

Policy for Determining Film Classifications

1. Purpose

The City Council of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne (The Council), as the Licensing Authority, is responsible for authorising the public exhibition of films. Section 20 of the Licensing Act 2003 (the Act) provides that where a Premises Licence or Club Premises Certificate authorises the exhibition of a film(s), the licence must include a condition requiring the admission of children to films to be restricted in accordance with recommendations given either by the British Board of Film Classification (the BBFC) or by the Licensing Authority itself.

The purpose of this Policy is to set out the formal procedure for the Licensing authority to determine the classification of previously unclassified films, appeals by distributors against the British Board of Film Classification's decisions or requests to reclassify films.

Where a premise seeks or intends to exhibit film(s) that venue must be covered by a Premises Licence, Club Premises Certificate or Temporary Event Notice under the Licensing Act 2003.

The definition of children is any person under the age of 18 years.

Under the Licensing Act 2003, the definition of the exhibition of a film is the exhibition of moving pictures.

The Licensing Authority when authorising film(s) shall at all times take into account the guidance issued under Section 182 of the Licensing Act 2003 (the National Guidance).

The Licensing Authority may be requested to authorise a film that has already been classified by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) in two different circumstances:

- a) A distributor of a film may appeal against the decision of the BBFC and request that the Licensing Authority re-classifies/authorises the film for local screening (with recommendations on age restrictions); and
- b) An independent party may request that the Licensing Authority re-classifies/authorises the film for local screening (with recommendations on age restrictions).

In addition, the Licensing Authority may be requested to authorise the showing of an unclassified film(s). This normally occurs in the following cases:

- A film festival covering a specific period of time
- A one off screening of a film
- A trailer for a film.

2. General Policy

In accordance with the Section 182 National Guidance, the Licensing Authority shall concern itself primarily with the protection of children from harm. It will not use its powers to censor films save where there is clear cause to believe that this is required to promote the licensing objectives.

The Protection of children from harm includes the protection of children from moral, psychological and physical harm and this would include the protection of children from too early an exposure to strong language and sexual expletives, for example in the context of film exhibitions or where adult entertainment is provided.

3. Principles in Determining Film Classifications

The BBFC classifies films in accordance with its published Guidelines, which are based on extensive research into public opinion and professional advice. The section 182 Guidance recommends that:

“Licensing Authorities should not duplicate the BBFC’s work by choosing to classify films themselves. The classifications recommended by the BBFC should be those normally applied unless there are very good local reasons for a Licensing Authority to adopt this role. Licensing Authorities should note that the provisions of the 2003 Act enable them to specify the Board in the licence or certificate and, in relation to individual films, to notify the holder or club that it will make a recommendation for that particular film”

The Licensing Authority considers the classification system used by the BBFC to be nationally understood and accepted. It will therefore use this system, and any amendments thereto, as a reference point for determining its recommendation(s) on the restriction of access of children to the films(s). It should be noted that the Licensing Authority is not obliged to follow these guidelines.

Where a licensed premises seeks to exhibit a film that has not been classified by the BBFC then it will be the responsibility of the Licensing Authority to authorise that film. As such the procedures outlined later in this document will be followed.

The Licensing Authority recognises the principle within the Human Rights Act 1998, that adults should be free to choose their own entertainment. Material should not be in breach of the criminal law, including material judged to be obscene under the current interpretation of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988 or any other relevant legislation and has not been created through the commission of a criminal offence.

Any authorisations for the exhibition of film(s) issued by the Licensing Authority shall only apply when the film(s) is exhibited within the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and does not effect the authorisation or recommendations in any other local authority area.

Once authorised by the Licensing Authority a film will be authorised for a particular showing or festival only subject to the recommendations imposed by the Licensing Authority (unless further application for re-classification is made).

The issue of any authorisation by the Council of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne is strictly limited to the authorisation within the City of Newcastle upon Tyne and it is assumed that all relevant third party consents and licences in respect of any and all copyright, confidential information and all other intellectual property rights have been obtained.

The Licensing Authority will consider each authorisation on its own merit and may impose additional and more specific recommendations where it deems necessary in order to comply with the Protection of Children from Harm Licensing Objective.

Where the Licensing Authority authorises unclassified material to be shown the Licensing Authority will require an undertaking from the applicant that he has satisfied himself/herself after proper enquiry that no material to be exhibited contravenes the current interpretation of the Obscene Publications Act 1959, the Copyright Design and Patents Act 1988 or any other relevant legislation and has not been created through the commission of a criminal offence.

The Licensing Authority shall also not be liable for any material that has been created through the commission of a criminal offence. It is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that no film or trailer contravenes the law.

4. Procedures for Authorisation Requests for Procedures for Approval of Films Already Classified by the BBFC

Applications for authorisation of films already classified by the BBFC shall be referred to and determined by the Licensing Sub Committee on behalf of the Licensing Authority. This Sub Committee shall consist of a minimum of three Members. Applications should be made to the Licensing Authority.

In accordance with the National Guidance all requests shall be made with the film(s) where possible in DVD format to avoid delays, the cost to be borne by the applicant. If DVD format is not possible then alternatively a related weblink should be provided. All requests should be submitted through to the Licensing Authority a minimum of 28 days before the proposed screening in the City of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Where an individual or organisation not connected with the film(s) requests re-classification of a BBFC classified film, they are not expected to provide a copy of the film(s). The Licensing Authority will then make suitable arrangements to view the film. It is also accepted that in these circumstances, it may not be possible to give 28 days' notice before the proposed screening.

All requests must be accompanied by detailed reasons for the request. Requests will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible as it appreciated that films are generally only shown in cinemas for a relatively short period.

