

STATES OF JERSEY

Education and Home Affairs Scrutiny Panel Cultural Strategy Review

MONDAY, 11th OCTOBER 2010

Panel:

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier of St. Saviour (Chairman)

Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier

Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour

Witnesses:

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited

Also Present:

Ms. S. Power (Scrutiny Officer)

[15:01]

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisssier of St. Saviour (Chairman):

I would like to welcome you both, and a member of the public, and what we will do is we will introduce ourselves. Just to make it clear, this is not what you might call a bottom-up examination of everything to do with culture and heritage on the Island, it is a health-check on the Cultural Strategy. We have strained a bit to keep it within those confines but we will try and do that and anyone who tries to define the term “culture” will be taken out and whatever. I am Roy Le Hérisssier, Deputy of St. Saviour, Chairman of the panel.

Deputy J.M. Maçon of St. Saviour:

Deputy Jeremy Maçon, representative of Petite Longueville of the Parish of St. Saviour.

Deputy T.M. Pitman of St. Helier:

Deputy Trevor Pitman, St. Helier, Vice-Chairman.

Ms. S. Power (Scrutiny Officer):

Sam Power, Scrutiny Officer.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Jasmine Hendry, Director of the Opera House.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Pierre Horsfall, Chairman of Jersey Opera House Limited.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Well, thank you very much, both of you, for coming. You will have received the questions, they are fairly broad, so there will undoubtedly be supplementaries. But as I said we are looking at how a lot of the key players, as we defined it, in the Cultural Strategy, certainly people also who are involved in some of the historical issues that have involved the development of the strategy and how things have evolved between then and now. So, to kick off, and it is like the second phase of University Challenge, anybody can take the questions once the first person has given it the treatment. So, Pierre, can you please outline the Opera House's relationship with the Department for Education, Sport and Culture?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Certainly, the relationship with the Department for Education, Sport and Culture is extremely good. We deal directly with 2 civil servants: Peter Horsfall (which is no relationship to me, incidentally; just down to coincidence) and Jeremy Harris and also Rod McLoughlin who is the adviser and we have an extremely good working relationship with them. Where necessary we have a communication with the Minister and our experience with the Minister is that he is extremely supportive and, again, we have a very good relationship with him. It is difficult to say anything other than our working relationship with the department could not be better. We are very, very happy.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Maybe I should have made myself slightly clearer. Particularly given that you have now emerged from what you might call under the “tutelage” of the Jersey Arts Trust, I wonder, could you outline what the legal constitutional relationship is to the department?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

The present relationship is strange and we are currently working to reorganise it to something a bit more sensible and we can outline to you what the aim is, though it is subject to the approval of the Minister, of course. But at the moment you have the Jersey Opera House, the building, which is owned by the States, and you then have the operating company, which is Jersey Opera House Limited, and the shares for Jersey Opera House Limited are held by the Arts Trust. But there really is little point to that and I think the Arts Trust would quite like to see the separation. What in fact we are aiming to do is to form a charitable trust which would be the Jersey Opera

House Charitable Trust and under it would come Jersey Opera House Limited as the operating company, and the trust would receive the grants from the Minister and filter it down to us. The shares in Jersey Opera House Limited would be held by the trust where we would have, say, 3 trustees yet to be selected. It is a very similar model to Jersey Finance Limited which works along the same basis. But at the moment, as I have said, you have the shares held by the Arts Trust but we have really no dealings other than co-operation dealings with the Arts Trust and the grant is received by the Opera House from the Minister. So it is all compartmentalised and is rather a strange arrangement which, I have to say, I do not quite know how it evolved into that.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I think it evolved from when the Jersey Arts Trust was the umbrella organisation, does it not, and had all the grant money and filtered it down to the rest of the organisations but that is now long gone, obviously because we get our grant money directly from E.S.C. (Education, Sport and Culture). We have a very good working relationship with the officers at Jersey Arts Trust but I think they are like-minded to us that so they would rather see this question out of the way because it kind of muddies the waters really and it is not representative of the way we work now. It probably was 6, 7 years ago, or however long it is, but it is not representative of how we operate in either company now.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

