

Open Complaint to Kent County Council: Reverse the Censorship of Trans-Inclusive Material

To: Members of the Kent County Council Cabinet
Kent County Council
County Hall,
Maidstone,
ME14 1XQ

Dear Kent County Council,

We, the undersigned, write to express our grave concerns regarding the recent decision of Cllr Webb to ban books with transgender themes across Kent's public library system, and the claims from Cllr Linden Kemkaran that she has removed trans inclusion training from KCC's staff e-learning platforms.

This act of censorship sets a dangerous precedent, particularly just a few days after the Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention and Human Security issued a red flag alert for trans and intersex rights in the UK, stating that they "*condemn recent judicial and governmental developments in the United Kingdom, which attempt to harm transgender and intersex people in the UK by stripping them of privacy and segregating them as 'others.'* The Lemkin Institute believes these moves are part of a broader process of erasure."

This broader process of erasure is clearly demonstrated by the decision of Kent County Council to censor work they consider "*transgender ideological material*". The decision is discriminatory in nature, lacks transparency, and appears to have been influenced by ideological motivations rather than rooted in public need, professional guidance, or legal obligation.

This is not an isolated incident, and the actions taken here will have consequences for equality and democracy within the UK. Research conducted in the UK, including the study published this spring by Alison Hicks, the Index on Censorship Survey 2024, and the 2023 study by CILIP, suggests an increase in demands to censor books, mostly coming from individuals and small groups, and mostly targeting LGBTQ+ material.

According to the public statement of Cllr Webb, the decision was taken after a "*concerned member of the public*" contacted him. That a local authority would restrict public access to literature in response to the politically motivated lobbying of one individual—particularly targeting a marginalised group—is alarming and unacceptable. It was implemented without meaningful consultation, without public transparency, and without regard for the legal duties you are bound to uphold as a public authority.

Equally troubling is the post on Linden Kemkaran's KCC page where she claims to have removed Trans Awareness staff training from KCC staff e-training platforms with immediate

effect. There has been no other public statement from the KCC on this matter, so it is entirely unclear what has been removed, and what she intends to replace it with.

In a similar way to Cllr Webb, she justifies her decision to remove this training due to concerns raised by a whistleblower, and links to an article that uses loaded and discriminatory language, not just towards transgender people, but also towards people of colour by referring to aims to be 'non-racist' as "*ideological madness*".

If she has removed this training, and has done so under pressure from an article that is discriminatory, inaccurate, and misleading, then this creates a hostile workplace for marginalized groups, and is a breach of the Equality Act 2010.

We also note with concern that there have been a number of contradictory and inaccurate statements published on official social media by these councillors. Initially, Cllr Linden Kemkaran claimed that they had "REMOVED all trans-related books from our libraries children's section with immediate effect".

Later, a KCC spokesperson claimed that "we have not changed policy" and that "recent media reports regarding the removal of books from our stock are inaccurate" and that the book in question had not been in the children's section as claimed by Cllr Webb, but "in a public display at the entrance of one library in Kent [and that] the book has since been relocated to a section that is unlikely to be visited by children."

We also note that Cllr Linden Kemkaren's post on Facebook about trans inclusion training misrepresents the Supreme Court's ruling on the definition of sex, implying that this definition extends beyond the Equality Act, and has resulted in a bathroom ban for trans people, both of which are inaccurate.

These contradictory and inaccurate statements raise serious concerns about transparency and accountability. Public statements by a council carry legal and reputational weight, and there is a legitimate expectation that these statements should be accurate and should reflect official policy or guidance. Even if there has been no formal change of policy, or full removal of books from libraries, public comments from councillors suggest that a book ban has still been implemented.

For instance, posting on Facebook, "*Kent County Council have confirmed that children are not and will not be exposed to adult transgender literature in our libraries.*"

"Staff at the county's 99 libraries have been asked to ensure that books are always stocked in age-appropriate categories and that no adult literature makes its way into areas specifically aimed at children, or where children will be selecting books, such as the public welcome displays.

“It follows feedback from a resident who spotted a transgender book aimed at adults in a public display at the entrance of one library in Kent. The book has since been relocated to a section that is unlikely to be visited by children.”

A book ban is not simply removing books from libraries, but also involves restricting their access through placing them in less accessible locations (such as adult-only sections) and refusing to display them prominently.

Every single library will include adult literature in its public welcome displays, because it is acknowledged that literature being aimed at adults does not make it automatically inappropriate for children to read, let alone for children to even see. Will you be removing all adult literature to adult-only sections, and only prominently displaying children’s literature from now on? Or is this specific to adult literature that has been classified as “transgender adult literature”?

