



Summary of an Inquiry Report of the:
Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee

FILMING IN CARDIFF - SUMMARY

January 2025

This document is available in Welsh / Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg.



Cardiff Council

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FOREWORD

When we commenced this Inquiry, I think it is fair to say that our focus was on how best to balance the costs of filming with the benefits that filming brings to Cardiff; we were keen to understand whether costs to the Council, and therefore residents of Cardiff, could be minimised without reducing the undoubted economic and cultural benefits that filming brings to Cardiff and the region.

Our conclusions are that there is a fine balance to be struck between attracting and maintaining filming and minimising costs. Our recommendations centre on improving the Council's offer to thereby attract more filming, by enhancing the information we provide to our stakeholders, strengthening collaborative working, exploring good practice in marketing and promoting, understanding regional work on unit base green grids and considering whether council buildings could offer space for production bases. Critically, we recommend that Cabinet consider the resources available in the Film Office and in Network Management.

We benefited hugely from the evidence provided by those who work as location managers, production managers and line managers – here and elsewhere – who shared their views and experiences with us and offered proposals aimed at encouraging and maintaining filming whilst recognising the widely varying budgets available to different productions – our recommendations, to explore the introduction of a rate card for council locations tiered by production budget and to explore a separate fees and charges regime for long-term repeat business, directly address these points made by many contributors.

We were very pleased to hear such positive feedback about our Film Office and about the experience overall of filming in Cardiff. We are in competition with other local authorities – we need to ensure that Cardiff continues to offer an attractive and welcoming environment for filming so that the many residents and businesses in Cardiff that work in this sector or benefit from this sector continue to flourish.

I wish to thank all those who contributed to this Inquiry, sharing their knowledge, time, and thoughts so generously – particular mention must go to Rhys Bidder for inviting the task group onto set to experience first-hand the work undertaken to enable filming and to minimise its impact on residents, local businesses and agencies. I also wish to thank my fellow members on this Inquiry – Cllr Jenkins, Cllr Lewis and Cllr Shimmin – for their work and the scrutiny officers who supported this Inquiry – Angela Holt and Gladys Hingco.



Councillor Peter Wong
Chair, Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee
January 2025

TERMS OF REFERENCE

1. Explore how Cardiff Council can encourage and facilitate filming in Cardiff, enhance income generation, reduce associated costs, and maximise the benefits for local people and the local economy, by:
 - a. Examining the operations of Cardiff Film Unit, focusing on:
 - i. the current business model and financial position
 - ii. customer data trends including filming enquiries and filming permits
 - iii. existing and potential customers' views.
 - b. Examining the delivery models of other local authority film units and agencies that deliver this service for local authorities.
 - c. Seeking input from key stakeholders and interested parties, learning from their knowledge and experience of filming in Cardiff and elsewhere.
2. To use the information gathered during the Inquiry to make evidence-based recommendations to Cabinet regarding how best to enhance the benefits of filming in Cardiff

APPROACH TAKEN

- M1. Members undertook this Inquiry during November 2024 – January 2025.
- M2. Members received evidence from the following internal stakeholders who attended question & answer sessions:
- Cllr Jennifer Burke – Cabinet Member – Culture, Parks and Events
 - Ken Poole - Head of Economic Development
 - Ruth Cayford – OM – Creative Industries and Culture
 - Jon Day – OM – Tourism and Investment
 - Claire Moggridge – Head of Transport
- M3. Scrutiny Officers met with Sarah Howells, Cardiff Film Officer, and Ali Yassine, Cardiff Film Manager, to learn more about their work and to hear their views and experiences. Relevant information was shared with the task group.
- M4. Members also received evidence from the following external stakeholders who attended meetings with the task group:
- Idris Ahmed – Location Manager
 - Rhys Bidder - Location Manager
 - Julian Davies – Series Location Manager, Casualty
 - Hannah James Johnson – Location Manager
 - Jason Keatley – Location Manager
 - Adam Knopf – Location Manager
 - Rachel Slater – Line Producer, Casualty
 - Lee Walters – Chief Executive Officer, Ffilm Cymru.
- M5. Members wrote to several key stakeholders offering them the opportunity to give their views to the Inquiry. Written responses were received from:
- Boom Cymru – Marged Llŷr-Griffiths
 - Creative Wales/ Wales Screen - Penny Skuse
 - Screen Alliance Wales – Allison Dowzell.

