Arts & Theatre

In Conversation

Culture Committee Chair The Rt. Hon. Dame Caroline Dinenage MP

Sophie Layton (she/her)

Following the 2024 General Election, in which the Labour Party swept to power and ended 14 years of Conservative governance, many of the structures within Westminster changed almost overnight. One of the few figures to remain the same, retaining their previous role following the election was Dame Caroline Dinenage MP, recently re-appointed to her role as Chair of the Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee, who spoke to Forge Press about her role, career, and the future of politics in an increasingly polarised world.

The Rt. Hon. Dame Caroline Dinenage MP is the Conservative Member of Parliament for Gosport. She has been an MP continuously since 2010 and was re-elected for the fifth time in July. She has held a range of Arts & Theatre-related positions during her time in Parliament, including as Minister of State for Digital & Culture from February 2020 to September 2021, under Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Following this, Dame Caroline Dinenage became the Chair of the Parliamentary Culture, Media & Sport Select Committee from May 2023 until the General Election, following which she was re-elected to the role. Before entering Parliament, Dame Caroline Dinenage studied Politics & English at Swansea University.

Dame Dinenage began by telling me about the importance of the Select Committee structures, their need to "scrutinise" the new administration and "hold the sectors [...] to account" as the new government begins its tenure: "During my first year as Chair, the [...] Committee not only scrutinised the Draft Media Bill, [...] asked how ITV were preventing exploitation of junior staff in wake of the Phillip Schofield scandal and played a pivotal role in the changes the [England & Wales Cricket Board] have instituted to improve their DEI practices".

Asked about her priorities for the committee's new term, she spoke to some of the issues facing the department, "examining the health" of our cultural industries and the planned Football Governance Bill – "there is plenty for the Committee to get its teeth stuck into".

Having served as a Minister for the Department of Culture, Media & Sport during the Covid-19 pandemic, Dame Dinenage had a unique situation on her hands, particularly as Minister for Digital & Culture. Despite the challenges imposed, she told me that she was still able to achieve some impressive things during her tenure, including "the £1.57 billion" Culture Recovery Fund and the Film & TV Production Restart Scheme.

"It meant the 3rd quarter of 2020 witnessed the third highest spend (£1.19 billion) on film and TV productions for any quarter on record since 2015, and extraordinary success in a pandemic!". But despite her successes, it was also this brief that presented her with her hardest challenge: "Trying to quantify the economic value of sectors that are hard to put a figure on to secure the Culture Recovery Fund from the Treasury", all whilst in a national lockdown.

It is no surprise that the creative industries are facing many serious issues, and Dame Caroline Dinenage is all-too familiar, but there is one issue in particular she was keen to point out currently facing creatives across the country and world, Artificial Intelligence: "It's important to ensure technological advances don't mean creators are not fairly remunerated, and the government will need to ensure that our future workforce have the skills to meet the demands of innovation in the modern world".



Credit: Dame Caroline Dinenage

Just before we spoke to Dame Caroline, she like many other people had missed out on tickets to the *Oasis Live 25 Reunion Tour*, which saw technological issues, as well as the use of dynamic pricing, forcing fans to "make snap decisions over large sums of money."

It's this "lack of transparency" that she believes warrant the most discussion: "Ticketing companies need to have honest conversations with fans before they enter a digital queue. We're awaiting the outcome of the Competition and Markets Authority investigation which will help clarify the situation", but will likely be a high-profile issue the committee will deal with.

But with so many issues facing our sector, many people may recall the complete absence of Culture, Media & Sport issues in the General Election. Asking whether these issues should be more visible and how we can make them so, her answer was resolute: "on every criteria that matters, the Culture, Media & Sport sectors gave something vital to offer our nation [...] but successive leaders have undervalued their importance [...] the creative industries alone are worth more than the aerospace, automotive, life sciences and oil and gas sectors combined" – but also its wider impact on the people of the U.K. and the places in which they live, speaking to "the power to bring communities together, to regenerate left-behind areas, and to expand our soft power by promoting the British brand abroad".

Read the full interview on the Forge Press website



Credit: Dame Caroline Dinenage





Credit: UK Parliament