

REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC REGENERATION

SCREEN INDUSTRIES – UPDATE

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide an update report on the development of screen industries in the city within the context of the North East Screen Industries Partnership.

2. Background

- 2.1 In early 2021, the BBC published a pan-UK commissioning strategy – ‘The BBC Across the UK’ – and announced its commitment to increase out-of-London production by 10% by 2028 (equivalent to £700m of expenditure). This strategy sets out to ensure increased representation of communities throughout the UK across all BBC platforms and increase commissioning spend in the nations and regions.
- 2.2 A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the BBC and the North East region as a whole was signed in 2021 at Baltic in Gateshead following discussions and agreement with the three Combined Authorities and individual local authorities across the region. This set out the BBC’s intention to invest up to £25m over 5 years into regional programming and content and a region-wide target commitment from the North East authorities to seek to commit £11.4m to support creation of a sustainable screen industries eco-system over the same period of time.
- 2.3 The MoU set out a series of shared ambitions and established the NESIP between the BBC and the North East authorities as a partnership initiative through which a co-ordinated regional Screen Industries Development Programme would be funded and delivered. Signing of the MoU followed a period of engagement with the BBC and partners across the region, co-ordinated by North East Screen which is the North East’s not for profit regional screen agency.
- 2.4 The collective approach to resourcing the development of the screen industries sector that is being progressed across the North East is a reflection of the scale of the investment from the BBC, which is such that no one single part of the region could meet the requirements. It also reflects the expectation that all areas across the region and their businesses and residents will benefit. A range of the delivery activity within the region, and specifically within Sunderland, is set out in section 3.
- 2.5 A collective Business Case was prepared across the region setting out the detail of the workstreams which would be delivered as part of the Development Programme and the way in which this would be governed.

Within this context, it was agreed that Tees Valley Combined Authority (“TVCA”) would carry out the accountable body function on behalf of the North East authorities in relation to NESIP.

- 2.6 Implementation of the MoU with the BBC is being taken forward through the North East Screen Industries Development Programme, for which the TVCA is the accountable body. This Development Programme has been designed to maximise opportunities for significant growth of the screen industries sector across the North East to enable the development of a thriving and sustainable ecosystem. The NESIP Board is in place to oversee progress and provide strategic oversight. The Board has a rotating Chair with representatives from the three Combined Authorities, Higher Education, Further Education, BBC and North East Screen. In addition, an Investment Panel (to determine individual grant applications from eligible businesses from a North East Production Fund of £3.8m over the period of the partnership), Skills Group, Steering Group and Marketing & Communications Working Group have been set up.
- 2.7 Following agreement that TVCA would act as Accountable Body for the North East authorities for NESIP – including commissioning North East Screen (the regional screen agency) to operate as the delivery partner; issuing grant agreements to successful businesses from the Production Fund; and carrying out monitoring and assurance on behalf of the authorities – it was agreed that an IAA would be put in place between the authorities.

3 Delivery in Sunderland and the wider region

- 3.1 North East Screen launched its new brand and the Screen Industries Development Programme in Sunderland at City Hall in June 2022, attracting over 150 industry leaders, followed by a crew event at the Fire Station which was attended by 230 TV and screen freelancers. They opened an office in The Beam at Riverside Sunderland in March 2023. North East Screen have since expanded their team and continue to recruit, ensuring they are resourced to deliver the Development Programme.
- 3.2 Each local authority across the North East now has a ‘Film Friendly Contact’ in place to coordinate filming requests in their area. North East Screen has set up a Filming Friendly Network, to share best practice regarding production enquiries aiming to develop a consistent approach to working practice across the region. The Council signed a Filming Friendly Charter in December 2022, demonstrating to the sector that Sunderland is open for business and welcomes productions. This was promoted collectively at a national industry conference in London in December 2022.
- 3.3 The number of productions filmed within the region has increased more quickly than was anticipated when the MoU was first signed. A number of shows have been filmed in Sunderland including: - Series 1 and 2 of ‘Charlotte in Sunderland’ for BBC 3 produced by Chatterbox Media; - BBC’s Rickshaw Challenge, Children in Need, BBC Breakfast and Question Time; - Vera, series 13 for ITV; - Robson Green’s Weekend Getaways – with Jill Scott

as one of the guests; - BBC Comedy Short 'Where it Ends' – resulting from a writers' room event.

