FilmApp follow-up

Introduction
Through FilmApp we aim to standardise and improve the current application process for film makers in London. There are currently 11 London local authorities signed up to FilmApp, an online application, notification and payment system designed to help London boroughs process filming requests, and 9 of them are currently "live".

Methodology
We conducted baseline evaluation in June 2010 of the application systems in use across London, sent to both location managers and local authority film officers. The results of that survey are available to download from our website: http://www.londoncouncils.gov.uk/London%20Councils/FilmAppEvaluationsummary.pdf.

A follow-up survey was sent in June 2011 to all local authority film officers who are currently using FilmApp, asking them to: approximate whether FilmApp had had a positive or negative impact on time taken and processes used to carry out filming requests and related tasks; comment on how easy it was to learn to use FilmApp; comment on the technical support offered as part of the FilmApp package; and to make suggestions for future improvements.
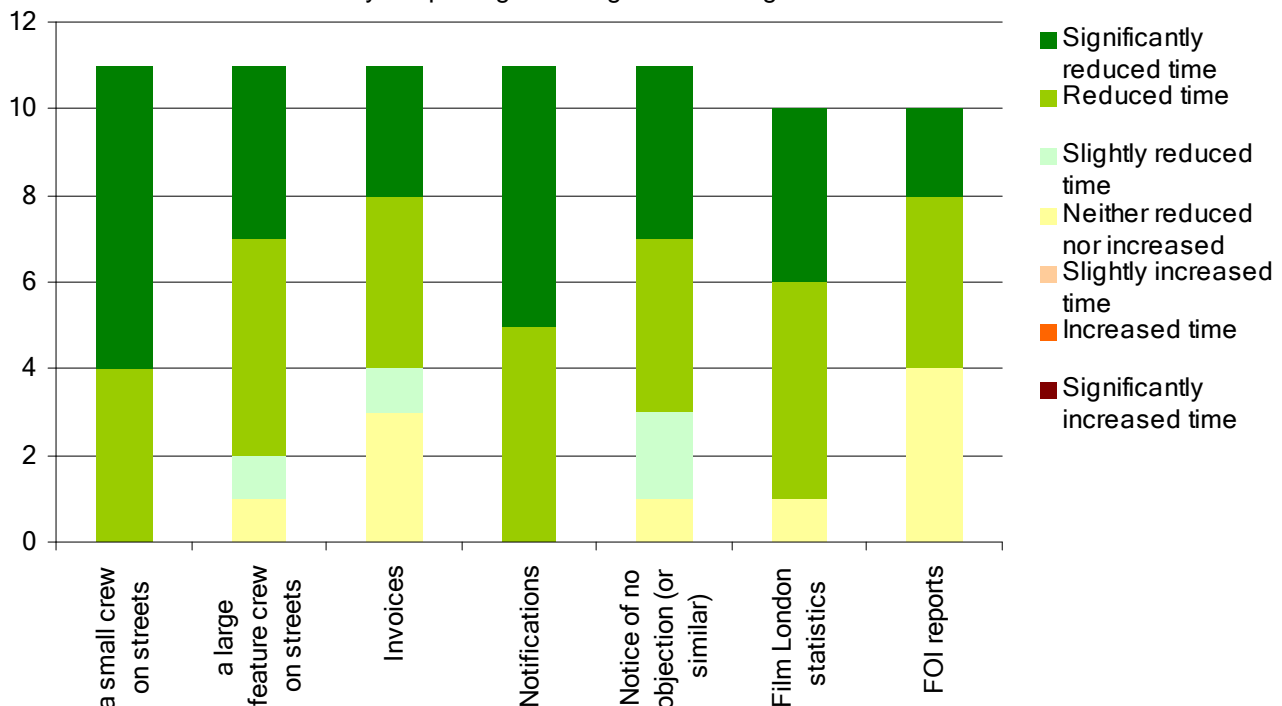
A follow-up survey was sent in June 2011 to location managers asking them to: rate their satisfaction with application processes used in London; rate whether FilmApp saves them time; rate FilmApp's ease of use; comment on the development of a common system and state how happy they would be for FilmApp to be that system; comment on FilmApp's impact on "film friendliness"; and to give their opinion on what works and what needs further development.

