



# Monmouthshire County Council's Film Classification Policy

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Further information can be obtained from:  
Licensing Section  
Monmouthshire County Council  
Abergavenny Community Education Centre  
Old Hereford Road  
Abergavenny  
NP7 6EL  
Tel: 01873 735420  
Email: [licensing@monmouthshire.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@monmouthshire.gov.uk)  
Website: [www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/licensing](http://www.monmouthshire.gov.uk/licensing)

# FILM AUTHORISATION PROCEDURES

## 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Council as the Licensing Authority is the responsible authority 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. As such the admission of children to the exhibition of any film(s) must be restricted in accordance with:

- EITHER the BBFC classification;
- OR where the film is not classified by the BBFC, any recommendations made by the Licensing Authority.

1.2 Where a premises seeks or intends to exhibit a film(s) that venue must be covered by a Premises Licence, Club Premises Certificate, Temporary Event Notice or benefit from an exemption under the Licensing Act 2003. Further information is available from the Licensing Authority.

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

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

1.5 In summary, the public exhibition of all films on licensed premises must either be classified by the BBFC or authorised by the Licensing Authority under the powers of the Licensing Act 2003.

1.6 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); or
- b) An independent party may request that the Licensing Authority re-classifies/authorises the film for local screening (with recommendations on age restrictions).

1.7 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

- 1.8 In accordance with the National Guidance issued by the BBFC, 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.
- 1.9 Under the Licensing Act 2003, the Licensing Authority must carry out its functions with a view to promoting the licensing objectives. In terms of film exhibitions and festivals, the most relevant licensing objective is the Protection of Children from Harm.

## **2 PRINCIPLES IN DETERMINING APPLICATIONS**

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

- 2.1 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 film(s). It should be noted however that the Licensing Authority is not obliged to follow these guidelines.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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 or has been created through the commission of a criminal offence.
- 2.4 Applicants must ensure that all material that is the subject of the application complies with 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.
- 2.5 Any authorisations for the exhibition of film(s) issued by the Licensing Authority shall only apply when the film(s) is exhibited within the County and does not affect the authorisation or recommendations in any other borough.
- 2.6 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). Details of the authorisation including any recommendations shall be available from the Licensing Section and listed on the Council's website.

- 2.7 The issue of any authorisation by the Council is strictly limited to the authorisation within the County 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.
- 2.9 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. Specimen Recommendations for inclusion are included at Appendix 1.
- 2.10 Where the Licensing Authority authorises unclassified material to be shown the Licensing Authority will require an undertaking from the applicant 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.
- 2.11 Where the Licensing Authority has determined to refuse authorisation of a film(s) clear and concise reasons shall be given.
- 2.12 The Licensing Authority will not charge a fee to classify a film. The charging of such fees to classify a film, will be subject to ongoing review by Monmouthshire County Council. Section 4(5) Video Recordings Act 1984 states, no fee is recoverable by, or in accordance with arrangements made by, the designated authority in connection with a determination in respect of a video work or the issue of a classification certificate unless the designated authority has consulted the Secretary of State about such fees.

### **3 PROCEDURE FOR RECLASSIFICATION AUTHORISATION REQUESTS FOR APPROVAL OF FILMS ALREADY CLASSIFIED BY THE BBFC**

- 3.1 Applications for authorisation of films already classified by the BBFC shall be referred to and determined by the Licensing and Regulatory Sub Committee / Licensing and Regulatory Committee on behalf of the Licensing Authority. This Sub Committee shall consist of 3 Members of the Licensing Committee. Applications should be submitted on the Licensing Authority's application form obtained from Licensing Section of the Council.
- 3.2 All requests shall be accompanied by the film(s) where possible in DVD format (or another agreed digital format) to avoid delays, the cost to be borne by the applicant. If this is not possible, then arrangements will be made for a suitable venue to view the film. This will allow the Licensing and Regulatory Sub Committee / Licensing and Regulatory Committee time 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. In

any event, all requests should be submitted on the Licensing Authority's application form a minimum of 28 days before the proposed screening.

- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 All requests must be accompanied by detailed reasons for the request. Requests will be dealt with as expeditiously as possible as it is appreciated that films are generally only shown in cinemas for a relatively short period.
- 3.5 The Committee will then view the entire film and assess it against the BBFC guidelines.. The 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).
- 3.6 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.
- 3.7 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 unaccompanied by an adult.
- 3.8 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”

Or

““PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF [*INSERT APPROPRIATE AGE*] CAN ONLY BE ADMITTED TO THE PROGRAMME IF ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT”

## 4 PROCEDURE FOR AUTHORISATION OF FILMS WHICH HAVE NOT BEEN CLASSIFIED BY THE BBFC OR THE COUNTY COUNCIL

- 4.1 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 Officer to the Licensing and Regulatory Sub Committee / Licensing and Regulatory Committee for determination.
- 4.2 Applications should be submitted on the Licensing Authority's application form a minimum of **28 days** before the proposed screening. If less than 28 days' notice is provided no request to review an officer decision upon the application will be considered. Application forms may be obtained from the Licensing Section of the Council.
- 4.3 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 for 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 of how age restrictions will be enforced.
- 4.4 Where officers at their discretion determine it is possible to formulate recommendations to the licence holder in relation to the exhibition of the film on the basis of this information, recommendations may be made on this basis alone.
- 4.5 However, the Licensing Officer may at his/her discretion request a copy of the film(s) on DVD format (or another agreed digital format), the cost to be borne by the applicant. If this is not possible, the Licensing Officer may agree to arrange for a suitable venue to view the film(s).
- 4.6 The Licensing Officer whilst viewing the film(s) may have regard to BBFC Guidelines and shall issue a Notice of Determination of the application within 5 working days from the date of the viewing.
- 4.7 When considering all such requests the Licensing Officer will pay particular attention to the Protection of Children from Harm Licensing Objective.

- 4.8 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 unaccompanied by an adult.
- 4.9 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 adopt the following example::
- “PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF [INSERT APPROPRIATE AGE] CANNOT BE ADMITTED TO ANY PART OF THE PROGRAMME”
- Or
- ““PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF [INSERT APPROPRIATE AGE] CAN ONLY BE ADMITTED TO THE PROGRAMME IF ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT”
- 4.10 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 applicant of any recommendation(s) on the restriction on the age of access for children to the film(s). This may also 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.
- 4.11 Where requests are made to the Licensing Authority to exhibit a film(s) to be shown to persons 18 and over the licence holder will be required to display in a conspicuous position a notice clearly stating that the Licensing Authority has authorised the film(s) but has not viewed it. This statement should be incorporated within any promotional literature and on any relevant web site including where relevant the licence holder’s web site.
- 4.12 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.
- 4.13 Save where less than 28 days’ notice of the application is given, the applicant will have a right to request a review of the Licensing Officer’s decision by the Licensing Sub Committee.

## 5 SECTION 20 LICENSING ACT 2003: EXHIBITION OF FILMS

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

1. *Where a Premises Licence or Club Premise Certificate authorises the exhibition of films, the licence or certificate must include a condition requiring the admission of children to the exhibition at any film to be restricted in accordance with these paragraphs.*
2. *Where a film classification body is specified in the licence or certificate, unless paragraph 3 (b) below applies, admission of children must be restricted in accordance with any recommendation by that body.*
3. *Where:*
  - (a) *the film classification body is not specified in the Licence or Certificate; or*
  - (b) *the Licensing Authority has notified the holder of the Licence or the Club which holds the Certificate that this paragraph applies to the film in question, admission of children must be restricted in accordance with any recommendation made by the Licensing Authority.*
4. *In these paragraphs "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 (authority to determine suitability of video works for classification).*



## Appendix 1

### Specimen Recommendations in relation to films authorised for exhibition:

- a. The Age Recommendation e.g:

“PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF *[INSERT APPROPRIATE AGE]* CANNOT BE ADMITTED TO ANY PART OF THE PROGRAMME”

Or

““PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF *[INSERT APPROPRIATE AGE]* CAN ONLY BE ADMITTED TO THE PROGRAMME IF ACCOMPANIED BY AN ADULT”

- b. That the premises licence or club premises certificate holder, adopt a suitable management policy and procedure to monitor and enforce the recommendations on age restrictions.
- c. That the premises licence or club premises certificate holder display in a conspicuous position a notice clearly stating that the Licensing Authority has authorised the film(s) for viewing by people aged *[INSERT APPROPRIATE AGE]* and above, but has not necessarily viewed it.
- d. That the age restriction applying to the exhibition of the film be incorporated within any promotional literature and on any relevant web site including where relevant the licence holder or exhibitor’s web site.