At that time the grant came to the Opera House from the Arts Trust.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It did, yes.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

That has changed, of course, and that is what makes it a bit odd.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Well your grant is an interesting issue, Pierre, so I will ask Jeremy to follow that up.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Yes. Can you explain how you allocate the annual grant received from the department?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

The grant really mostly goes on operational costs. We try and work our artistic programme on a zero budget - this is how it has been since I mostly arrived anyway - so that you programme something that you may think will lose money. But you want to programme it because creatively or artistically it is good but you put on a couple of comedy events or a Chippendales because you know that you are going to get some money in that will underpin that, so therefore you get a balanced programme. Really then the fixed costs, I would say, that the grant goes on to is the operation of the building: it is the utilities, it is the staff and keeping the building running day-to-day.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

We have heard in other hearings about the interest on the loan. I do not know if you would care to comment.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is difficult for me in some ways because when I came here the loan was ... because one of my questions at my interview was: "What is this about this loan?" But really it kind of does not touch us, if you like, because it used to, and I think still does, go straight into the Jersey Arts Trust account and then straight out of the Jersey Arts Trust account to be paid to the bank, so it does not come near the Opera House at all.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

But does it have any impact, Jasmine, on your programme? Is it taking funding away from other areas?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I would say yes. I would say that it is taking funding away from the whole cultural sector because if we had that nearly £600,000 a year for the cultural sector then a lot of us, and I think most of the cultural organisations, are probably working to the bone, that would probably ease the situation considerably if that money was available.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Can you just take that a stage further, what you just said about the fact where you might bring the Chippendales, for example, to level out the real cutting-edge stuff that you want to deliver, how great is the risk that that balance gets out of line so you really are just delivering stuff to make money basically to survive?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is always very risky. I mean, that is the most variable aspect to our work. The fixed costs are the fixed costs but the programme is the most variable. If we want to try and operate, I would suggest, within the bounds of the Cultural Strategy and to provide that diversity, it can be very, very difficult and the theatre, I think at any scale, is very difficult to ... well you never really break even on even, let alone make a profit, particularly at our scale where the risks are even greater because we are expected to put on things for the middle scale i.e. for 600-seater plus. We have to truck them over, the shipping costs, accommodation costs; an enormous amount of money. So you have to try do that balance and, yes, when times get hard you have to think next year we have to cut our cloth accordingly. If we have to have less risky stuff **on**, then that is what we do because ultimately it is the bottom line for all of us. We understand that there has been a history of perhaps going cap in hand and we do not want to go down that route but it is very difficult sometimes to operate, and particularly in the current economic climate, I would say.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

But the board takes an overview and gives Jasmine direction on the risks that may or may not be taken and every time we have a board meeting we have a constant eye on the overall position, the balance that you are talking about, and the climate at the moment is that the risk assessment is being reduced, shall we say? The amount of risk to be taken has been reduced at the present time because there is a general downturn because of the general economic climate. We are not getting as much sponsorship as we used to and not quite as many people in the theatre, so that is constantly under review by the board in conjunction with Jasmine, and Jasmine works to the parameters the board lays down.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I think you are right in terms of it curtails your creativity. It has to because you have to work within those confines but the ultimate outcome is that is exactly what it does: it curtails the level of creative activity you can engage in.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

The board would not determine who the artistes will be or whether you will get another Buddy Holly tribute show?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

No. Nasty thought.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Which I do enjoy but there have been a few recently.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Yes. No, I decide the creative programme.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

On the other hand, last night we had a grand performance, straight from the Grand Metropolitan in New York, of Rhinegold.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Oh, yes?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Which was absolutely brilliant.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Brilliant, yes.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is a way that has been introduced of putting some really what you might call “big culture” into the programme without running any risk because it is a share box office with a grand name.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Coupled with that as well, I suppose in terms of access, is that we are linking up with a screening of the National Theatre live so that means that people can come and see a live performance of what is happening in the National Theatre and our dearest ticket will be £12, but you will see a star playing Hamlet or whatever. So I think in terms of accessibility that works better.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is a good way of broadening what we offer without running any additional risk.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

