

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>Cabinet member contracts and assets</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>Monday, 2 October 2017</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Honouring the Canary Girls</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Democratic services manager</b>

## **Classification**

Open

## **Decision type**

Non-key

## **Wards affected**

(All Wards);

## **Purpose and summary**

In March, full Council recognised the significant contribution made during the First and Second World Wars by the 'canary girls' in the munitions factories in Rotherwas and asked the executive to consider erecting a plaque in Rotherwas to recognise their national role and sacrifices made in the war effort and to honour and remember their important work in the county. This report responds to that request.

## **Recommendation(s)**

That:

- (a) **a plaque recognising the contribution of the 'canary girls' be erected at the Herefordshire Archive Records Centre (HARC) at a cost of no more than £2,500.**

## **Alternative options**

1. **Do nothing:** this is not recommended as the recommendation proposed is in keeping with the will of Council members and is a fitting and affordable tribute to the canary girls.

2. **Do something different:** Options might include a munitions- or agricultural-inspired artwork or the commissioning of a statue/sculpture. For these options to be agreed, additional sources of funding, beyond those set out in option (a) would be required. In light of pressures on council resources this option is not recommended but should the community wish to progress such a project the council could offer support through project and funding advice and may, subject to relevant governance approvals, provide land on the site on which such an artwork could be based.

## Key considerations

3. In 1916 a munitions filling factory was opened at Rotherwas in Herefordshire. It became one of the largest explosive filling sites in the UK. It covered more than 300 acres and comprised more than 370 buildings. Employing mainly women, the site was bombed during the Second World War, in 1942, and suffered a major explosion in 1944, killing and injuring many of the workers.
4. The work itself was also highly dangerous requiring the handling of explosive chemicals that carried the risk of them contracting potentially fatal diseases. The trinitrotoluene used to make the shells was a toxic and explosive substance, the effects of which turned the skin yellow in colour. This was a condition common to the female workers working in the munitions factories earning them the nickname the canary girls – also known collectively as munitionettes.
5. Records suggest that about 8,000 women worked at Rotherwas in WW1, drawn from all over the UK. Unlike many of the other filling factories, Rotherwas was kept open after WW1, and was refurbished in secret ahead of WW2. Once again the employees were predominantly female – while estimates vary widely it is suggested that between 3,500 and 10,000 workers were conscripted to work on the site.
6. The Rotherwas Royal Ordnance Factory Front Line Duty Project, for instance, was developed to honour the contribution of the women who worked at Hereford's former munitions factory and was awarded Heritage Lottery Funding of more than £77,000 along with significant contributions from the Hereford Enterprise Zone and Skylon Park. In March, Herefordshire Council resolved that 'it recognise the significant contribution made during the First and Second World Wars by the canary girls by erecting a plaque in Rotherwas to honour and remember their important work in the county'.
7. In March, full Council recognised the significant contribution made during the First and Second World Wars by the 'canary girls' in the munitions factories in Rotherwas and asked the executive to consider erecting a plaque in Rotherwas to recognise their national role and sacrifices made in the war effort and to honour and remember their important work in the county
8. The recommendation is to provide a plaque at HARC, a facility with a strong affiliation to local history housing many significant county records, as it would be seen by people using the centre.

## Community impact

9. The community impact can be considered in terms of its contribution to Herefordshire Council's Corporate Plan priorities where a stated aim is to *help create a strong sense of community where people feel they belong and have the confidence to get involved*. While there are now very few remaining canary girls, they are remembered fondly by

their families and friends. The Rotherwas site is frequently visited, with many coming from outside of the county and some travelling from overseas to visit the site where their mothers, grandmothers or sisters once worked.

10. In commissioning a plaque, Herefordshire Council, on behalf of the citizens of Herefordshire, will be able to offer an appropriate gesture of remembrance.

## **Equality duty**

11. Under section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, the 'general duty' on public authorities is set out as follows:
12. A public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to -
  - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
  - (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
  - (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The public sector equality duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying 'due regard' in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services. Our providers will be made aware of their contractual requirements in regards to equality legislation

## **Resource implications**

13. Based on the recommendation the cost of a plaque could be no more than £2,500 and will be procured in accordance with the council's contract procedure rules. Costs can be accurately determined once wording, the method of mounting the plaque and any necessary granting of permission have been agreed. The costs, whilst unbudgeted, will be funded from economy, communities and corporate (ECC) revenue budgets.
14. The cost for a sculpture would cost significantly more. If using the costs to Herefordshire Council of the plinth created to stand the Hereford Bull sculpture on in high town as a benchmark the Council may expect to incur costs in the region of £50k. If such an option were to be pursued potential funding sources would include sponsorship, external grant funding and crowd funding.

## **Legal implications**

15. The council may exercise its discretion and has the power to do anything that individuals generally may do in accordance with the general power of competence under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011.
16. The council's contract procedure rules must be followed when purchasing goods and services.

## Risk management

17.

Risk / opportunity	Mitigation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is opportunity for Herefordshire Council to pay a fitting and appropriate tribute/act of remembrance to a group of key workers who contributed significantly, in dangerous working conditions, to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> world war efforts.</li><li>• There is a risk that Herefordshire Council is seen to be committing financial resource on items of non-essential spend during a time of budgetary constraint.</li><li>• There could be demand for the council to do more.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• There is positive local media interest in promoting the working lives and contribution made by the canary girls and a clear public appetite for more to be done to remember the canary girls.</li><li>• A plaque is a modest but highly visible gesture of remembrance, with relatively low cost.</li><li>• Competitive quotes would be sought to ensure value for money is achieved.</li><li>• The council could provide backing and support for any wider community scheme.</li></ul>

## Consultees

18. Full Council has been consulted on the proposals to commemorate the canary girls. Unanimous support was offered by members for a plaque.

## Appendices

19. None identified

## Background papers

20. None identified