FilmApp saves time:
FilmApp has saved borough officer's time processing applications and generating related documentation:
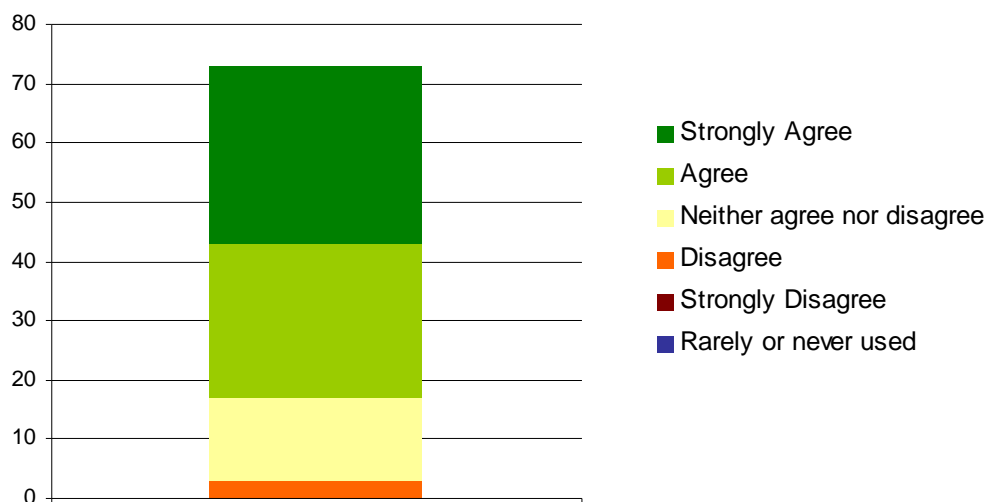
One officer commented that the reduction in time allowed them to spend more time on other aspects of their job, which may well lead to increased business and profits: "instead we can concentrate on scouting locations, undertaking recces, supervising on set etc. Since our key business focus is revenue, FilmApp is crucial to our ability to provide an efficient service and thus drive up income".

Two officers found that FilmApp was unable to save them time when invoicing because they are required to process invoices using pre-existing financial structures: "FilmApp produces chargesheets (pro forma invoices) but we still have to generate full invoices using the in-house corporate system, so no effect here" and "FilmApp is not compatible with my council invoicing system, but this is not a FilmApp issue - it's something I am attempting to rectify at my end".

One officer commented on the need for additional writing space in FilmApp and the need for objective clarification over what is meant by small and large crews: "There is not enough space for Film Crews or for ourselves to write in the boxes. Also a lot of people click on General Views so then we have to chase up what exactly General Views means to them!". This concern was echoed by a location manager who stated: "The main issue with the automated system is describing the type of work involved. There's a huge difference between a 2-man PSC crew, and the scale of say, Doctor Who or a Feature Film."

Location managers also reported that FilmApp saved time by being "streamlined", "straight to the point" and removing the need to "re-enter lots of basic information.

How far do you agree with the following statement: "Using FilmApp has reduced the amount of time I spend supplying a local authority with production information and documentation"?

There were only three recorded instances of FilmApp increasing time, one of whom commented that "having to be so very specific about streets tends to use up more time". This slight negative for location managers is actually a positive for borough officers as this specific information is essential to processing applications. One location manager commented that it "cut out a lot of unnecessary calls and helped save time for me", which has the added benefit of saving time for location managers also.