- M6. At the invitation of Rhys Bidder, Members visited a filming location in the centre of Cardiff, seeing firsthand the work undertaken to enable filming, including meeting with Steve Hyatt and Matt Harrison to understand their work on the ground on behalf of the Council to assist with road closures, parking arrangements and other issues that arise on site, such as managing the needs of residents, businesses, and other council services, such as waste collection.
- M7. Members commissioned Scrutiny Research to undertake a review of local authority film offices in Bath, Bristol, Enfield, Liverpool and Manchester. The full report is attached at Appendix 1.
- M8. In addition to the above, Members considered information on the Council's complaints and compliments system (Halo), information provided by Economic Development officers and Network Management officers regarding road closure costs at selected other local authorities, attached at Appendix 2, information on filming gathered from the websites of Birmingham City Council, Bristol City Council, Cardiff Council, Neath Port Talbot Council, Newport City Council, and the Vale of Glamorgan Council, as well as the Film Office, and other organisations cited by witnesses as good to film with, including Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority, Cadw, Cardiff University, National Museum of Wales, National Trust, and Natural Resources Wales.
- M9. To inform the Inquiry, Members were provided with briefing reports ahead of each meeting. Relevant sections have been synthesised into the report.
- M10. The evidence has been used to identify suitable findings from the Inquiry.

KEY FINDINGS

KF1. Filming in Cardiff is thriving, benefiting from strong growth across the Creative Industries, diverse, accessible locations in and around Cardiff, good infrastructure, facilities and connectivity, and competitive prices, all underpinned by a supportive strategic and policy environment at all levels of government.

KF2. Filming brings economic and cultural benefits to Cardiff and the region, employing a significant number of people, directly and indirectly, providing training and work-placement opportunities, and boosting tourism by raising awareness of Cardiff generally as well as by film-specific tourism.

Film Offices

KF3. Local Authority Film Offices provide a range of services to advise, support and guide filming in their areas. The extent of service provision varies depending on the level of resources available, with the best resourced working extensively to encourage and maximise filming in their areas as well as providing the basic services of advising, signposting and administering filming requests.

KF4. Cardiff Film Office focuses on providing advice, support and guidance, signposting to other departments and partners as needed. With only one FTE officer providing this service, it has less resource compared to other film offices looked at during this Inquiry – Bath, Birmingham, Bristol, Enfield, Liverpool and Manchester –and consequently undertakes less marketing and promotion and less skills development work.

KF5. This Inquiry received very good feedback regarding the Cardiff Film Officer, with the vast majority of written and verbal contributions stressing their high regard for the professionalism, helpfulness and friendliness of the service received.

KF6. Traffic management and parking for filming are dealt with by the relevant public highways department in local authorities. The film offices looked at during this Inquiry had varying levels of involvement in this process, ranging from simply signposting to the relevant department, through to dealing with initial queries, receiving applications via their online portals, and providing detailed advice.

Network Management

KF7. In Cardiff, traffic management and parking requests are dealt with by Network Management; the Film Office refers all queries to them. Network Management have a specific team, staffed by

casual staff, for traffic management and parking requests related to events and filming. Staff undertake site visits, prepare relevant paperwork, and deliver the service on set, with Council staff approving the paperwork. The casual staff on set consist of retired council staff and police officers, students, those seeking work experience, and existing council staff who work on their time off; all staff are trained to work on the public highway and to have excellent customer care skills, with those taking the lead roles having the most experience. The Head of Transport highlighted that the amount of work generated by filming and Events has grown in recent years and that it would be helpful to have permanent staff in Network Management to deal with the administration and processing of site visits, paperwork and legal orders.

KF8. This Inquiry received very good feedback regarding the front-line, operational staff providing the services on set; contributors were keen to stress that they were helpful, polite, knowledgeable and solution-focused.

KF9. This Inquiry received mixed feedback regarding the overall Network Management service provision, with contributors comparing their experiences in Cardiff with their experiences of working with local authority traffic management and parking services elsewhere. Members noted that complaints are mainly about Network Management fastidiously adhering to legislative requirements. This includes the requirement to provide official notices bilingually, leading to additional translation and advertising costs. Some contributors were appreciative of the approach taken in Cardiff and liked having council staff undertaking the traffic management and parking service provision, highlighting that this enabled quick decisions to be taken in response to emerging issues. Other contributors would have preferred to use private traffic management companies to manage the process overall, citing cost and convenience as the main factors. Members are cognisant of the reasons given to the Inquiry regarding why the Council moved away from permitting private traffic management companies to operate in Cardiff, although we recognise that other local authorities allow the use of these companies seemingly without the consequences and issues raised with Members.