However, I am also aware that it is easy to fall into the trap of that is a very easy thing to do and you have to balance that with putting your live performances on.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

One of the issues that has been brought up to us, and I know it has been a recurring issue, is local dramatic clubs renting it out and as you know they are very proud, rightly, of the lavish technically-accomplished pantomimes, for example.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Absolutely.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

How do you fix the rental for these people given that they are all ultimately amateur groups?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

When I first arrived in January 2007, I do not think there had been a rental increase since 2005. So I met with all the companies in September 2007 and from 1st January 2008 the rental was put up 5 per cent and it has not gone up since. We need to perhaps review that, unfortunately, again maybe soon. However, you have to take into consideration the on-costs of the Opera House go up as well in terms of utilities: electric, gas. You know what it is like in your own home, let alone running a place like that. But where we do try and help is that if you are a commercial company and you come in and rent us you pay a huge commercial fee that you do not really pay. I will give you an example of this. So if you come in as a commercial company you will pay in the region of £1,600, nearly £1,700, to rent our space plus any costs technically.

[15:15]

This is per day. If you are a community group you will pay in the region of £1,400 for a one-off per day, slightly less. If you are in for a week or more, as the amateur companies are, your rental breaks down into around £735 a day. So, that is one way that we try to help the companies that come in for weeks at a time. The other way is that local community groups and amateur groups get 25 per cent off any hire fees, so if they hire any equipment from us they get a 25 per cent discount.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

But are they suffering as well? Are they coming to you and saying ...?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I think everybody is suffering in terms of audience. There is quite a lot of feedback about that and a lot of discussion about that and (a) I think there is the economic climate and (b) some people will say that there is too much on the Island to do and not just in terms of arts and culture but the other activities that go on that people have to choose what they are going to spend their money on. If the economic climate is tight then their choices get narrower. But I think probably, yes, they are and there may be ways they could look at co-operating that could possibly save them money.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

But there is a basic cost of putting the theatre out to anybody whether it is a charity or a club.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

But does the board make a conscious decision here that in a sense it will subsidise the amateur groups? Does it make that decision?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I think the answer to that is, no, we have not made that decision on the basis that we do not have enough money in order to subsidise them. On the other hand, we try and help them as much as we possibly can. I think that is fair, is it not?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Yes. In terms of capacity we have between 14 and a half and 15 weeks of local amateur dramatics and community organisations and by those I mean people like Music in Action that do the Liberation Concert and do concerts throughout the year: [Le Rocquier](#) Big Band, there are organisations that [hire](#) it on a one-off basis.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

That £700 includes ticket sale facilities?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Yes.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Also technicians.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

They are allowed contractually a certain amount of technical hours per day and if they go over that then we have to re-charge but that is all done in a pre-production meeting between the technical manager and the company before they even come into the building.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

We will move to a rather big question, part of which you have obviously dealt with. Trevor, would you like to do number 3?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

As Roy said, you have obviously touched on this already but what are the key issues that you see as facing the Opera House at present and in the near future?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Well, I will mention a couple and I am sure Jasmine will probably add to it. One of the things that we intend to address, or we are addressing, and it is referred to in Rod McLoughlin's strategy report which you have, and that is the question of having some certainty of grant over 3 years because at the moment it is year-by-year and that presents problems. Apart from anything else, you sometimes have to make bookings for a following year but you do not have the money and it is questionable. Also as a board of directors you have to be able to - or you should be able to - declare that your business, it is a limited liability company, is a going concern and there is a definition of "going concern" in the Accounting Rules. Without knowledge of the grant in following years it is questionable so we would like to persuade the Minister that a

