

FILM IN ARGYLL – SCREEN INDUSTRIES UPDATE REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report provides an annual update of the work of Argyll and Bute Council in attracting inward investment into Argyll and Bute from the screen industries and the economic benefits that this brings to the area including the opportunities to promote and market the area.
- 1.2 Over the past 12 months, the spread of COVID-19 (coronavirus) has had a profound impact on many industries and the broadcast sector is no exception. The UK and Scottish Governments' have imposed various restrictions to try to limit the further spread of the virus, including strict rules around social distancing and travel, which have had far-reaching implications for film and TV production.
- 1.3 This report highlights the impact of COVID-19 on film and TV production within Argyll and Bute and provides an overview of how challenges within the industry have directly impacted the number and size of productions coming into the area over the course of the year 2020.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.0 That members consider the contents of this report and the continued positive economic impact the screen industry has had on Argyll and Bute.
- 2.1 That members note the challenges the screen industries have faced over the last year and the impact this has had on Argyll and Bute's local economy.

3.0 DETAIL

- 3.1 Development of Screen Industries fits with UK government targets for developing the economy and has been identified as one of the key growth sectors by Scottish Government. In April 2014 Creative Scotland (CS) published its 10-year Strategic Plan (2014-2024), Unlocking Potential and Embracing Ambition.

The vision of the Plan States:

“We want a Scotland where everyone actively values and celebrates arts and creativity as the heartbeat for our lives and the world in which we live; which continually extends its imagination and ways of doing things; and where the arts, screen and creative industries are confident, connected and thriving.

Nearly a thousand people working in the arts, screen and creative industries have helped shape this vision through consultation, conversation, feedback and dialogue.”

This is a shared vision for the arts, screen and creative industries and at its heart is a set of ambitions and priorities that has focused and informed the work of Creative Scotland.

- 3.2 Screen Scotland was launched in August 2018 and its aim is to grow the film and TV sector in Scotland. Screen Scotland sits within Creative Scotland and is a partnership with Scottish Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Skills Development Scotland, Scottish Funding Council, with funding from the Scottish Government and the National Lottery.

In response to the Coronavirus, Screen Scotland launched a £1.5m Screen Bridging Bursary programme to support the freelance and self-employed workers in the screen sector who have experienced a loss of income. This programme was designed to complement the UK Governments Job Retention and Self Employment Support Scheme.

- 3.3 The Development and Economic Growth service has been providing a service to the screen industries since 1998 when the film service was initially part of the Scottish Highlands and Islands Film Commission. The last 11 months have been significantly challenging, with the first lockdown in March 2020 meaning that film production was not possible between March and August 2020 and thereafter whilst productions could take place, there were significant restrictions. Over the last year we have been working hard to continue to support filming, subject to compliance with Scottish Government guidance and the necessary Covid 19 risk assessments to improve the service.

Core to our service is providing confidential advice and support as a “one stop shop” to the industry through a single point of contact within the Economic Development section. The “one stop shop” supports the production’s needs in many ways including, liaising with other council departments (for road closures, access to land/property including car parks etc.), providing locations to film enquiries, landownership queries, local knowledge and connecting productions to local services such as Gaelic speakers and community groups.

Screen industries development meets with our Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) objective of ‘Our Economy is Diverse and our Economic Strategy objective under the “Place and People” outcome, “Creating a vibrant, cultural experience and strong creative industry”. In response to the pandemic, Argyll and Bute’s Economic Recovery Plan published in August 2020 also highlights council action to “Continue to support cultural activity including film and TV locational work” under the key Scottish Government theme, Place and People.

- 3.4 For the year January 2020 to January 2021, Argyll and Bute Council received 91 film enquiries and there have been 21 productions filmed during the year. This has led to an estimated local production spend of **£310,000**. Compared to the 2019 estimated local production spend of just over £1M, last year's figures are a direct reflection the impact the Coronavirus pandemic has had on the screen industries. It should be noted that filming was unable to take place from the end of March 2020 until August 2020, missing out on key spring/summer months which are historically the busiest time for film in Argyll and Bute.
- 3.5 Within the year 2020 productions included:
- Twelve celebrities attempt to row the entire length of Britain in ITV's reality show "**Don't Rock the Boat**". Starting at St Ives the celebrities also filmed at Port Ellen, Islay and Oban before moving on to the Highlands. In addition to the estimated local spend, the Council received over £500.00 in commercial filming fees for use of the North Pier Harbour and Pontoons in Oban.
 - **Secret Scotland with Susan Calman** as she explores Mount Stuart House on the Isle of Bute, learns how to make a copper axe at Kilmartin Glen and discovers the secrets of oyster cultivation at Loch Fyne. Susan also visited the Isle of Mull and the Council assisted with filming in and around Tobermory and the Isle of Staffa.
 - **My Mortgage Free Home** presented by Amanda Lamb filmed in and around the Isle of Bute to show a couple potential properties and what the area had to offer.
 - **STV Pride of Scotland Awards** presented a well-deserved community award to the People of Bute for their role in welcoming families from Syria to the island.
- 3.6 It should be noted that the majority of productions filmed this year in Argyll and Bute were smaller unscripted TV series. This is due to the challenges larger feature and drama productions faced as business interruption insurance to cover COVID-19 has been unavailable for the majority of 2020 - many larger productions would not take the risk of filming. The film service is starting to see a change in this now as firms are starting to introduce insurance packages including COVID for over £400M. Development and Economic Growth have started assisting larger productions again as of December 2020 with approximately three confidential enquiries ongoing at present.
- 3.7 In addition to the above challenges faced by the screen industries, in response to the pandemic the British Film Commission also introduced industry specific guidance for productions to ensure filming can be undertaken safely across the UK. The industry has been advised to read this guidance in conjunction with Scottish Government guidance on wider public health and fair work principles. The guidance was then adopted by the Scottish Government which prompted the Development and Economic Growth service to review our operational procedures to align with this new guidance. A report was approved at DMT in August 2020 to implement these new procedures which has proved effective to date.

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 Moving forward into the January 2021 full Scottish lockdown, the Scottish Government have stated Film and TV remains able to continue production under “essential work that cannot be undertaken from home”. This is under the condition that productions adhere strictly to the industry specific guidance set out by the British Film Commission. The Development and Economic service will continue to monitor productions coming into the Argyll and Bute area where possible and encourage early community engagement. However it should be noted that this is not always possible if productions do not require input or permission from the Council – this is however a very rare occurrence for larger productions.
- 4.2 The screen industries continues to have the potential to not only bring production spend to the local economy but to be a catalyst for the growth of the tourism industry in Argyll and Bute. As part of Argyll and Bute’s economic recovery process from the coronavirus pandemic, the Development and Economic Growth service will continue to work across council services and with key partners such as Screen Scotland and the Scottish Locations Network to ensure filming is carried out safely in the Argyll and Bute area.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Policy
Supports SOA, Economic Strategy and Economic Recovery Plan under Place and People theme.
- 5.2 Financial
None
- 5.3 Legal
None
- 5.4 HR
None
- 5.5 Fairer Scotland Duty:
None
- 5.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics
None
- 5.5.2 Socio-economic Duty
None
- 5.5.3 Islands
None

5.5.4 Risk

COVID-19 continues to be a real risk to our communities and it is critical that we continue to ensure that our processes reflect the guidance from SG, Screen Scotland and British Film Commission and continually adapt as this guidance changes

5.5.5 Customer Service

Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth

Kirsty Flanagan

Policy Lead Councillor Alistair Redman

6th January 2021

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