



*EXPLORING THE HARMFUL IMPACT THE NHS SUSSEX INVESTIGATION
AT WELLBN HAD ON TRANS YOUTH & THEIR FAMILIES*



a zine by Nightjar

*I dedicate this to every trans, non-binary young person -
what a strong, beautiful, talented and exceptional bunch
you are!*

You deserve so much better.

*I also dedicate this to all the supportive families out there -
the parents, guardians, siblings and otherwise related
superheroes of trans children who know so well how to love.*

And, to my love, forever.

*May this zine make you furious that
this was allowed to happen.*

*May this zine make your heart ache for trans children
and their families caught up in this scandal.*

*May this zine inspire you to stand up for trans kids
so we can improve their lives together.*

*May this zine help us dream of better futures
with a comprehensive ban on conversion practices,
legal recognition and protection of all trans and non-binary
people and desegregated gender affirming health care
accessible to all who need it.*

CONTENT WARNING

This zine discusses difficult topics like transphobia, forced detransition, self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, bullying, dysphoria and conversion therapy. Please proceed with caution and if you are personally affected have a look at the support available on the back of the zine.



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Terms of Reference

In July 2025 the NHS Sussex Integrated Care Board (ICB), under pressure from NHS England, announced a patient safety investigation into the gender affirming care of trans young people under 18 at the WellBN GP surgery in Brighton.

The ICB published a Terms of Reference document on their website to set out how the investigation would be conducted. 78 young people were identified to be within scope, but their voices and their families' voices were never envisioned to be featured in any way.

The Terms of Reference cited national guidelines and specialist service specifications that were all written in the widely contested Cass Review's shadow. This left families with little faith in the impartiality of the investigation and raised serious concerns around the likely outcome and its impact.



Data Pulling

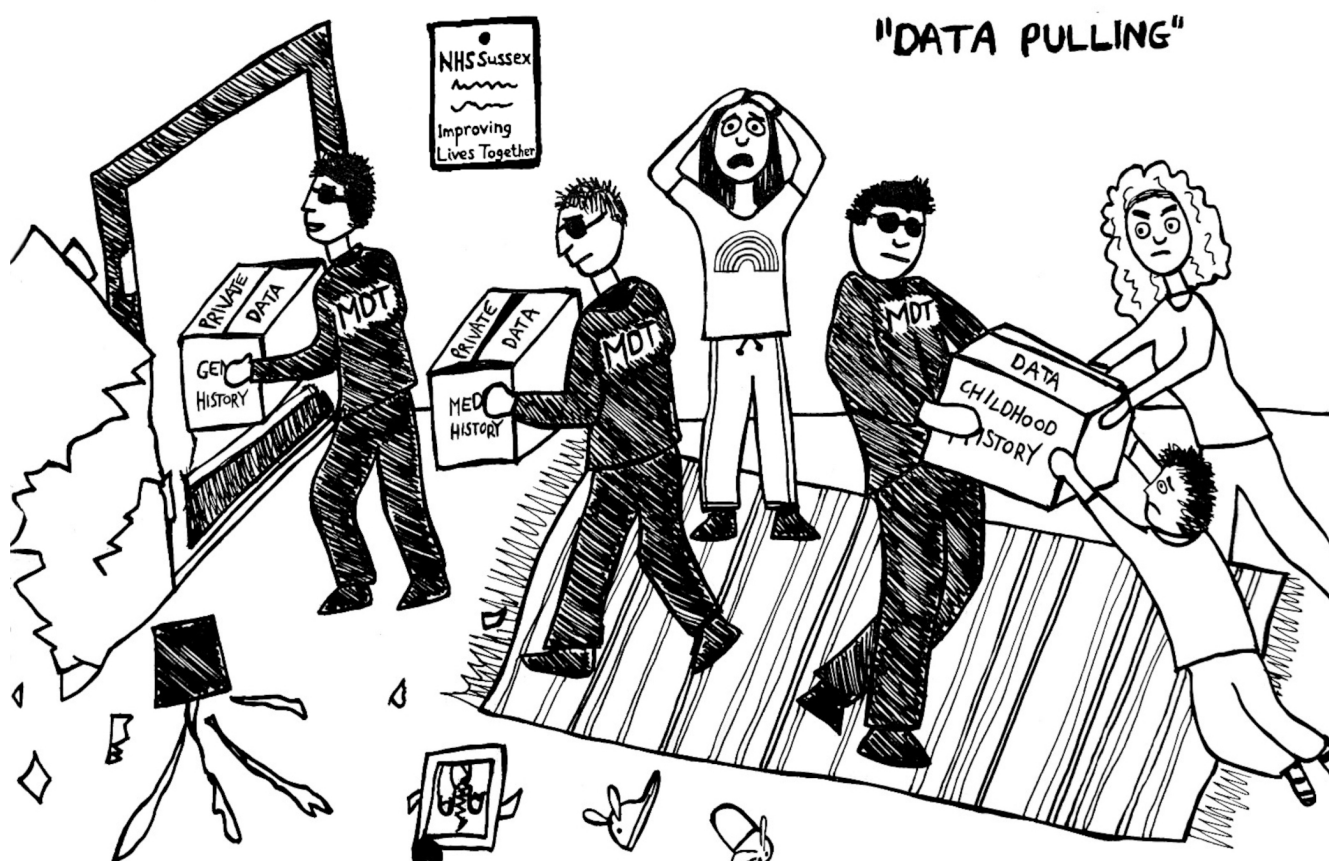
To start the investigation, the ICB needed to gain access to the 78 young people's medical records. Citing concerns around patient safety and public interest, they argued that they did not need to seek consent from the families for this.