FilmApp improves processes:
Borough officers reported that FilmApp has improved processes used in their Film Offices. One officer made the following comments:
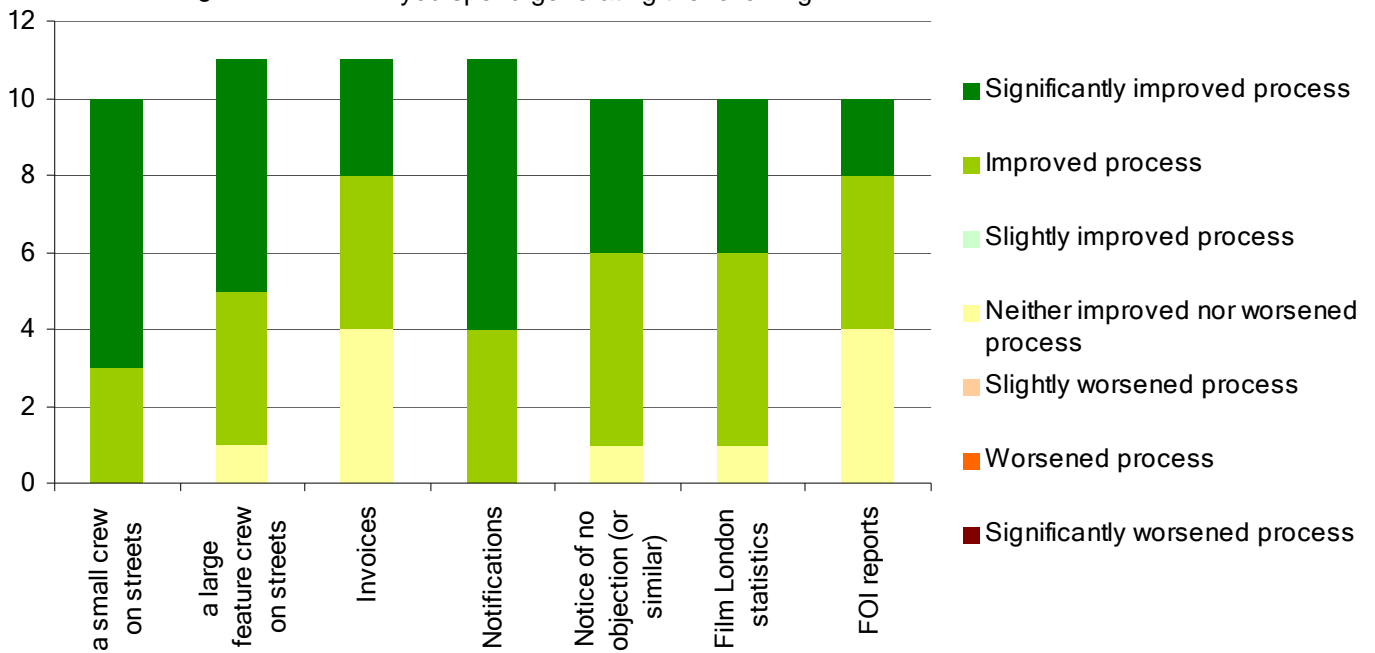- Process is now paper free
- I can now process applications away from the office via a smartphone
- Managing data and statistics is now much easier - FilmApp has cut down on duplication of work
- Distributing information to council colleagues and external partners is now quicker and simpler

One officer commented on the ability to notify relevant third parties as part of the process as being an improvement: "Great to be able to send a notification to several people and they can see who have been cced in. The departments like it too, as it is very clear."

