

**WRITTEN QUESTION TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE EDUCATION, SPORT AND CULTURE
COMMITTEE BY THE DEPUTY OF ST. JOHN**

ANSWER TO BE TABLED ON TUESDAY 29th NOVEMBER 2005

Question

Would the President inform members what provisions, if any, the Committee makes in respect of maintenance of the Jersey Opera House particularly in view of the current external appearance of the building?

Answer

Members may recall that the States recently debated and adopted the Committee's recommendations contained in a Report and Proposition for the Development of a Cultural Strategy for the Island (19th July 2005). This issue, and indeed the whole issue of maintaining the cultural estate, was addressed in the Report and Proposition which informed the debate. In essence, the States has financed huge capital developments in culture over the past 10 years but has failed to increase revenue funding to keep pace with the maintenance demands which buildings make.

Since taking over responsibility for culture, the Committee has passed on all resources previously allocated to cultural organisations by the Finance and Economics Committee and in some cases has even increased its funding. The fact remains, however, that the Jersey Opera House, like the Jersey Heritage Trust with regard to the Archive Centre and the Jersey Arts Centre with regard to St James, has had insufficient funding or income to agree the terms of a lease with the Property Services Department for the use of the premises they occupy. At the moment, therefore, the Jersey Opera House remains a States building which the States must maintain whether it is used as a theatre or not. In the absence of a signed lease the responsibility for its maintenance is the responsibility of the Property Services Department. As a short term measure for 2005, members will recall that a sum of £150,000 was allocated to a Minor Capital Vote in the 2005 Budget for the maintenance of cultural properties in States ownership and that expenditure against this sum has been prioritised and managed by the Property Services Department in consultation with the various organisations occupying the properties. With regard to the Opera House, the priorities are the removal of asbestos and the renewal of a seriously defective flat roof. Even if there were enough resources within this budget to meet all requirements, there is a question as to whether minor capital money may be used for external redecoration.

At present, therefore, I fear that the Opera House has been required to look to its own resources and fund-raising capability to improve the external appearance of the building. I understand that the Board of the Opera House Limited are actively pursuing a number of options in this respect.

This is an unsatisfactory state of affairs, not just for the Opera House but for all publicly owned buildings within the cultural estate. This is one of the first issues which the duly appointed Minister for Education, Sport and Culture should seek to address with the newly formed Property Holdings Department next year.