The Sub Committee will then view the entire film and assess it against the BBFC guidelines and National Guidance. The Sub Committee shall issue a Notice of Determination of the authorisation within 5 working days from the date of viewing. The Licensing Authority will then formally advise the applicant and the licence holder of any recommendation(s) restricting the admission of children to the film(s).

Requests must be relevant to the protection of children from harm licensing objective and not frivolous, vexatious or repetitive. Requests may also be relevant to the prevention of crime and disorder licensing objective but only in relation to the contravention of the current interpretation of the Obscene Publications Act 1959 or any other relevant legislation.

In line with the National Guidance, where a film(s) is recommended by the Licensing Authority as falling into an age restrictive category, no person under the age specified shall be admitted. Where a film(s) is recommended by the Licensing Authority as falling into a category requiring any persons under a specified age to be accompanied by an adult, no person under the age specified shall be admitted unless accompanied by an adult.

In these circumstances, the licence holder will be required to display in a conspicuous position a notice clearly stating the relevant age restrictions and requirements. With regard to the wording of such notices, the Licensing Authority shall have regard to National Guidance, e.g.:

Persons under the Age Of (insert appropriate age) Cannot Be Admitted TO Any Part of The Programme.

Persons under the Age Of (insert appropriate age) Can Only Be Admitted To The Programme If Accompanied By An Adult.

5. Procedure for Authorisation of Films Which Have Not Been Classified by the BBFC or the Council of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne

Applications for authorisation will in the first instance be considered by officers under delegated powers. Any request to authorise an unclassified film may however, be referred by the Licensing Manager at his/her discretion to the Licensing Sub Committee for determination.

Applications should be submitted a minimum of 28 days before the proposed screening.

An application for authorisation should include the following information:

- a) the film maker,
- b) such recommendation as may have been made by the film maker upon age limit of the intended audience for exhibition of the film,
- c) any existing classification issued by an existing classification body, whether within or outside the UK,
- d) a synopsis identifying the material within the film considered by the exhibitor to be likely to have a bearing on the age limit for the audience for exhibition of the film. Where an applicant seeks an authorisation allowing exhibition of the film to persons 18 years and over only, a detailed synopsis will not be required,
- e) if known, a legitimate and legal internet site where the film, or a portion of the film is available to view without charge,
- f) any proposals on age restrictions for viewing the film that the applicant intends to impose, and
- g) details on how age restrictions will be enforced.

In accordance with National Guidance all requests shall be accompanied by the film(s) where possible in DVD format to avoid delays, the cost to be borne by the applicant. If DVD format is not possible then arrangements will be made for a suitable venue to view the film. This will allow the Licensing Sub Committee Members to view and authorise the film(s) so that the licence holder is able to adhere to any recommendations on age restrictions the Licensing Authority may impose.

The Members of the Licensing Sub Committee, whilst viewing the film(s) will have regard to the BBFC Guidelines and National Guidance and shall issue a Notice of Determination of the application within five working days from the date of the viewing.

In line with the National Guidance, where a film(s) is recommended by the Licensing Authority as falling into an age restrictive category, no person under the age specified shall be admitted. Where a film(s) is recommended by the Licensing Authority as falling into a category requiring any persons under a specified age to be accompanied by an adult, no person under the age specified shall be admitted unless accompanied by an adult.

In these circumstances, the licence holder will be required to display in a conspicuous position a notice clearly stating the relevant age restrictions and requirements. With regard to the wording of such notices, the Licensing Authority shall have regard to National Guidance, e.g.:

Persons under the Age Of (insert appropriate age) Cannot Be Admitted To Any Part of The Programme.

Persons under the Age Of (insert appropriate age) Can Only Be Admitted To The Programme If Accompanied By An Adult.

In order to ensure the promotion of the Protection of Children from Harm and Prevention of Crime and Disorder licensing objectives, the Licensing Authority will formally advise the licence holder and holder of any recommendation(s) on the restriction of the age of access for children to the film(s). This may include any relevant notices required to be displayed by the licence holder inside and outside the premises. The licensed premises hosting the exhibition of film will be expected to comply with these recommendations.

The Licensing Authority recognises the principle that adults should be free to choose their own entertainment and will not normally override this principle – as such requests shall not normally be refused. However, in all cases the Licensing Authority will expect the applicant to follow the BBFC's Guidelines for 18 and R18 restricted films.

6. Licensing Act 2003 Section 20: Exhibition of Films

All premises permitted to exhibit films are subject to the following mandatory conditions:

(1) Where a premises licence authorises the exhibition of films, the licence must include a condition requiring the admission of children to the exhibition of any film to be restricted in accordance with this section.

(2) Where the film classification body is specified in the licence, unless subsection (3) (b) applies, admission of children must be restricted in accordance with any recommendation made by that body.

(3) Where—

(a) the film classification body is not specified in the licence, or

(b) the relevant licensing authority has notified the holder of the licence that this subsection applies to the film in question,

admission of children must be restricted in accordance with any recommendation made by that licensing authority.

(4) In this section—

- “children” means persons aged under 18; and
- “film classification body” means the person or persons designated as the authority under section 4 of the Video Recordings Act 1984 (c. 39) (authority to determine suitability of video works for classification).

7. Exemptions for The Showing of Films

The provision of the exhibition of film(s) is exempt from regulation by the Licensing Act 2003 if either

It consists of or forms part of an exhibit put on show for any purposes of a museum or art gallery

Or:

Its sole or main purpose is to:

- a) demonstrate any product,
- b) advertise any goods or services (excluding the advertising of films), or
- c) provide information, education or instruction.

Contact:

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