

West Lothian Council SNP Group

Leader: Cllr Janet Campbell
Depute Leader: Cllr Robert De Bold
Secretary: Cllr Mary Dickson

Díco Tíbi Verum, Libertas Optima Rerum Nunquam Servilí!



Agenda Item 10

West Lothian Council Meeting 22nd November 2022

Motion -Retain Channel 4 in Public Ownership

The news that the Westminster Tories plans to sell off Channel 4 have been paused whilst the business case for the sale are to be re-examined is extremely welcome. Now that the pause button has been pressed on this decision it is vital the new Secretary of State for Culture in Sunak's Government is made well aware of the importance of retaining Channel 4 in Government control.

Although owned by the Government – and by extension taxpayers – Channel 4 receives absolutely no public funding. C4 was set up in 1982 to deliver to underserved audiences and therefore has a unique public service remit, receiving 100% of its funding from advertising.

Channel 4 is a public service commercial broadcaster that commissions original programming and online content from independent production companies. Channel 4 works with more small production companies than any other broadcaster, estimated at 200 over the last two years. A privatised Channel 4 would likely leave many financially challenged. Analysis of those 200 production companies found that almost 140 relied on Channel 4 for half or more of their TV production work. So called regional production companies, that is production companies in Scotland are more likely to be reliant on Channel 4 projects. said Broughton. A sale of Channel 4 therefore totally undermines the UK governments so called 'levelling up' agenda."

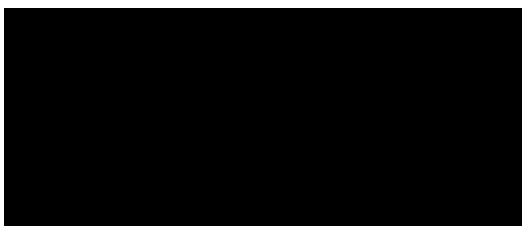
A report in the Guardian argues that a new owner would aim to cut 40% to 50% of Channel 4's programming budget to boost its roughly 8% margin closer to the level of commercial peers across Europe, which operate at about 15% or higher. A reduction in spend on original productions could jeopardise 50 to 60 small production companies and potentially more if a buyer is particularly risk averse and looks to commission more from larger producers.

In 2020 Channel 4 produced 58% of its contents in the Nations and regions outside of London – privatisation could only serve to make television production more London centric and will be detrimental to independent production in Scotland.

Not only does Channel 4's creative hub in Glasgow make significant contributions to the local economy, the Pyramids in Bathgate are to become the home of a £2 Million film studio bringing highly skilled and well-paid jobs into West Lothian at a time when they are so desperately needed. They will be renamed Pyramids Studios under plans to significantly expand and develop production facilities in West Lothian.

Speaking about the plans to privatise C4, "The Thick of It" creator Armando Iannucci is quoted as saying of the UK Tory Government "They asked for 'a debate'; 90% of submissions in that debate said it was a bad idea. But still they go ahead. Why do they want to make the UK's great TV industry worse? Why? It makes no business or economic sense".

West Lothian Council therefore agrees to write without delay to the new Culture Secretary outlining the Council's opposition to Tory plans to privatise a successful public broadcaster which belongs to all of us and which supports independent film production in West Lothian and across Scotland.



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Cllr Janet Campbell

SNP Group Leader