grant should be allocated to us over more than one year which happened with - I am sorry to bring it up again - but I know it happened with Jersey Finance because we had not a dissimilar situation where in planning one year's programme you were having to make commitments for the year ahead. If you do not have the money you theoretically anyway - more than theoretically - you could not make those commitments because it would be contrary to the finance laws and the like. So, that was changed for Jersey Finance and we are very much hoping that the same thing would happen for the Opera House. It is another of the points made in Rod McLoughlin's report that it is a matter that really does need addressing, so that is certainly one thing. The other thing that we would like, probably after the reorganisation if we get this Trust above the Company, to have a lease on the building which sets out who is responsible for what because there is no lease and we are always relying on the goodwill of Property Holdings as to who might do what and the like. So, it would be quite normal for the States who own a building to have a lease that sets out all the responsibilities that the parties have and we do not have that. So those are 2 things that we would like to address - and intend to address - in the not too distant future. Jasmine might want to add something to that.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Well, no, the lease I think is quite important as it defines the boundaries of who is responsible for what. It is an elementary thing, is it not, because until you decide who is responsible for what, you cannot fix the terms of the lease but I think that is definitely something that has probably been outstanding since it was refurbished and when it re-opened in the year 2000. I suppose that comes under Cultural Strategy really. In terms of our bid and in terms of our fiscal stimulus bid ...

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Yes. We have been successful with a fiscal stimulus bid to do some work. There is an area at the back of the Opera House which was never refurbished, is absolutely desolate - I am not sure what the word is - but we put in a fiscal stimulus bid to do some building work which fits the fiscal stimulus requirements exactly. It provides building work across all the trades for the local smallish builder and brings into use areas of the Opera House that are not currently used and improves some areas and, in fact, once it is done, makes a very significant difference to the viability of the Opera House. It will improve the kitchen facilities so that the restaurant can offer cooked food, which at the moment it cannot, and there would be an area which can be used for dance classes, children's dance classes, workshops for students, workshops for adults. There is a whole range of activities that can take place and improve corporate facilities as well which will help attract corporate money. We were successful with that bid and work is very shortly due to start, so that is another matter in hand, shall we say, and will make a big difference to the Opera House and also to our financial situation.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Good.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

The 2 points you mentioned initially, the 3-year grant request and the lease, that just seems so fundamental for running any kind of operation of the sort that you are. How

has that history developed that it has never come out before? Or is that a naïve question to ask?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I am going to go back a bit in time, because it all links into the loan as well, when the Opera House was refurbished and around about the same time it was decided that there would be an operating company and the rest of it. I have to say I was not involved in any way, and I really do not know quite how they arrived at what they arrived at. But now that I see it from the other end, it is not particularly sound and I think we must sort it out. The Minister, I know, agrees with that view but how it got to where we are, I do not know. We are an operating company operating a building without a lease on it and the loan held through the Arts Trust with the interest coming from somewhere else, all the rest of it, I have to say I just do not know.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

We will come back to the Cultural Strategy.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Yes, thank you. In your view, how should the implementation of the Cultural Strategy be progressed and are there any areas that should be focussed on in the immediate future?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

How it should be progressed overall I will leave that to Jasmine. The Opera House is quite a small part of the Cultural Strategy. Even though the Opera House is

important, it is quite a small part of it because it is so wide-ranging. Certainly, one aspect of the Cultural Strategy that we think should be worked on is better co-operation between all the bodies. We have a good working relationship with everybody but at the same time there is a level of co-operation that could be improved.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Could you give some example just to contextualise it?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Well I think there is probably overlap. If you were to do a Venn diagram there are probably overlaps of areas between ourselves, the Arts Trust, the Arts Centre that could maybe work together perhaps more closely than we do now.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Do you meet regularly, Jasmine?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Yes, we meet under the guise of the Council for Culture with Rod. So that happens, and it is normally ourselves, the Arts Trust, the Arts Centre and Rod. We did used to meet with Heritage but Heritage now have their own separate meetings which is probably a good thing because there is probably going to be a mechanism in place for us all to come together at some point because I think Cultural and Heritage are just equally as important and need to talk to each other. I think there is going to be probably more meetings. We meet up, apart from that, outside of the official

structure, if you like, anyway, and try and ensure that there are no clashes in the clash diary but it is not always possible.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

