

From: Mike Hill, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services
Simon Jones, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee – 19 July 2022

Decision No: N/A

Subject: Kent Film Office

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Divisions: County Wide

Summary: The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the Kent Film Office.

Recommendation(s): The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note and make any comments and recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Kent Film Office (KFO) sits within the Creative & Cultural Economy Team in the Growth and Communities Division. There are two full time and one part time staff members.
- 1.2 KFO was established in 2006 by Kent County Council. It generates inward investment into the Kent and Medway economies from the film and broadcast industries while ensuring that any filming activity taking place in the region is lawful and considerate of Kent & Medway's residents and businesses.
- 1.3 KFO's mission is to maximise inward investment from filming activity for a minimum of disruption to residents and businesses. Since 2006, the contribution of filming activity to the Kent economy has experienced a steady rise from £1.3m annually, to a record £8.2m in 2021-2022. Annual figures are expected to fluctuate, but over the last five years an average of £5m per annum was achieved. For every £1 invested in the Kent Film Office, in 2021-22 there was a £109 return into the Kent economy, and the average over the last five years was £58 per £1 invested.
- 1.4 KFO is currently the Chair of FO:UK (Film Offices UK); an affiliate member of The Production Guild; has a partnership agreement with Creative England; and contributes to the National study currently undertaken by Olsberg SPI

examining the economic impact of the sector. KFO initiated and maintains the Kent Filming Partnership, making Kent a film friendly county.

2 Kent Film Office Activity

2.1 To attract filming, especially large-scale, high-profile filming, an area must evidence a suitable and supportive infrastructure in addition to fantastic locations. A lost filming day due to problems that cannot be resolved quickly, can cost the production company between £8K and £42K.¹ The KFO:

- maintains and develops an online locations database of public spaces as well as private residences and businesses available for filming;
- offers advice on process, contracts, and fees to local location owners;
- offers these locations to the sector via an online database on both its own and Creative England's websites, during the annual attendance at [FOCUS](#), an international trade show for productions, and individually tailored brochures for requests by producers, directors, and location scouts;
- finds additional locations via mailouts to its extensive local contacts if there is no fit on the database; and
- maintains and develops working relationships to provide the necessary infrastructure. These include Kent Police, Kent Highway Services, local councils, KCC internal services and assets such as our estates team, libraries, schools, country parks etc., Regional & National Agencies and bodies like Network Rail, National Trust, Environment Agency, Natural England, Stagecoach, Dartford Bridge Development Group, Ebbsfleet Development Corporation, Port of Dover, RNLI, Visit Kent and many more.

2.2 Once a production has decided to come to the county, KFO provides the necessary local contacts and assists with liaison and troubleshooting as well as ensuring film companies set up filming in the least disruptive and most respectful manner to our communities and that activity is legal. KFO now handles the filming for district authorities of Thanet, Folkestone & Hythe, Canterbury, Swale, and Dartford, as well as a few parish council properties for a 10% commissioning fee. We are currently awaiting a decision from Dover DC as to whether KFO will also handle their district filming approaches.

2.3 In terms of film companies using the public highway or a public right of way, KFO acts as liaison between Residents, Councils, Kent Highway Services or PROW and production to request traffic management and road closures under the KCC (Filming on Highways) Act 2010 if traffic flow cannot be maintained

¹ Creative England distributes average daily spend figures for diverse type of productions to film offices. These were arrived at by access to a selection of production budgets though the BFI and the Production Guild from which averages were arrived at, A currently ongoing study by Olsberg SPI was commissioned to update these projected spends, as budgets have increased significantly, and the averages are felt to be out of date. Currently, a daily spend of £8K is estimated for a feature film with a total budget of £1.5 million, £42K for a £100million production and £16K for a TV drama.

safely; organise or attend recces; ensure the correct paperwork is sent to the correct department for road or footpath closures or traffic management, street furniture removal, the placement of lights, cranes or other objects on the public highway; monitor comms from production are in place, such as consultations with residents and councils, letter drops, warnings signs; check that filming events do not clash with planned local events or waste collection dates, connect production with staff to facilitate street lighting requests or the removal of bins and other street furniture; liaise with bus companies if bus stops are affected or need to be moved; ensure repairs and replacements are offered in case of loss or damage; raise invoices and check insurance details and risk assessments.

- 2.4 In terms of legality, KFO ensures, among other things: Kent Police are informed of weapons and police livery use; the coastguard and RNLI are informed of any work on the sea; productions are directed to the correct protocol for child performer licenses; night filming has the correct mitigations in place to be ratified by environmental services; and any structures have local planning licences where applicable.
- 2.5 KFO also ensures that disruption to businesses and residents are minimised and directs production to notify affected residents and businesses of any filming in the area; cater for special needs if residents need ambulance access during road closures; offer alternate parking when bays have been suspended or alternate accommodation during a noisy night shoot for example; give compensation when a business has to close due to filming or access is severely restricted when filming occurs outside their premises.
- 2.6 KFO also helps with some of the more functional requests including finding and securing accommodation; parking; rubbish disposal; portable toilets; making sure verges are not cut during filming to maintain continuity; re-arranging bell ringing practice; removal of graffiti and so forth.
- 2.7 Though most productions travel with heads of department and key crew, KFO helps with finding local crew, extras or trainees as employing local labour save production overnight payments and upskills our local communities.
- 2.8 KFO has partnered with Creative England who deal with crewing on our behalf. We do have back-office access to this database at KFO to manage crew enquiries if needed.
- 2.9 KFO offers its social media outlets to finding additional crew and services if none are available from the database.
- 2.10 KFO works with all the local colleges and universities, giving student lectures and has a large database of local trainees we can hire to support a production. This provides productions with entry level support and a most

valuable first step into the industry for our graduates and young people. A couple of other county film offices have now adopted this approach piloted by KFO. We also tweet training, networking, and funding opportunities for the sector.