The graph below demonstrate the positive impact that FilmApp has had on processes:
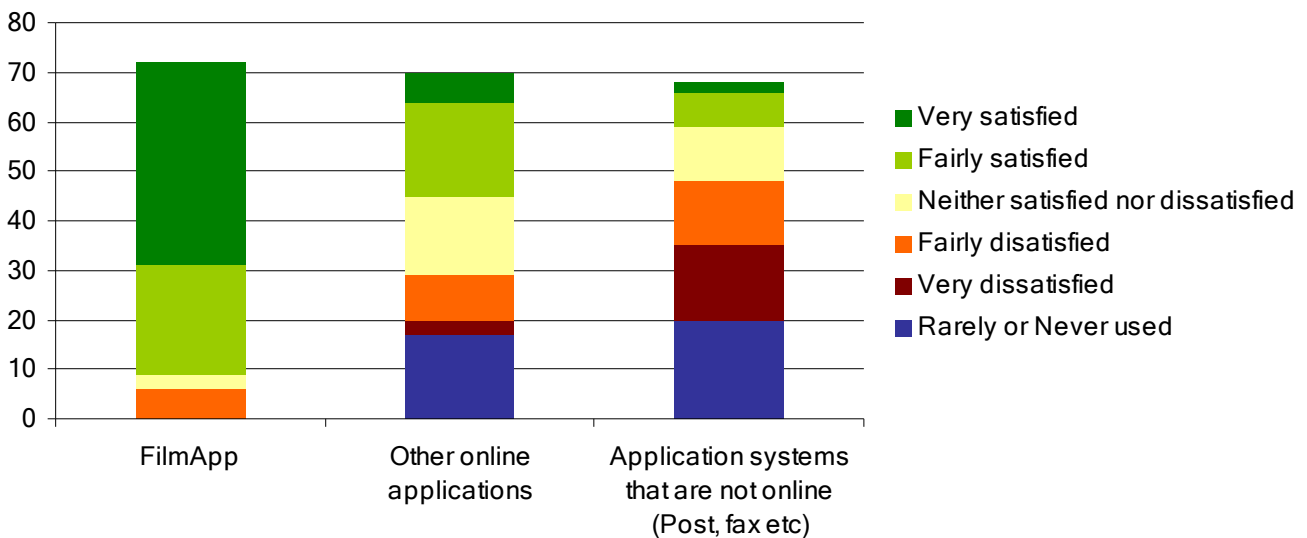
Has using FilmApp had an impact on the time you spend processing an average application from the following:

Has using FilmApp had an impact on the time you spend generating the following:

Legend:
- Significantly improved process
- Improved process
- Slightly improved process
- Neither improved nor worsened process
- Slightly worsened process
- Worsened process
- Significantly worsened process

(Categories: a small crew on streets; a large feature crew on streets; Invoices; Notifications; Notice of no objection (or similar); Film London statistics; FOI reports)

The satisfaction levels with the FilmApp processes are mirrored by Location Managers who were asked to rate their satisfaction with FilmApp, other online application systems and systems that are not online:

How satisfied are you with the overall application process to film in London using the following systems:

Legend:
- Very satisfied
- Fairly satisfied
- Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
- Fairly disatisfied
- Very dissatisfied
- Rarely or Never used

(Categories: FilmApp; Other online applications; Application systems that are not online (Post, fax etc))

FilmApp generates an automatic response with the details of the filming application and a confirmation once the application has been approved by an officer. This level of communication was seen as a key strength by location managers: "The problem with applications of any sort is usually just being unsure of whether you have been heard. The prompt response I received from the borough was wonderful" and "The application came back really quickly - it's a great system!".

FilmApp received largely positive feedback about its uniformity and simplicity. One location manager also commented on the necessity for an application process to allow for changes and flexibility: "Date/location changes happen a lot during filming and people need a fast and easy way to get the information they need to carry on - which is what FilmApp does well."

A few location managers commented on the increasing scarcity of fax machines and the difficulty of making fax or postal applications: "Paper applications take longer and when trying to describe a scene or set-up can take a long time to write up, then you have the headache of finding a fax which less and less companies are now having on board a production trailer.". However, there were several responses indicating that, whilst location managers are positive about an online system, they highly value the people behind the system: "sometimes it's easier to describe what you want to do rather than try to fill in a form" and "There are benefits to a non-online system, particularly if ones filming does not fall into an existing genre or type".

FilmApp is easy to use:
Borough officers and Location managers were asked how easy they have found FilmApp to use:

Borough Officers: How easy have you found it learning to use FilmApp from 1 (very easy) to 5 (very difficult)?

