

From: Clair Bell, Cabinet Member for Community and Regulatory Services
Simon Jones, Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee – 14 May 2024

Decision No: N/A

Subject: Kent Film Office

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Divisions: County Wide

Summary: The purpose of this paper is to provide an update that shows the economic impact of Kent Film Office being able to facilitate filming in Kent.

Recommendation(s): The Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee is asked to note and make any comments and recommendations to the cabinet member.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 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 initiated and maintains the [Kent Filming Partnership](#) with councils and local and national agencies, making Kent a film friendly county. It is a member of FO:UK (Film Offices UK), a group of council run or funded film offices sharing best practice, providing evidence to government on economic performance of the sector and identifying laws and practices that impact on sector growth so UK remains attractive for inward investment. KFO is an affiliate member of The Production Guild, giving it access to promotion to and networking with key industry professionals and has a partnership agreement with Filming in England (FiE), formerly Creative England, key benefits being: Kent locations have a national exposure on the FiE database, access to a Kent crew and facilities database which saves significant staff time at KFO, regional networking with industry professionals, promotion via FiE newsletters and social media.

2 KFO Economic Impact

- 2.1 Filming in England distributes average daily spend figures for diverse types of productions to film offices. These were arrived at by access to a selection of production budgets through the BFI and the Production Guild from which averages were calculated. Olsberg SPI were recently commissioned to carry out a study which is currently ongoing to update these projections to reflect significant increases in production costs. Currently, a daily local spend of £8K is estimated for a feature film with a total budget of £1.5+ million, £108K for a £60+million production and £16K for a TV drama.
- 2.2 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 Kent Film Office, there was a £109 return into the Kent economy, an average of £58 per £1 over the last five years.
- 2.3 KFO has managed to attract an increasing number of filming projects, including high profile productions like Empire of Light, The Beekeeper, The Crown and Mr Bates Versus The Post Office, largely due to the excellent film facilitation service it provides. Kent is the home county furthest from any London Production Hubs like Pinewood and Leavesden, therefore, managing a large, nationally available locations database and fast responses to national location enquiries by FiE and international ones from The British Film Council (BFC) is crucial in putting Kent at the forefront of a UK film offering.
- 2.4 In 2023/24 KFO supported the generation of £6.8m for the Kent economy through a total of 690 filming days. Over the year, KFO received 872 requests, made up of 468 filming requests and 404 related enquiries. KFO also provided 17 trainee/runner placements over 57 days and 1 location manager job over 22 days. Highlights this year include dramas such as Mr Bates vs the Post Office, Mary & George, The Crown S6, and features such as Mission Impossible, Hamlet and Bird.
- 2.5 A location filming day is the result of long, detailed prep work, sometimes starting months ahead because it is very costly to production; anything from £90K to £250K for a film like Empire of Light and up to half a million for large blockbusters like Mission Impossible. Understandably, productions need to make sure any location chosen is supported by an agency that can provide local connections, remove obstacles and solve a multitude of problems quickly and effectively. It is the core work of KFO to provide this support and we have included a small selection of feedback in section 2.7 to give you a measure of KFO's success in this area.

2.6 The support given includes, among other things: accelerating temporary planning permits, finding additional crew and production bases, negotiating runner and trainee placements for local students, arranging parking dispensations, traffic management, drone flying exemptions, Kent Police permits for weapons and stunts, liaising with environmental departments at councils, environment agency or Natural England, providing advice to location owners as well as ensuring safety and consideration for residents.

2.7 Below are 3 of the 25 best feedback we logged on iCasework this year.

03/11/23

[We] had an amazing time shooting in Kent. It proves to me again what a solid option Kent is for production as London is becoming more and more difficult in terms of the financials & lead up times. On behalf of our little short, a massive thank you for your ongoing support!

Julian Bivol, Location Manager, Bookyville

09/06/23

Your hard work, flexibility unwavering support, and sheer knack for making things happen played a huge role in the success of our shoot.

It was an absolute pleasure to work with a team as dedicated, efficient, and downright amazing as you folks.”[...]