So, well ahead of time you swap ideas with each other as to what your programme is going to look like?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Yes, we try to do that. Absolutely.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It does not always work.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is inevitable that occasionally there will be a clash. It is inevitable that there will be a clash; it happens. But you try and minimise it and that is where also the Arts Trust in conjunction with the Performing Arts Development Group try to keep a clash diary as well. So, we try and feed the information into them and they try and tell us if anybody else is doing anything. But it is not just the official organisations, you can get 2 amateur companies that are putting on the same things each week. That happens too.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

It is interesting because speaking to all the other groups, the working relationship, they always seem to say that the Council for Culture seems to be working well. There

is a lot that everyone is getting out of it, it is progressing well. It is interesting that you made the point about better co-operation. I am still trying to get a bit more kind of examples about specific things just so I can relate.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Maybe facilitating something that can be looked at in terms of economies of scale, then, perhaps would be a better way of putting it rather than co-operation. So maybe that was slightly misleading.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

That means things like common ticketing facilities, joint programmes, perhaps?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Potentially. I think there is a fine line, is there not, between organisations and buildings having their own identities and keeping their brand alive, if you like, and the audiences that associate themselves with that brand. Maybe there are other areas, perhaps - I do not know, marketing, whatever - that you could look at that you could do jointly.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

When you mentioned identity, that is one thing I wanted to raise, this idea of speaking with one voice. Do you see a danger of eroding your individuality as the Opera House?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I do not know about speaking with one voice. I think that is what I meant by the fine line about being co-operative and working in collaboration with other organisations. I still think you have to keep your brand because at the end of the day it is the brand that people associate with. Rightly or wrongly, we all do it. We all like this brand of soap powder against that brand of soap powder, or we have recognised that with this brand our expectations are this and with this brand our expectations are something different. So I think the branding is very, very important to all the cultural organisations.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

So what is your brand then, Jasmine?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Our brand is determined, I think, by scale because we are the scale that we are, so we have to put on shows that fit the stage, fit the auditorium, that will get that amount of people in. It is to present a diverse programme, as diverse as we can, operating in the climate that we do to extend that programme perhaps into different areas that we have not before.

[15:30]

So, we have dipped a toe in the water in the Portuguese community, we put on a very successful Polish comedy theatre group that came over and we sold out 2 performances on a Sunday. So it is kind of like stretching what we do, working with the communities more within the confines that we can. Unfortunately, the Opera

House did used to have outreach educational work but we do not do that at the moment because the post got frozen and it has not been replaced. But I think our brand is pretty strong, people know what kind of thing to expect. We are there, I think, to give people a nice time, a happy time, and we are there also to hopefully try and make people think by some of the artists that we bring over and some of the acts that we put on to the stage.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is a proper theatre which is nowhere else. I do not mean that disparagingly but the Opera House is a respectable theatre when you think of the fly screens and all the kit you have at the back. It is a full-blown theatre and our brand has to be that we are a theatre.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

You mentioned, for example, with the fiscal stimulus you are going to improve cooking facilities. Of course there was a short period - it was aborted - when you did run a fully-fledged restaurant before you came, Jasmine.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Yes.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Is there a danger that, to use that famous phrase, you will take your eyes off the ball?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

No.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

No, I do not think so. I think to be fair ...

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is improving. It is improving what we have. The restaurant at the top was effectively a bit of a non-starter. It was too far up the building, it used to get baking hot... I do not know if you ever went up there.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Yes, I did.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

You would get roasted just as much as your pork chop because it was so hot up there. It just did not work and it was closed long before you came, I think.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It was closed by 2002.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is up there and it is still there. Perhaps I should just explain a bit more about the fiscal stimulus bid which I think answers your question. That is a space that we can use but we cannot use it kitted out as a restaurant but we can use the kitchen stuff, et cetera, down in our café bar which cannot produce any hot food because there is no

