girls will be able to see that Leeds does value and recognise the contribution that women have made, and continue to make, to the city.
- 23 As the civic focus for the city, one of the largest employers and a key partner for many organisations it is important that the Council champions equality and diversity and this work marks the start of part of that increased recognition.
- 24 Future work would be Member-led with a focus on further diversity and involvement of key stakeholders and representative groups.

25 The proposals also contribute to the pillar of health and wellbeing by providing the assurance that women and girls are valued and their contributions recognised. It is hoped that this recognition will also inspire future generations.

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

26 A cross-party meeting for female Members was held on January 18th 2024 where the shortlist of six names were discussed. All Members who attended the meeting were supportive of the proposals and expressed a desire to be involved in future work.

27 A public consultation was held from January 26th to March 1st 2024. This included media coverage in addition to emails sent to all Members and the staff networks. 1438 responses were received in total.

28 The Executive Member for Resources wrote to all Members of Council to encourage them to feed their views into the consultation.

What are the resource implications?

29 As the installation of the plaques is recognised as not just the right thing to do but also an overdue recognition of the contribution of women to the city, the funding of the plaques will be from a saving to the General Fund due to the current Chief Executive not taking his pay award for a number of years, the saving for 2023/24 was £26,878.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

30 A key risk is listed building consent being refused. This is being managed by early involvement of expert officers in the plans to ensure any potential issues are identified early and addressed.

What are the legal implications?

31 The report is subject to call-in and contains no exempt information.

Options, timescales and measuring success

What other options were considered?

32 Once the inequality within the Council Chamber had been identified, doing nothing was ruled out as an option as it would not start to address that inequality.

33 Placing names without consultation was considered but not progressed as it was felt that this should be a city-wide decision.

34 Consulting without a shortlist was considered but this would have been too broad, the consultation asked for additional suggestions for future recognition work.

How will success be measured?

- 35 Success will be the names of inspirational women on the walls of the Council Chamber, both these initial six and further names in the future.
- 36 It is important that people who have contributed to making Leeds the city it is are recognised and by correcting the gender imbalance of that recognition within the Council Chamber it will show young girls and women that they are valued, respected and honoured.
- 37 Further success will be the continuation of the conversation around the recognition of women and increasing the diversity of those commemorated on the walls of the Civic Hall.

What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?

- 38 The application for listed planning consent has been submitted and can be found [here](#), if approved by Executive Board, the plaques will be installed as quickly as possible if consent is given.
- 39 Director of Strategy and Resources will be responsible for implementation.

Appendices

- Survey analysis is included as Appendix 1.
- EDCI screening is included as Appendix 2.

Background papers

- No background papers.