



Cheshire West and Chester Council  
Focus on our Communities



Cheshire West and Chester's  
**TRANSGENDER**  
community



Cheshire West  
and Chester

## Focus on our Communities

Cheshire West and Chester is made up of many different types of people - with different cultures, beliefs, attitudes and needs.

As a service provider, it is essential we understand our communities so that we can improve quality of life, offer excellent customer services and cater for everyone in the best way possible.

‘Focus on our Communities’ is a series of short reports, each looking at groups that are often hidden or not well known, and who form part of the equality streams covered by the Single Equality Scheme. These reports aim to provide a snapshot of the issues as a spring board to learning more about the residents of Cheshire West and Chester.

The communities considered in the series are:

- The black and minority ethnic community (BME)
- The lesbian, gay and bisexual community (LGB)
- The transgender community
- The disabled community
- Children and young people
- Older people
- The religious community

This particular report focuses on

Cheshire West and Chester's  
**TRANSGENDER**  
community

### Accessing Cheshire West and Chester Council information and services

Council information is also available in Audio, Braille and Large Print formats. If you would like a copy in any of these formats or in another language, please email us at [equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:equalities@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk). We are also able to provide a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter to support customers with accessing Council services.

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# Further Information

## ‘Communities’

Although they have been termed communities, it should be kept in mind that the communities are made up of very different individuals with different needs and outlooks who have been grouped together as they often experience a level of overlap on the key issues they face.

## Equality and Diversity

Further information on the ‘Single Equality Scheme’ and ‘Equality and Diversity’ can be found on the Cheshire West and Chester website at [www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/equality](http://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/equality)

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## The Reports

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## Background

‘Focus on our Communities’ is a series of short reports looking at communities of interest in Cheshire West and Chester. These communities are linked to the equality streams covered by the Single Equality Scheme. **Whilst the reports highlight many difficulties faced by our communities, they do not present the good work done by many Council service areas, partners and the Third Sector in supporting vulnerable groups.** Instead, they serve as an introduction to the key issues affecting particular communities. **This report looks at the transgender community.**

## Summary

- The term ‘transgender’ describes people who do not identify with traditional gender roles and can include a medical condition known as Gender Dysphoria.
- Many transgender people experience discrimination, hate crime, inequality in the workplace and are sometimes refused access to key services, including health services, housing, leisure services and social activities.
- Transgender people suffer disproportionately from mental health problems, which can be a result of discrimination, abuse, family breakdown and financial problems. This can lead to alcohol and substance misuse as individuals seek to find ways of coping.
- There are no official statistics on the number of transgender people, but there may be as many as 1,500 transgender people living in Cheshire West and Chester.

# Introduction: meanings and definitions

## Transgender

Transgender, or trans for short, is an umbrella term used to describe people who do not conform to traditional ideas of gender roles. Many types of people fall under this general term, including pre and post-op transsexuals, transvestites, drag queens and kings, androgynous individuals and intersex people.

## Transsexual

Transsexuals are people who feel they have been 'born in the wrong body' because they identify, both psychologically and emotionally, with a gender different from the one they were assigned at birth.

Many often seek medical treatment to 'transition' to their desired gender (which they feel is their true or core gender) - this is known as Gender Reassignment Surgery.

Those who have successfully 'reassigned' their gender through surgery are known as post-op transsexuals. Other terms used to describe transsexual people include MTF (or male to female transsexuals), FTM (female to male transsexuals), transmen and transwomen. Before surgery is performed, individuals are expected to live in their new gender role and, during this time, they are often referred to as pre-op transsexuals.

Many transsexual people choose not to undergo gender reassignment for a number of reasons, including fear of losing their family or job, because of poor health or a lack of financial resources, however they still wish to live as the gender they most identify with.

## Transvestite

Transvestites are often referred to as cross dressers and are individuals who wear clothes associated with the opposite sex but do not want to change their gender permanently. These may be people who identify themselves as transsexuals but for many reasons do not wish to enter into the process of gender reassignment. They may also be individuals who feel comfortable with their physical gender but enjoy dressing as the opposite sex.