- 2.11 Once filming is in progress, KFO troubleshoots if there are problems for the film company or complaints from residents.
- 2.12 KFO liaises with local press and the PR agency of the production to ensure the fine balance between promotion of Kent and protecting the work environment and intellectual property of the production that is currently filming.
- 2.13 Once filming is complete, KFO requests feedback and calculates the economic benefit to Kent for each production that visited the county.¹
- 2.14 Once a production is screened, broadcast, or streamed, KFO promotes productions that filmed in Kent online and via social media. If the production was a film or TV drama, it will also be included in the Kent Moviemap on the KFO website, to celebrate Kent's filming heritage.

3 COVID

- 3.1 During lockdown, the Cultural & Creative Economy team held various sector conversations to assess the impact of the pandemic and ascertain what support the sector needed for speedy recovery.
- 3.2 The Kent Film Office (KFO) then became part of a working group with Creative England, British Film Institute (BFI), the British Film Council (BFC) and Film Offices UK (FO:UK) to establish robust COVID guidelines to allow the sector to return to work as soon as possible. After ratification by the Health and Safety Executive, the sector managed to return to work by July 2020.
- 3.3 The sector felt that support for plans to bring a studio complex to the Old Railway Shed site in Ashford was important and would be most effective in the form of a promotional trailer, celebrating the wealth of diverse locations and high-profile productions that have been filmed in Kent, supported by an attempt to locate and register Kent & Medway crew to evidence a local skills base.

¹ To calculate the spend by production, for the vast majority we apply the average daily spend figures provided by Creative England to each filming prep and strike day logged. Where we have provided a lot of support, we also ask production to give us local spend figures, as we did for Empire of Light. If we receive this direct information, we feed this back to Creative England who can then use this to calculate the next year's averages. We have found that largely the averages we use are conservative against the real spend. Empire of Light's average spend figures show a local spend of £1.9million, while initial figures released by the company show their spend was more than £4 million.

- 3.4 The trailer was produced at cost locally and has already attracted enough attention that Hertfordshire County Council has approached the Kent production company with a request for their own trailer, generating business as well as marketing Kent. This trailer will be shared at committee.
- 3.5 KFO also undertook a refresh of its branding. Inspired by Libraries' success, this was done in house and has already received many positive comments.



From Old – to New



4 Next developments

- 4.1 With current staffing levels, KFO will strive to continue the work it is doing, taking advantage of any opportunities that present themselves to improve and develop the service.
- 4.2 Looking forward, there are several risks that must be factored into continuing service provision and potential adjustments to stay competitive in the marketplace.
- The cost-of-living crisis has already seen the reduction of subscribers to screening services (like Netflix and Amazon) which may result in a reduction of content creation.
[<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2022/apr/18/streaming-subscriptions-in-decline-as-uk-households-cut-budgets>]
 - PACT, the UK screen sector trade body, warns that government plans to sell Channel 4 is expected to lead to a reduction in UK content production.
[<https://www.pact.co.uk/latest-updates/news/detail.html?id=statement-from-pact-on-the-government-s-privatisation-of-channel-4>]
 - Rising costs may lead to government reducing tax credits for productions from abroad, which is one of the key factors contributing to the screen industries being the fastest growing sector in the UK economy for the last few years. [<https://www.bfi.org.uk/news/screen-business-report>]
 - Suburbanisation of Kent leading to a location shortage of distinct, industrial and studio build space locations as well as increased pressure on protected sites which may have to be locked off to be preserved, for example Long Rock, Shellness and Dungeness.
 - Studio provision north of the Thames in Dagenham (Eastbrook Studios), Purfleet (Media Village), Thurrock (High House Production Park) in combination with the creation of new film office functions in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk makes that region a serious competitor. Dartford Crossing

charges act as a barrier to productions based in those studios to travel to Kent for location filming.

4.3 There are several opportunities and mitigations KFO can enact:

- Work with Creative England to establish a strong working relationship with studios north of the Thames;
- maintain advantages of being a well-established and highly respected service;
- maintaining position to take advantage of any opportunities that arise should a studio complex in Ashford be realised;
- be part of discussions around developments to coordinate film provision across the Thames Estuary Production Corridor;
- work with local partners to keep prices competitive in a potentially more restricted marketplace; and
- continue to improve its high profile with Creative England, BFC and Production Guild to ensure the Kent offer stays current.

5 Financial Implications

5.1 The 2022-23 budget for the Service is £110,800. There are no direct financial implications arising from this paper. Future opportunities that arise should a studio complex in Ashford be realised and developments to coordinate film provision across the Thames Estuary Production Corridor will be subject to detailed feasibility studies and approval will be sought for any proposed growth of the Kent Film Office.

6 Data Protection

6.1 The existing privacy notices covers the operation of the service and no new data protection issues arise due to the contents of this paper.

7 Equality and Diversity

7.1 The existing Equality Impact Assessments underpinning the breadth of the service's work apply to the work and roles described in this paper.

8 Recommendation(s):

The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note this report and make comments and recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services.

9 Contact details

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