

REPORT

To: GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE	Subject: CINEMA LICENSING - REVIEW OF THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE FILM "SWEET SIXTEEN"
From: DIRECTOR OF ADMINISTRATION	
Date: 9 October 2002	Ref: WBK/KH

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of a representation received from Tommy Sheridan, MSP for Glasgow Region, which seeks a change to the film classification in respect of the film "Sweet Sixteen" and to seek a decision from the Committee.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1. A separate report has been placed before the Committee in respect of film classifications. The Committee is reminded that the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) classifies films for exhibition in cinemas. It does so on behalf of local authorities who actually hold the legal power to determine film classifications.
- 2.2. Tommy Sheridan, MSP has written to the Chief Executives of all local authorities by letter dated 4 October 2002 seeking a change to the film classification of the film "Sweet Sixteen". A copy of the said letter is attached at Appendix A.
- 2.3. "Sweet Sixteen" is a film depicting the everyday lives of certain young people growing up in the Greenock area. The film was classified with "18" rating by the BBFC on 27 June 2002. The BBFC in its advice to consumers has indicated that the film "contains very strong language". Mr Sheridan has suggested that the film does not have gratuitous scenes of violence or sexual content and that the main reason for the BBFC giving the film an "18" rating is the use of strong language. That assertion is consistent with information made publicly available by the BBFC in respect of the film.
- 2.4. Mr Sheridan has lodged a motion in the Scottish Parliament concerning the issue and suggesting that Scottish Executive make representations to Her Majesty's Government to devolve decisions on censorship to Scotland. A copy of that motion is included with Mr Sheridan's letter. In actual fact, the matter is already within the direct control of local authorities throughout the United Kingdom.

3. ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1. Mr Sheridan has asked the Council to consider reducing the certification for "Sweet Sixteen" from "18" to "15". The Committee requires to decide whether to simply note Mr Sheridan's representation and effectively confirm the BBFC's decision, or whether to agree to Mr Sheridan's request.
- 3.2. The BBFC has many years experience and expertise in the classification of films for cinema exhibition. It has traditionally enjoyed the trust and support of local authorities in doing so. This Council is unaware of any substantial criticism of the actions of the BBFC. In this particular case, Mr Sheridan makes a brief reference to his understanding of the reasons for the BBFC's decision. However, he appears to

make no real criticism of the decision or indeed present any substantive case for a change to the rating.

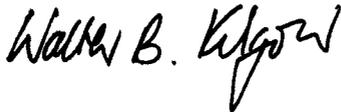
- 3.3. The Committee is entitled to change the rating of the film. The Committee could take the opportunity of viewing the film and would be entitled to independently rate the film. However, in the face of no substantive criticism of the BBFC's decision in respect of this film, there appears to be no justification to treat it any differently to any other film and indeed no apparent reason to interfere with the BBFC's decision.

4. CORPORATE CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1. The matters contained in this report do not impact upon the Council's overall policies and positions.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1. The Committee is asked to note the representation received from Tommy Sheridan, MSP in respect of the film "Sweet Sixteen" and to confirm the decision of the British Board of Film Classification to classify the film with an "18" rating.



W. Director of Administration

Members seeking further information on the contents of this Report are asked to contact Kenny Hannaway, Senior Solicitor (Licensing) at Extension 2214.



The Scottish
Parliament

Tommy Sheridan
Member of the Scottish Parliament for Glasgow Region

4 October, 2002

To All CEOs
Scottish Local Authorities

Dear Chief Executive

Sweet Sixteen

I write to you to ask you to take up the issue of censorship of this brilliant new film which was written and filmed in Scotland with young Scottish actors.

As you may know, this film, directed by Ken Loach and written by Paul Laverty (who won the Best Script Award at the Cannes Film Festival), has been given an '18' rating by the British Board of Film Censors based in London.

The film is about the life of young people growing up in Greenock and the problems they can face. It does not have gratuitous violence or sex. The main objection of the censors seems to be the use of swear words which reflect how young people speak.

I have lodged a motion in the Scottish Parliament concerning this issue (see attached) but I would ask you to place this issue before your Members to see whether there is any way it could be licensed locally with a '15' certificate.

Ken Loach and the film's distributors, ICON, are very supportive of this approach and would be grateful for the support of your local authority. Obviously, this is a matter of some urgency as the film has just been released and it is important to get a quick decision.

I appreciate this may take you a little time to organise but would be grateful if you could let know your intentions. The distributors, ICON, would be happy to arrange special screenings for your Members if you felt this would be helpful.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely

Hugh Ken

pp. Tommy Sheridan MSP



Motion Lodged in the Scottish Parliament (4/10/02)

***SIM-3462 Tommy Sheridan: Sweet Sixteen**—That the Parliament congratulates the team responsible for the film Sweet Sixteen which was made and premiered in Greenock and won the best script award at the Cannes Film Festival; notes with concern the decision of the British Board of Film Classification to give the film an "18" rating meaning that many of the young actors who made the film would not be allowed to view it; believes that this is clearly absurd and that, further, the decisions on what Scots see in the cinema should be decided in Scotland, and calls on the Scottish Executive to make representations to Her Majesty's Government to devolve decisions on censorship to Scotland.