## Other transgender people

- Drag queens or kings are people that cross dress for the purpose of entertainment.
- Androgynous individuals may include 'effeminate men', 'masculine women' or those who identify themselves as being bi-gendered, whereby their gender identity (their deeply felt sense of being a particular gender) encompasses both masculine and feminine genders.
- Intersex people (who were previously sometimes referred to as hermaphrodites) are those who are born with indeterminate or 'ambiguous' genitalia or chromosomal anomalies and are often assigned a gender by doctors or parents.





# Key issues affecting the transgender community

There are a wide range of issues affecting transgender people. This report summarises some of the main concerns of the transgender community and the impacts these have.

## Family and Relationships

Transgender identity can form at any age but may emerge during early childhood, which can be exacerbated by the onset of physical changes during puberty. Teenage years can be a difficult time, but for young transgender people the problems they face in addition to pressures like school work and trying to 'fit in' can be extremely distressing. They may encounter bullying, harassment and physical and verbal abuse during school years and may feel isolated and alone because they are scared to tell their family how they are feeling. **Parents often find it hard to accept or cope with these problems and many worry about the stigma and misunderstanding that often surrounds transgender.** This may lead to a strain on the child/parent relationship and even the breakdown of this relationship all together.

These are not just problems faced by young transgender people but by older people who wish to be open about their trans identity with their friends and family. **Problems faced by trans people who are in a relationship may not only result in the loss of support networks but may lead to severe financial problems and the loss of their home.** All of these issues can lead to depression and or severe anxiety. It can also trigger the onset of other problems such as alcohol and substance abuse.

## Transphobia & discrimination

Transphobia is the 'unrealistic or irrational fear and hatred of transgender people'. It can result in discrimination and hate crime, which can include harassment, physical and verbal abuse and bullying. A study exploring inequality and discrimination experienced by trans people found that **the top five areas in which they experienced discrimination occurred:**

- At work
- When accessing general healthcare
- When requesting funding for gender reassignment surgery from the Primary Care Trust (PCT)
- When dealing with the criminal justice sector (specifically the Police)
- When accessing general leisure services.

The same study also identified school as being a key area in which young trans people encounter discrimination and harassment.

## Hate crime

Linked to discrimination is hate crime.

A hate crime is 'any incident, which constitutes a criminal offence, which is perceived by the victim or any other person as being motivated by prejudice or hate'. **Transphobic hate crime is defined by the Crown Prosecution Service as 'any incident which is perceived to be transphobic by the victim or any other person'.**

Research conducted for the Equalities Review, a national project exploring trans people's experiences of discrimination, found that in 2006 19% of transgender adults aged 18-75 were subjected to threatening behaviour, 10% experienced verbal abuse, 5% were physically abused and 2% experienced sexual abuse when out in public spaces.

Experiences of transphobic hate crime can have wide reaching consequences:

- Individuals affected feel unsafe and suffer a range of negative experiences, which can impact on their well-being, confidence and mental health
- Establishing friendships can be difficult
- Many transgender people feel they have to move from place to place to escape or avoid transphobic behaviour, discrimination, hate crime and other types of victimisation.

Constantly moving around can affect:

- Access to services, particularly health services and can result in having to delay or temporarily stop particular types of treatment.
- Their ability to feel part of the local community as they do not have a permanent base
- Their ability to build a local network of friends and support

Despite the fact that transgender people suffer from high levels of hate crime, research has shown that they are often very unwilling to report it.

## Public misconceptions of Transgender and confusion with sexual orientation

Transgender is typically included in the collective 'LGBT community' (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) because groups within this community face similar issues, including discrimination and harassment. Historically, gender identity has also played a large role in the gay community and gay culture. Because of this, transgender people tend to feel more accepted and 'safe' with lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals, particularly in terms of socialising and social venues.