extraction. So you could put a kitchen in but there is no extraction so you cannot do the hot food and stuff. So people want pre-show suppers and all that sort of thing; you just cannot do it. So, part of the fiscal stimulus bid and only part of it - the main bit is the performance phase and be able to do these lessons and all that sort of thing - but some of the equipment is going to come down from the top floor and it frees-up the top floor to be an additional space that we can use as well once all the kit has gone out of it. Again, it can be used for lots of functions and, again, corporate hospitality and the like. But all we are wanting to do as far as the catering is concerned is a modest sort of catering to match the requirements of the people who are using the Opera House at the moment that we just cannot supply. The other thing I would like to say about the fiscal stimulus bid, I did say that it met all the criteria for a fiscal stimulus bid and it provided work across the trades for the local builder and the like, but what I forgot to say which is, I think, very important, is that you get the normal benefit out of the fiscal stimulus bid but you are spending it on a building that belongs to the public and is used by the public which makes it a sort of double benefit. A double benefit. It will transform the viability of the Opera House.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I think the other thing as well from a creative point of view is that the performance space gives us a small-scale space. It will seat probably a maximum of 85 people but it gives us that space to nurture local talent. In the old restaurant area we kind of re-branded it over the last year and called it the ‘Attic’ and it made it a kind of “left of field” sort of space. We have had poetry readings in there, we have had young people from the Island that have been away to college come back doing some creative work and that has been quite successful in terms of getting an audience, hopefully for the

new performance space as well, but toe in the water and testing whether that facility is really needed.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

You do that in conjunction with the Jersey Arts Trust.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

We do some of it in conjunction with the Jersey Arts Trust.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Yes, I was wondering about that for obvious reasons. Yes.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Absolutely. Yes, and local poetry organisations, local writing organisations and writers' groups. But that has been quite good. So the performance space gives us that edge to take a risk because it is a small space but it would also enable us to nurture some local talent.

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

Just going back to the Cultural Strategy. In your opinion, what criticisms do you have of the Cultural Strategy, if any?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I suppose the thing that struck me walking in, if you like, to the Cultural Strategy and being asked to operate within it, and it is not dissimilar to any strategy that is created

in the U.K. (United Kingdom) either, is that it is a huge documentation of what could and can be done with very little funding to underpin it. I think that that would be my main observation. Rather than it is a criticism it is an ...

Deputy J.M. Maçon:

That has been a consistent thing.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It will be fantastic. If we could implement - and I mean we, the cultural and heritage organisations - the Cultural Strategy, it would be brilliant but there is not the money.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

You mention that, Jasmine, it is an interesting question to ask you. What else did you find different about the environment in Jersey compared to your previous workplaces?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

That is a big question.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

In 3 words or less.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

In 3 words.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Level of grant.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I suppose in terms of funding (a) there is the thing that we are hopefully getting around to here anyway which is the 3-year funding. That was always the case for the U.K. It was a struggle to get there but organisations gradually got a 3-year or a 5-year funding agreement which means that you can plan. I think the biggest one for me is the level of funding given to cultural organisations. Now the last place I ran was in Chester and I had a 450-seater main house and a 150-seater studio theatre. Both programmed very different things: the studio theatre you could take risks; the main house was the bigger things and used by the local community and amateur groups. My funding level was £650,000, as an example, because the rule of thumb, if you like, was £1,000 a seat.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

What is your funding here per seat?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

£456,202 so it is about £700 off the top of my head.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is under £700.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Just under £700.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I have in my head as being £640, something like that, per seat. But it is interesting that at the time the theatre was refurbished, before the decision was made by whoever made the decision (which was essentially, I think, made down at the Finance Committee level in the days of committees) I remember reading papers which had published: “Refurbish the theatre and the grant that would be needed would be a minimum of £630,000”, I seem to remember . You might remember these figures better than me. So they refurbished the theatre and opened it and gave it a grant of £350,000. But the decisions were made on the basis of a forecast grant much greater than the one that was given at the time. There may have been a good reason for that - I am not saying not - but the forecast grant and the actual grant were widely different.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

One of the reasons we are looking, the main reason, the States has gone through this exercise with Jersey Heritage Trust; there has been a lot of blood spilt. There has been a debate basically about the fact that it no longer can operate what we want it to do at the level of financing we are giving it. Have you had that debate with the Minister?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Not really.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Not really. I think we are just sort of maybe working towards it.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

We are managing. We are managing.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I think it needs to be had, most definitely. Because for me, I suppose, especially coming from the U.K., 3-year funding is great but if you want to sign up to an agreement, then you want to make sure that that agreement enables you to operate how you are expected to operate, I think. I will not say “want”, but how you would like to operate to deliver the programme that you want to deliver.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Jeremy or Trevor, any questions?