Location managers: How easy do you find FilmApp to use from 1 (very easy) to 5 (very difficult)?
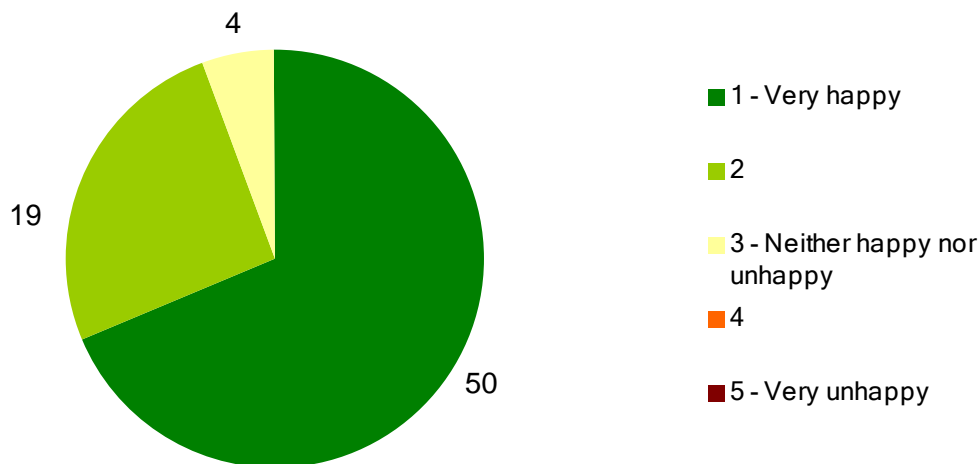

One borough officer commented that "some [location managers] have had trouble with applying but as you talk them through it they understand what they did wrong - simple!". Several people used the word "intuitive" to describe FilmApp. Borough Officers have also been satisfied with the technical support provided: 10 out of 11 officers gave the highest rating and one officer gave the second highest rating.

"London is one city, so let's start having common systems."
44 Location managers provided their views on the intention and desire to move towards a standardised common system. All 44 agreed with this intention: "London is seen as one city to anyone outside of the location department, very few producers & directors understand why each borough has its own system. If you are to promote 'one city' then it should have one application system". Several location managers mentioned that a standardised system needs to be complemented by local knowledge: "I agree with the attempt to provide a common system, its one of the most frustrating things about filming in London. However, it's also important to deal with local officers with local knowledge of their borough".

Location managers were then asked how happy they would be with FilmApp as that single system. The graph below depicts the responses:

FilmApp is currently used in 9 boroughs with others in the process of signing up. We aspire for FilmApp to be the standardised common system used in London. How happy would you be for FilmApp to be that system from 1 (very happy) to 5 (very unhappy)?

One location manager commented that: "If all the London boroughs used FilmApp it would make filming in London considerably easier and a lot nicer. This system makes it really easy to inform the film officers of exactly what you wish to do and when, where and how! The boroughs that are still using paper must find filming completely tedious; if they changed to this system then I am sure they would receive plenty of happy crews."

Suggested improvements for the future:
Borough Officers and Location Managers were asked to make any suggestions for future development of FilmApp. Three of the most frequent suggestions were:

- improve the process for applying for parking: "Parking. Parking. Parking".
- integrating the system with online maps: "It would be good to have mapping technology and a better road index as part of the application process"
- having more options in your account information: "Could you maybe log in as a location manager and have certain production company details saved which you could select from a list, like when you have different delivery addresses on Amazon for example. That would be immensely helpful" and "Productions should be given a common log-in to use rather than each person who uses it having to enter production details, or if this it not the case it should be made clear".

A sample of other responses are included below:

Ability to backdate applications or complete retrospectively. Ability to edit fields produced by reporting module.

I think it would be useful for parking request forms, risk assessments and resident letters to be uploaded on to the system as well as public liability insurance so everything is stored in the one place.

An iPhone app version would be extremely useful.

Help on how to complete the form could improve it further. It would be helpful if a pro-forma form could be viewed in its entirety so that all information required can be gathered prior to the start of an application

When you are shooting in several boroughs on a film and your mail box is filling up with "approval" notices coming back from the boroughs, it would be good that the borough is clearing indentified in the subject heading rather than a 2 letter designation. It would just make finding these forms a bit easier.