However, it is important to note that gender identity is a complex issue and **just because a person identifies as being transgender does not mean that they are lesbian, gay or bisexual.**

A 2008 study of transgender people and their issues found that many were concerned about being included under the LGBT banner and felt that, although they shared issues and concerns with LGB people, the needs of transgender people are very different. This is often because lesbian, gay and bisexual people's interest and issues are centred around sexual orientation, whereas transgender people's needs are related to gender.

Despite the fact that trans people are considered to be part of the LGB community, **discrimination and prejudice from lesbian, gay and bisexual people can be an issue.** In many circumstances, this is related to individuals who have 'transitioned' to their desired gender and, as a result, are now considered to be in a heterosexual, rather than a same sex relationship. Other issues of discrimination may also occur when 'straight' men cross dress as a female in a gay environment.



## Health issues and access to health care

### Gender Dysphoria

Many, but not all, transgender people feel that they have been 'born in the wrong body'. This is a medical condition known as Gender Dysphoria and is **defined as 'a profound and persistent unhappiness related to one's physical sex'**. It may also be referred to as Gender Identity Disorder, Gender Incongruence and Transgenderism. According to the NHS, Gender Dysphoria is usually characterised by feelings of 'anxiety, uncertainty, or persistently uncomfortable feelings about the gender a person is born with'. These feelings can be experienced at a very young age, although may not emerge until a person is older. **Gender Dysphoria is not considered to be a mental illness** and many trans people feel that treating it as such leads to lack of understanding of transgender issues and contributes to the stigmatisation and marginalisation of transgender people.

### Mental health

**Research has shown that transgender individuals often suffer disproportionately from mental illness and mental health problems.** This is mainly attributed to negative experiences like transphobia and the breakdown or loss of family support networks, which cause issues of poor mental health such as depression and anxiety disorders.

### Access to health care

Access to health care can also be a major issue for transgender people for a range of reasons:

- **Health professionals often lack the knowledge and information required to treat trans people and their issues, particularly those who wish to begin gender reassignment.** Findings from the national 'Engendered Penalties' report (2007) showed that although 80% of GPs contacted by transgender respondents were willing to help them access these services, 60% lacked the appropriate knowledge to provide help.

- **Research shows that those who have 'transitioned' to their desired gender (transsexuals) can also encounter discrimination from health professionals.** The 'Engendered Penalties' report (2007) found that 29% of transsexual respondents felt that being transsexual had adversely affected the way they were treated by health professionals. Some had been refused treatment by health care professionals who did not approve of gender reassignment.

### Access to Gender Reassignment Surgery and associated support

For those who wish to undergo gender reassignment surgery, there are a wide range of barriers and issues:

- **Some transgender people encounter discrimination and inequality when trying to access gender reassignment services.** Research shows that some GPs refuse to help them access gender reassignment treatment services.
- **Many face barriers in terms of obtaining funding for treatment from their local PCT.** The 'Engendered Equalities' report found that around 27% of post-op transsexuals faced problems obtaining funding, a figure which had not changed significantly over the past 15 years.
- **Waiting times for treatment can be extremely long.** The average waiting time is around two years but some transgender people have to wait much longer. This can cause great anxiety and stress, and in extreme circumstances may lead to mental health problems like depression, or even suicide. **Because of long waiting times, some seek treatment at private clinics, often at great personal expense.**
- **Crucial support services for gender reassignment can be patchy.** An NHS satisfaction survey of transgender services found that 36% of respondents were offered no counselling when they sought to 'transition' to their core or true gender. Family members, close relatives and friends of transgender people will often require support.



## Access to services

Trans people are likely to feel uncomfortable using mainstream services due to transphobia and discrimination. This can affect education, housing, leisure pursuits, sport activity and socialising. Occasionally, individuals are asked to use alternative facilities to that of their preferred or acquired gender, such as changing and toilet facilities. In some cases, trans people have been refused service in places such as pubs, restaurants and gyms because they are transgender.