- 3.4 In terms of reach, 'Where it Ends', the BBC Comedy Short above, which was shot entirely in Sunderland, premiered at the BBC Comedy Festival 2023 in Cardiff and gained regional and national press coverage. Charlotte in Sunderland is currently the largest unscripted production in the region; it is currently being broadcast on BBC Three and BBC iPlayer. Series 2 follows on from the success of Series 1, which averaged 300,000 viewers, with 40% of this audience being between the ages of 16 and 34, with strong overall iPlayer viewing (62%). The series performed particularly well with viewers in the North of England. It also generated 448k engagements via social media with a combined total of 36m impressions.
- 3.5 North East Screen continues to build its locations database with a wide range of locations from across the region. There are now 61 Sunderland based locations on North East Screen's locations database and 14 of these are new locations. This allows production companies to search images of the region's and city's diverse locations and encourages them to film in the area.
- 3.6 Sunderland-based companies are among those which have benefited from the NESIP Development Programme. These include: - MCC Media - commissioned by Channel 5 to produce 'Cooking with Gills,' awarded BBC Indie Funding and Commissioner support, awarded a REACH award and taking part in PACT Future North East (a two year growth programme focusing on developing skills and understanding in specific areas such as strategy, market intelligence, business planning, creativity and development, export strategy, investment and maturity); - New World Designs - supported with their business development activity, developing innovative new products and applying for Innovate UK funding; - Fulwell73 were supported through a Reach Plus grant to assist with recruitment of a local Development Producer Support from NE Screen also extends to individuals, with a Sunderland-based Development Producer being supported through Open Horizons to shadow on UKTV's 'The Murders' in London with Tiger Aspect.
- 3.7 The North East Production Fund was formally launched on 12th September 2023 in London with a range of industry representatives present. It is a discretionary grant funding scheme, managed and delivered by North East Screen on behalf of the North East authorities. Open to both local and national companies, the Production Fund aims to catalyse the sustainable growth of the region's film and TV production sector by investing in a portfolio of distinctive, high-quality projects that will collectively contribute to the North East region increasing on-screen visibility and will actively contribute to employment of locally based crew, spend in region and improved equality, diversity and sustainability. Grants offered range from between £50,000 and up to £500,000. Individual funding applications to the Production Fund are determined by the NESIP Investment Panel which comprises a representative from each combined authority plus North East Screen. Sunderland-based MCC Media, received support from the Production Fund to secure their commission with Channel 5's Milkshake, for a children's show called 'Cooking

with the Gills' which was recently nominated for a Royal Television Society Award.

- 3.8 North East Screen have actively taken part in a series of events and initiatives across the region since the MoU was first signed. In 2022 in Sunderland, this included participating in the Sunderland Business Festival at which they hosted 'In conversation with Lord Puttnam' at the Fire Station, with over 350 people in attendance as well as in Sunderland Shorts Film Festival where they hosted a Talent Development Talk and Networking event in City Hall. During the recent Sunderland Business Festival 2023 held in October, North East Screen took part in a Future Skills panel highlighting employment opportunities in the region's growing screen industries sector following a key note speech from Leo Pearlman of Fulwell73.
- 3.9 North East Screen have developed several programmes and initiatives to develop skills in the sector. These are delivered at locations across the region with agreement that activity is open to residents from anywhere within the North East unless there are any specific external funding restrictions which apply. In terms of the Sunderland-specific benefits, from September 2022 to June 2023 the following took place: - NE Screen Bootcamp held at the Stadium of Light on 28th June with 43 people attending, 9 from Sunderland - 5 North East Screen Crew Academy events took place in partnership with Sunderland University - 23 Sunderland based crew signed up to the crew database and 2 Sunderland based entry level crew were supported into paid work - 21 Sunderland-based first time/new entrants to the sector were supported through the skills academy, 3 trainees were placed on productions made in Sunderland and 2 early career crew have had longer term placements in Sunderland Indies - 170 Sunderland-based new entrants and established professional crew attended advice sessions, networking and careers and spotlight events across the region - 8 Sunderland-based enterprises attended the following events: 'Get Ready For Business': Meet the Comedy Companies; Writer's Tea Room; Northern Talent Network: Writing For Drama; Creative Cities Convention; PACT Event - 2 Sunderland-based enterprises took part in pitch opportunities.
- 3.10 In addition, Tiger Aspect brought a writers' room to Sunderland, led by experienced industry producer David Simpson and lead writers Richard Naylor and James Baxter (originally from Sunderland). Working with North East based talent, the connections and development from the writers' room resulted in Tiger Aspect developing the Sunderland-based Short, Where it Ends referred to earlier in the report. The Short, which was premiered at the BBC Comedy Festival in Cardiff, is now available to watch on BBC iPlayer.
- 4.14 It is important that momentum behind the collective approach to growing the region's screen industries is maintained. This includes ongoing commitment of resources through the Production Fund, business development and skills development initiatives to maximise the impact which can be realised. The proposed Inter-Authority Agreement underpins this collective approach.

3.10 The Council's contribution to the North East Screen Industries Partnership delivery programme for 2022/23 and 2023/24 is being met from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

3.11 Catherine Auld (Assistant Director of Economic Regeneration) will be in attendance to provide a presentation on the nature and level of activity to date.

4. Recommendations

4.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider progress and comment.