KF10. Several contributors highlighted that it would be useful for the Film Office and Council websites to set out the process regarding traffic management and parking for filming, including the process followed in Cardiff and the rationale for the use of Temporary Traffic Regulation Orders rather than Temporary Traffic Regulation Notices, Stop & Go and Stop & Stop. This would provide clarity upfront, assisting producers and location managers when planning filming schedules and budgets, particularly those new to filming in Cardiff.

Fees and Charges

- KF11. Members heard that the fees and charges levied by the Council are set annually as part of the Council's budget setting process. There are a number of fees and charges, including street and drone filming permit fees, traffic management and parking charges, and location charges. Members heard that the street and drone filming permit fees are used to help offset the costs of the Film Office, and the traffic management and parking charges are set to cover costs but not make a profit. Members note that some of the film offices looked at during this Inquiry also levy additional administrative fees, which help to cover film office costs. Members also note that, since Covid, companies with a base in Cardiff have not been charged a street filming permit fee.
- KF12. Members recognise the fine balance that needs to be struck in terms of attracting and maintaining filming, resisting competition from other local authorities, and thus providing work for the Creative Industries based here, supply chains, hospitality, facilities and tourism, whilst also ensuring the costs to the Council, and therefore residents of Cardiff, are minimised.
- KF13. Several contributors highlighted it would be beneficial for the Film Office and Council websites to set out all the standard fees and charges associated with filming, such as coning, parking bay dispensation, temporary structures on the highway etc.; currently, only the costs for permits and Temporary Traffic Regulation Order are shown. Setting out all the standard fees and charges would provide clarity, enable transparency, and reassure customers that there is consistency in the fees and charges regime. In addition, contributors stated that it would be helpful to explain that bespoke costings are provided upfront following a site visit to ascertain requirements. Members believe it would also be helpful to highlight that the fees and charges are based on recovering costs rather than generating income.
- KF14. With regard to location charges, Members heard from many contributors that it would be beneficial for the Council to have a 'rate card' for hiring council locations, tiered by production budget to reflect the huge variance in filming budgets. Again, this would provide clarity, transparency and assist when planning film budgets, bringing the Council in line with organisations including the National Trust, National Museum of Wales, Natural Resources Wales, and Cadw, as well as with several other local authority film offices where costs vary according to production size.
- KF15. Members heard that there should be thought given to exploring a separate fees and charges regime for film productions that bring long-term repeat business to Cardiff, such as Casualty, given the benefits these bring to the economy of Cardiff and surrounding region and the film ecosystem.

KF16. As part of this Inquiry, Members sought to understand the monies raised by the various fees and charges levied by the Council for filming in Cardiff. Members are aware there is a specific 'Access for Filming' budget cost code to capture location charges, that Network Management uses a sub-code for filming in its overall Events budget cost code to enable staff to track filming work, and that film permits are logged on a database system that is used by most film offices. However, Members found that the information provided by these three sources did not tally, with inconsistent use of the 'Access for Filming' budget cost centre.

Encouraging Filming

KF17. This Inquiry heard several examples of effective working between Welsh Government and Cardiff Council to encourage filming in Cardiff, working together and with the city region to create the right conditions to foster the growth of Creative Industries, promote innovation, and welcome filming.

KF18. This Inquiry heard that, to further encourage filming, Cardiff needs to strengthen collaboration with stakeholders, invest in marketing, and improve the Film Office website. Strengthening collaboration would help to align Cardiff's offerings with industry demands by sharing intelligence and best practice, enhancing skills development and providing notice of upcoming filming. Investing in marketing would promote Cardiff's filming potential. The Film Office website should provide details of council locations, have links to Creative Wales and Wales Screen's location catalogue and crew and facilities databases, and have more information about previous filming in Cardiff; Members were particularly impressed with the Bristol Film Office website in this regard.

KF19. Several contributors raised the importance of having appropriate unit bases available, both near regular film locations and also to enable overnight charging. One contributor also highlighted that there is a need for suitable accommodation to host production bases, without having to enter 6-month lets or longer leases.

Maximising the benefits of filming

KF20. This Inquiry heard about the many economic and cultural benefits that filming brings to Cardiff and the region, including work to ensure that these are maximised for the benefit of residents.