Research by the University of Brighton and Spectrum LGBT Forum called 'Count Me In Too' has shown that **over 1 in 10 transgender people find council and other public services either unfriendly or very unfriendly.** This experience of discrimination may be the result of a lack of understanding of legal requirements in the treatment of transgender people and the equal rights they have to access services and facilities.

## Employment

Research has found that the main trigger point for discrimination is in the workplace when individuals are undergoing 'transition' (when they first attend work in their new gender role). Work is one of the key phases in the process of gender reassignment, where individuals are expected to live in their true or core gender role full time for 1 to 2 years. However, trans people frequently face intimidation, discrimination and harassment in the workplace. Issues relating to the use of toilet and other changing facilities are a problem faced by many trans people planning to, or currently undergoing treatment for gender reassignment. **The provision of time off for such treatment and surgery may also be problematic,** with the Equalities Review 'Engendered Penalties' research report stating that 42% of transgender respondents had been prevented from living permanently in their preferred gender by their job.

## Poverty, housing services and homelessness

A combination of problems and issues can lead to transgender people facing a life of poverty. **Issues of discrimination and intimidation can make working life extremely difficult, forcing some transgender people to leave their jobs.** Research has also shown that some transgender people use private health services and facilities at great personal expense so as to avoid long waiting times for treatment on the NHS, to overcome lack of funding provided by their local PCT or to simply avoid what is often seen as a difficult process via conventional routes. Inevitably, this can lead to considerable financial problems, which can have consequences for keeping up mortgage or rent payments. **Further issues around housing and homelessness can occur as a consequence of a breakdown in family or spouse relationships and subsequent loss of support networks, as well as experiences of hate crime, intimidation and harassment in their own homes.** Those who privately rent may also face discrimination from their current or potential landlords.





## Civil rights and legal issues

A number of key legislations have emerged in recent years that aim to protect transsexual people from discrimination but do not cover other transgender individuals. However, from 1 October 2010 amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act will mean the remit is widened to include other transgender individuals, such as those who do not necessarily wish to transition.

## Changing important documentation and legal status

Being referred to by their desired title (i.e. Mr or Miss) can help to put transgender people at ease and is a key area of recognition for many. However, some services require the presentation of a Gender Recognition Certificate, which legally recognises an individual's preferred or acquired gender, before any changes can be made. This can be a problem for people who do not wish to 'transition' fully or for those who have been through gender reassignment surgery and are living permanently in their new gender role but do not want to hold one for a number of reasons.

For example, this may include people who were married or in a civil partnership before gender reassignment who would be required to annul their marriage or partnership in order to apply for a certificate.

## Rural issues and isolation

**Isolation and fear of discrimination and not 'fitting in' are feelings many transgender people experience at some point during their lives.**

These feelings can be intensified if they do not have access to support groups or know any other transgender individuals. Many support groups operate predominantly in major cities and those living in rural areas are likely to feel increasingly isolated and lonely.

## Religion and Ethnicity

**Particular religions and ethnic minority groups may be less accepting of transgender identity.**

This may mean that individuals find themselves excluded from particular communities that they were once a part of, such as religious groups and places of worship. They may also be excluded from family and friendship networks who do not approve of their trans status.



# Key Facts and Figures

## Population

There are a range of estimates relating to the number of trans people within the UK, but it is impossible to know with any accuracy.

One of the main reasons for this is that it is difficult to identify individuals during different stages of transition, whether they are simply living as their desired gender or having hormone treatments, or whether they are planning to 'transition' at all. This is because gender identity can be complex and, as a group, transgender people often define themselves in very different ways. In addition, transgender people are often unwilling to disclose themselves as being trans at all, as many fear they may be identified within the local community.