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

Just to take a step back, you mentioned the possibility of corporate hospitality I think in the area that was the restaurant. What potential does that have for helping income for the Opera House?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

If one goes back a few years, the corporate hospitality was a significant part of our budget. At the moment it is not; there is hardly any in the budget from corporate hospitality. There are 2 main reasons: one is the general downturn and the other is that during the downturn a lot of the corporates say: “Well, in this situation we cannot be seen to be spending loads of money.” In fact, it may be the year before last now

because time goes so quickly but we did have some big corporate bookings that were cancelled, so it was significant and it is not now. But the message generally now is that - in fact, funnily enough I had one this morning which I have not even told Jasmine about - people are beginning to think about it again but the clear message that I have been given is: "We will resume corporate functions and the like in the Opera House but the facilities you are offering us at the moment are not up to our modern-day standards and requirements." That is where one of the things the fiscal stimulus bid will address and put right. It will give us better facilities for them and should increase income for that reason...

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Yes, as an example that room upstairs is licensed to hold 150 people, so when we get a corporate ringing up and saying: "We have 120 people, we would like to bring them to a comedy night, an opera night, a dance night, a ballet night" or whatever, we say: "Well we can put 40 of you here" and we do not have a space where we can put them all which obviously they are not happy about and they do not want to come.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

They say: "No, thank you."

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

But that will enable us to have that facility. It may be that we do not charge them a rental for the room but they buy our champagne and canapés and that is how we make our money. But that space will be available for children's parties, adult parties,

anything that we can use a space that accommodates 150 people. So at the moment and for the last 8 years it has been a dead space.

Deputy T.M. Pitman:

So what sort of a timescale are we looking at for when that might start to bear fruit?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

2012.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Early 2012.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Just a small question, the loan is utterly non-negotiable, is it? We just have to see it through?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Well, we do not have anything to do with the loan. I say that as a sort of preface. We do not have anything to do with the loan, it is kind of a loan that is in the hands of the Arts Trust and the Treasury and the like.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

In the name of the Arts Trust.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Now, for what it is worth, I had a conversation with the Minister and we together said: “Well, why can they not just re-pay it?” So, certainly I could not make any inquiries with the bank about that but the message I got back was that the bank would not accept early repayment.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I have no idea what the penalty clause is but maybe the penalty clause is regulated.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Well it would not accept early repayment so you pay all the interest as well.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Yes. But maybe the penalty clause is ...

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

The rate of interest is 6.5 per cent.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

I was about to say, the interest must be totally at variance with today’s rates.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It is, yes.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Absolutely. Which is why I stipulated at the very beginning that I do not know how it was arranged; I had nothing to do with it.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

It does seem a bit potty, absolutely.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

Yes.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

But at the time, of course, in fairness to the people concerned - I do not want to be unfair to anybody - it was a fairly competitive rate. At the time.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérissier:

We have ranged far and wide. Are there any points you wish to make? Anything that you feel perhaps we may not have fully appreciated or we may have misinterpreted or needs re-emphasising?

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

I will make one. When I look at the Opera House it is run, maybe not on the proverbial shoestring, but it is very tightly controlled in the sense that we have one finance person, one marketing person, one manager, one this, one that which makes it very difficult to cope during holidays and illness and that sort of thing but it is very, very thinly staffed.

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

We have 12 permanent members.

Chairman, Jersey Opera House Limited:

But that includes the technicians as well as box office, marketing, building manager and the like and it is very, very thinly staffed. They manage but I just would like you to appreciate the fact that there is no fat left on the body.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Okay. Jasmine, any final points you wish to make?

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

No, I think we are fine.

Deputy R.G. Le Hérisier:

Okay. Well I would like to thank you very much for coming. We are very appreciative of all the hard work that you do, all the commitment that you show and we wish the best of luck to the S.S. Opera House as she sails forward.

[15:45]

Director, Jersey Opera House Limited:

Thank you.