KF21. Members were pleased to hear that there are training and work experience schemes and that work already takes place with Cardiff Commitment to raise awareness amongst schoolchildren of film sector careers and opportunities.

KF22. Members heard that London has invested in a green electricity charging grid for unit bases, that Liverpool is doing likewise, and that work towards this has commenced in Wales, with the British Film Institute, Ffilm Cymru and Welsh Government conducting a scoping study on high potential sites in South Wales with a view to adopting a similar model.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Having considered the evidence presented to this Inquiry, the Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee makes the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- R1. Within 3 months, improve the Film Office website by including the following:
- a. Signpost to Creative Wales and Wales Screen
 - b. More detailed information re filming in Cardiff
 - c. FAQs re traffic management and parking processes, including rationale for TTROs rather than TTRNs, Stop & Go, Stop & Stop, and that there is a legislative requirement for bilingual notices
 - d. Standard fees and charges, including the fact that these are not profit-generating, as agreed by the annual budget-setting process
 - e. An explanation that there may be bespoke additional charges, including the fact that these are not profit-generating.

Supported by KF10, KF13 and KF18

- R2. Within 6 months, improve the Film Office website by including the following:
- a. Database of council locations, including vacant locations such as empty schools and office buildings.

Supported by KF18

- R3. Within 3 months, improve the Network Management section of the Council's website by including the following:
- a. FAQs re traffic management and parking processes, including rationale for TTROs rather than TTRNs, Stop & Go, Stop & Stop, and that there is a legislative requirement for bilingual notices
 - b. Standard fees and charges, including the fact that these are not profit-generating, as agreed by the annual budget-setting process
 - c. An explanation that there may be bespoke additional charges, including the fact that these are not profit-generating.

Supported by KF10 and KF13

- R4. Within 3 months, explore the introduction of a rate card for council locations, with Council fees and charges tiered by production budget, and consider this information as part of the 2026-27 budgetary process.

Supported by KF14

R5. Within 6 months, explore a separate fees and charges regime for film productions that bring long-term repeat business to Cardiff, with reduced costs to reflect the benefits these bring to the economy and film ecosystem.

Supported by KF15

R6. Within 6 months, review and assess the effectiveness of the current suspension of the street filming permit fee for local companies.

Supported by KF11

R7. Within 3 months, remind all directorates of the need to use the 'Access for Filming' budget cost centre when processing filming location charges, to enable these to be tracked.

Supported by KF16

R8. Within 3 months, explore the possibility for there to be an automatic flag on the Council's cost centre system that suggests using the 'Access for Filming' budget cost centre when the text entered includes relevant words such as film, filming, TV, drama etc.

Supported by KF16

R9. Within 6 months, consider the resources available in the Film Office for managing filming requests and whether there is a need for additional resource to deal with the administrative aspects of film requests, in line with Film Office resource levels at other Core City local authorities.

Supported by KF3, KF4, and KF6

R10. Within 6 months, explore the resources available in Network Management for dealing with film-related administration, processing of site visits, paperwork and legal orders and whether there is a need for additional, permanent, resource to deal with these.

Supported by KF7

R11. Within 6 months, meet with stakeholders to explore how best to strengthen collaborative working to encourage filming and maximise the economic and cultural benefits for local residents.

Supported by KF18, KF20, KF21 and KF22

R12. Within 6 months, explore the good practice, regarding marketing and promoting filming, identified in the Research Report attached at Appendix 1 of this report, and consider implementing those elements that are of benefit to Cardiff.

Supported by KF4, KF 17 and KF18

R13. Within 6 months, meet with relevant stakeholders to ensure the Council is aware of the latest developments regarding unit base green grid charging facilities.

Supported by KF18 and KF22

R14. Within 6 months, consider whether any council buildings have appropriate space to offer as production unit bases, for example County Hall.

Supported by KF19

Economy & Culture Scrutiny Committee

Membership

Councillor Peter Wong (Chairperson)

Councillor Rodney Berman

Councillor Catriona Brown-Reckless

Councillor Peter Jenkins

Councillor Owen Jones

Councillor Margaret Lewis

Councillor Sara Robinson

Scrutiny Services, Cardiff County Council
Room 283, County Hall, Atlantic Wharf, Cardiff CF10 4UW
Tel: 029 2087 3506 Email: scrutinyviewpoints@cardiff.gov.uk
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