Although it is recognised that there are **currently no publicly available statistical data on transgender people**, the Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRES, 2008) suggests that the prevalence of people age 16 and over seeking help for treatment of Gender Dysphoria is 20 per 100,000 and is thought to be increasing by 15% annually. If this was applied to Cheshire West and Chester, this would equate to approximately 50 people in the Borough. The average age for seeking treatment for Gender Dysphoria is 42. In terms of the transgender population, GIRES gives an estimate of 600 per 100,000. **If these figures were applied to the Cheshire West and Chester area, there may be around 1,500 trans people in the area.**

## Gender Reassignment explained

There are three recognised stages of reassignment. Before entering into any of these stages, an individual is normally referred to a Gender Identity Clinic. The stages are:

1. Social change
2. Hormonal and other treatments
3. Surgical gender reassignment.

**Also known as 'The Real Life Experience', social change is a process by which individuals begin to live and work in their core or true gender.** A person is expected to do this for a minimum period of 2 years and subject to a number of assessments. Evidence of an individual's 'Real Life Experience' is required in order for treatment to progress, which includes proof that an individual has changed their name and documentation, has lived in their new role full time and evidence of occupational activity during this period (such as employment, voluntary work or further education).

**The second stage involves the administration of cross-gender hormone prescriptions, which aid physical changes to help a person 'transition' to their true or core gender.** Finally, **the third stage of transition involves gender reassignment surgery**, which can remove or create characteristics to help an individual to align their physical body to their gender identity. According to the Leeds Gender Service, the whole process of gender reassignment can take between three and four years to complete.

## Support groups and networks in Cheshire West and Chester

There are a number of support groups and networks in and around Cheshire West and Chester that cater for transgender people.

**UNIQUE**, a voluntary organisation supporting North Wales and West Cheshire, is specifically aimed at transgender people. Other groups that cater for the LGBT community as a whole include **Cheshire Rainbow**, **Glitz and Glamour and Encompass**. National groups include **Mermaids**, which offers support for children and teenagers with gender identity issues and **Press for Change**, which lobbies and campaigns for the equal rights of trans people in the UK, **the Beaumont Society**, a national group for transvestite and transsexuals and the **Gender Trust** for transsexual people.

## Legislation

There are three main acts that protect the legal rights of transsexual people but do not cover other trans people. **The Gender Recognition Act 2004** provides a mechanism for someone to be legally recognised in their acquired gender by applying for a **Gender Recognition Certificate**. **The Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999** protects transsexual people against discrimination in employment and vocational training. This **legislation was amended in 2008** and seeks to eliminate unlawful direct discrimination and harassment on the grounds of gender reassignment in the provision of goods, facilities and services. However, it is only relevant to those who are planning to, are undergoing or have undergone gender reassignment. The Equalities Act 2004 introduced the **Gender Equality Duty**, which requires all public authorities to give due weight to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment against transsexual people in the fields of employment and vocational training.

## What does this mean for Cheshire West and Chester?

### For the Area

It is impossible to know with any accuracy the size or make up of the transgender population in Cheshire West and Chester. If national estimates were applied to the local population there may be as many as 1,500 trans people living in the area.

### For the Council

Research suggests that the transgender population is growing, making it more important than ever to ensure that, as a service provider and employer, the Council has policies in place to prevent and tackle discrimination. The introduction of the Council's Single Equality scheme, which incorporates the Gender Equality Duty, will help to protect transsexual and transgender people from discrimination. In addition the following actions will enable the Council to better meet the needs of transgender residents and employees:

- Equality impact assessments to understand how Council services, and the way they are provided, impact on transgender people
- Awareness training for Council staff on legal duties and transgender issues, with particular emphasis on staff who are directly involved in the provision of services to the public
- Fair employment and support for all employees, particularly for those who wish, or are in the process of undergoing gender reassignment
- Supporting transgender advocate and support groups in the local community
- Working with partners to stamp out discrimination and hate crime and improve access to services
- Highlighting and sharing positive work done to support the transgender community by the Council, partners and the Third Sector to promote best practice.



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