Karin Kavanagh, Location Manager, The Veil [sic to be released]

31/08/2023

I have to say we were incredibly impressed with Kent Film Office's approach - so easy to deal with and helped us with a tight turn around. The shoot went brilliantly and can't wait to film in Kent again soon!

Dan Matthews, Producer, Sam Fischer| Afterglow

2.8 The year 2023 saw some of the longest industrial action in the industry's history, with firstly US writers going on strike at the beginning of May, being joined by US actors in the middle of July. As a large proportion of the UK film and TV Industry is closely allied to the US one, the strikes had a serious effect on UK industry. Kent was lucky in having secured several projects early in the year, as well as a number of domestic productions that remained unaffected by the strikes.

2.9 Although industrial action was resolved in October, the effects are ongoing. Various productions were shelved as pivotal crew or cast already had prior commitments to productions going forward. Production will therefore take time to regain momentum.

2.10 Many production companies, especially the large streamers like Amazon and Netflix used the strikes to roll back budgets which had gone up to anything in excess of between £10 and £20m per episode through competition for audience subscriptions for prime shows. It is expected that budgets of between £1 and £3m per episode are more likely going forward.

- 2.11 Government recently announced that film industry tax credits will be maintained and, in some cases, extended which is a positive incentive. However, this comes alongside proposals for large increases in business rates for film & TV studios, which are expected to deter companies from filming in the UK.
- 2.12 It is a disadvantage that Kent has no studio provision since film companies favour combining studio and location production to provide economies of scale. As reported through industry contacts, significant number of new studio developments have come online since 2020, all to the northwest of London. Others were greenlit and supported in the north of England through Levelling Up. We will continue to work with Ashford Borough Council on the potential for a studio provision on the Railway Sheds site.
- 2.13 Our nearest large studio complex is in Dagenham which, if combined with location work in Kent necessitates extra costs for Dartford crossing tolls which could amount to an additional £500 per day to get crew, equipment and cast into the county. The proposed Lower Thames Crossing is also planned as a toll road and as such would not alleviate this.
- 2.14 Kent Film Office is part of discussions on developments to coordinate film provision across the Thames Estuary Production Corridor.

3 Film Tourism

- 3.1 KFO have been working with Visit Kent to analyse the impact of screen tourism by assessing the effect of filming on visitor figures through their quarterly business barometer. Of the 41 attractions surveyed, 51% reported they had been used as a filming location previously. Of this group, 22% specified that since filming they have seen an increase of up to 20% in footfall. 11% experienced increases in footfall of up to 40% which, through their own research they could directly attribute to filming. Going forward, KFO will monitor this quarterly with the aim of assessing which kinds of programmes bring in the most tourism benefits.
- 3.2 KFO and Visit Kent are working jointly to promote projects across our social media platforms, press campaigns and film tourism trails when opportunities arise. This will build on previous joint work undertaken for the Boleyn, Darling Buds of May and Empire of Light promotions and trails.

4 Communication Strategy

- 4.1 KFO has recently reevaluated its comms strategy in response to industry trends to move towards other platforms following the acquisition and rebranding of Twitter to X. There has been a steady decline in users of X but an increase in use of our new Instagram account where engagement is spread more evenly across posts and the user base is more in line with our target audience of location managers, scouts and other industry professionals. For 2024/25, we are also focusing on building up our LinkedIn presence to maximise use of this business focused platform.

5 Financial Implications

- 5.1 The 2024-25 budget for the Service is £118,700 net. This is made up of £120,000 staffing, £12,700 non staffing and an estimated £14,800 income. 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 Conclusion

- 8.1 Subject to Securing Kent's Future, KFO will continue to provide a high quality service, grow and manage filming in Kent, taking advantage of any opportunities that present themselves to improve and develop the service, maximising economic benefit to the county, through leverage and tourism.

9 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.

10 Contact details

Report Author:

Gabrielle Lindemann [she/her] | Kent Film Officer

03000 422 000 | filmoffice@kent.gov.uk | www.kent.gov.uk/filmoffice

Relevant Directors:

Stephanie Holt-Castle, Director Growth and Communities

03000 412064 | Stephanie.Holt-Castle@kent.gov.uk