The book in question, *The Adult Trans Guide to Life*, contains no explicit content on its cover that could be deemed inappropriate for children, and the content of a book that “promotes self-acceptance and resilience” can hardly constitute a safeguarding concern.

This decision to restrict transgender adult literature to less prominent areas of the library is targeted and discriminatory, and would not be applied to any other form of adult literature.

This is disturbingly reminiscent of the deeply harmful and traumatic Section 28, which Kent was the last county in the UK to overturn. The KCC’s inflammatory phrasing of children being ‘exposed’ to trans literature implies that transgender lives and identities are inherently inappropriate for children, and feeds into discriminatory narratives that frame transgender identities as predatory and dangerous.

We remind you that:

- Public libraries are a cornerstone of democratic society, providing free and equal access to knowledge and information. **The Charter of Public Library Services** in England, which provides the ethical framework for most libraries, states that published material should not be restricted on any grounds but the law, and affirms the right to read freely and without bias.
- The **Equality Act 2010** requires you to foster equality, eliminate discrimination, and advance equality of opportunity. Blocking books with trans content and removing staff trans inclusion training may be considered contrary to the Equality Act 2010, and discriminatory in nature. This could also be a breach of your HR duties under employment law if the removal of trans inclusion training resulted in staff feeling unsafe, unsupported, and the creation of a hostile work environment.

- Your **Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)**, requires you to assess the impact of decisions on protected characteristics (like gender reassignment). If you failed to carry out an equality impact assessment (EIA) or disregarded its implications, then this may constitute a failure of Public Sector Equality Duty. It seems unlikely that such an assessment was carried out, as when the BBC asked if Reform UK had carried out an assessment, Cllr Webb did not answer, but said, *“As far as impact assessments are concerned, I would have thought that question should have been asked before these books were placed in the children’s section to begin with.”*
- **Article 10 of the Human Rights Act 1998** guarantees the right to freedom of expression and access to information; you would be acting contrary to this legislation by removing books based solely on ideological and discriminatory grounds. There is no evidence that suggests any harm results from people—whether adults or children—having access to literature that includes the lived experiences of transgender people.
- If you have made inaccurate or misleading statements on official social media then this could constitute **procedural impropriety**. Public bodies are required to act fairly and transparently, and you could be in breach of legitimate expectation if staff, residents, or service users rely on earlier statements, especially if this impacted upon access to public services or public behaviour. If this goes unchallenged, it sets a dangerous precedent where discriminatory shifts of policy could be trialled through implication, with plausible deniability if challenged. This undermines procedural fairness.

Thus, we would suggest that your actions could be grounds for judicial review, as it was unlawful, procedurally unfair, and discriminatory.

Blocking access to books and training about transgender lives and identities sends a chilling message to people—trans and cis alike—that some identities are inappropriate, unacceptable, or unworthy of understanding. It undermines the right of everyone to access age-appropriate, inclusive education. It fosters stigma and isolation. And it sets a deeply troubling precedent for censorship that will impact the democratic rights of all UK citizens.

As reported by *The Guardian* in April this year, librarians across the UK are facing increased pressure to remove books with LGBTQ+ content, influenced by tactics from US-based pressure groups. Staff are reporting a rise in coordinated complaints, harassment, and attempts to intimidate public services. The decision taken by Kent County Council lends legitimacy to this hostile movement and opens the door to further discrimination.

We therefore call on you to:

1. **Immediately reverse this policy** restricting the access of books with transgender themes in public libraries.

2. **Reinstate trans-inclusive staff training** to ensure a safe, informed, and respectful environment for all employees and service users
3. **Publish the full decision-making process**, including communications with any external groups or individuals, and any equality impact assessments conducted.
4. **Uphold your legal obligations** under equality and human rights law, and publicly commit to inclusive, uncensored library provisions.
5. **Repair the relationship with the transgender community** through meaningful consultation and investment in LGBTQ+ literature and support.
6. **Ensure accountability** for Cllr Webb, Cllr Kemkaran, and all those responsible for pushing through this decision without adequate consultation, transparency, or justification.

Every person—especially young people, LGBTQ+ individuals, and marginalised communities—deserve to see themselves represented in public spaces. The role of libraries is to support understanding, not to erase it.

We urge you to reverse this policy, reject the influence of ideological censorship, and reaffirm your commitment to equality, inclusion, and freedom of information.

Yours Sincerely,



Jay Woods
Transpire Outreach Officer

Additional signatories:

Dover Pride

Trans Voices Young Company

WhatTheTrans?!

Ramsgate Pride

Broadstairs Pride

The Global Trans Charter

Safe Space Merseyside

Herne Bay Pride