The families disagreed and for months fought tooth and nail to keep the ICB and their data pullers out of the kids' confidential medical history. They sought legal help, sent letters and added explicit dissent forms to their NHS records, but it was of no use.

Under the threat of closure, WellBN was forced to provide access, and the data extraction began in September 2025.

The sense of violation experienced by families was immense. These records contained details of their traumatic journeys supporting their trans children in an often-hostile health and social care system. Their deeply personal stories were siphoned into neat data piles to be read and discussed by a Multi-Disciplinary Team of strangers.

Their privacy ripped from them without having a say in what narrative would be constructed or how their data would be used.



Assisted Withdrawal

Feeling completely shut out from the process, many families experienced intense anxiety which was significantly worsened by the ongoing uncertainty around the children's continuity of care.

Even though the ICB denied that the investigation would have pre-determined outcomes, their Terms of Reference document already set out exactly what was likely to happen to many of the children involved in the investigation – withdrawal of treatment.

In other words,

forced detransition.

Suddenly, hanging over each young person's head was the prospect of being forced to go through an incongruent puberty, physically and mentally torturous, with the risk of being outed in front of peers, losing access to hobbies, being bullied, the list goes on.



Desktop Review

Despite the multitude of formal complaints, requests and testimonials families submitted to the ICB, they only agreed to meet the parents for the first time in November 2025,

5 months after the investigation was first announced.

All the while, the desktop review continued without feedback or input from the young people and their families.

The investigation was predicated on the potential harm prescribing gender affirming medications may have caused these children, without considering the risk of non-treatment or the potential benefits of treatment.

Most of these young people and their parents had already spent years fighting for this care, yet their experiences were deemed unworthy and their voices profoundly silenced.



Expedited Referral

Throughout the process, Sussex ICB demonstrated very poor understanding of what these families had to go through with the NHS over the years, including

- astonishing waiting times to be seen at the specialist service,
- the closure of the Gender Identity Development Service (GIDS),
 - a considerable gap in provisions,
 - widespread GP hostility,
 - malicious social service referrals,
 - the puberty blocker ban.

Young people and their parents were told that if they wanted any hope for continued treatment, they must accept an expedited referral into a specialist gender service.

CYPGS does not operate a medical pathway, though, and their assessments are infamous for their intensity and deeply intrusive nature. Many talk about being strung along for years with the promise of treatment only to be constantly told that there are more hoops to jump through.

Many say that it amounts to

conversion therapy.

While thriving children are pushed into a service that will likely harm them, trans adults are unable to access care as NHS Gender Identity Clinic waiting times stretch into decades.



Holistic Assessment

Many families who found a safe haven at WellBN had already, over years, experienced how the NHS-commissioned pathway worked at both GIDS and the new clinics.

What is described by Cass and CYPGS as a holistic assessment involves a grueling process seemingly designed to destabilise - 3-4-hour long appointments with a panel of clinicians questioning every detail of the young person's and their family's life.

Children as young as 11 are asked about their masturbation habits and sexuality. Puberty staging - a physical examination of a child's private parts to determine development - is deemed to be a necessary element of these pathways even though it leaves young people feeling violated and ashamed.

Some parents say the experience left them and their child crying in the car on the way home.

Others talked about feeling interrogated, undermined and scrutinised for supporting their trans kid. Many families end up using private providers because they feel chased away from the National Health Service that seems more interested in intruding into their private lives than providing any meaningful health care.

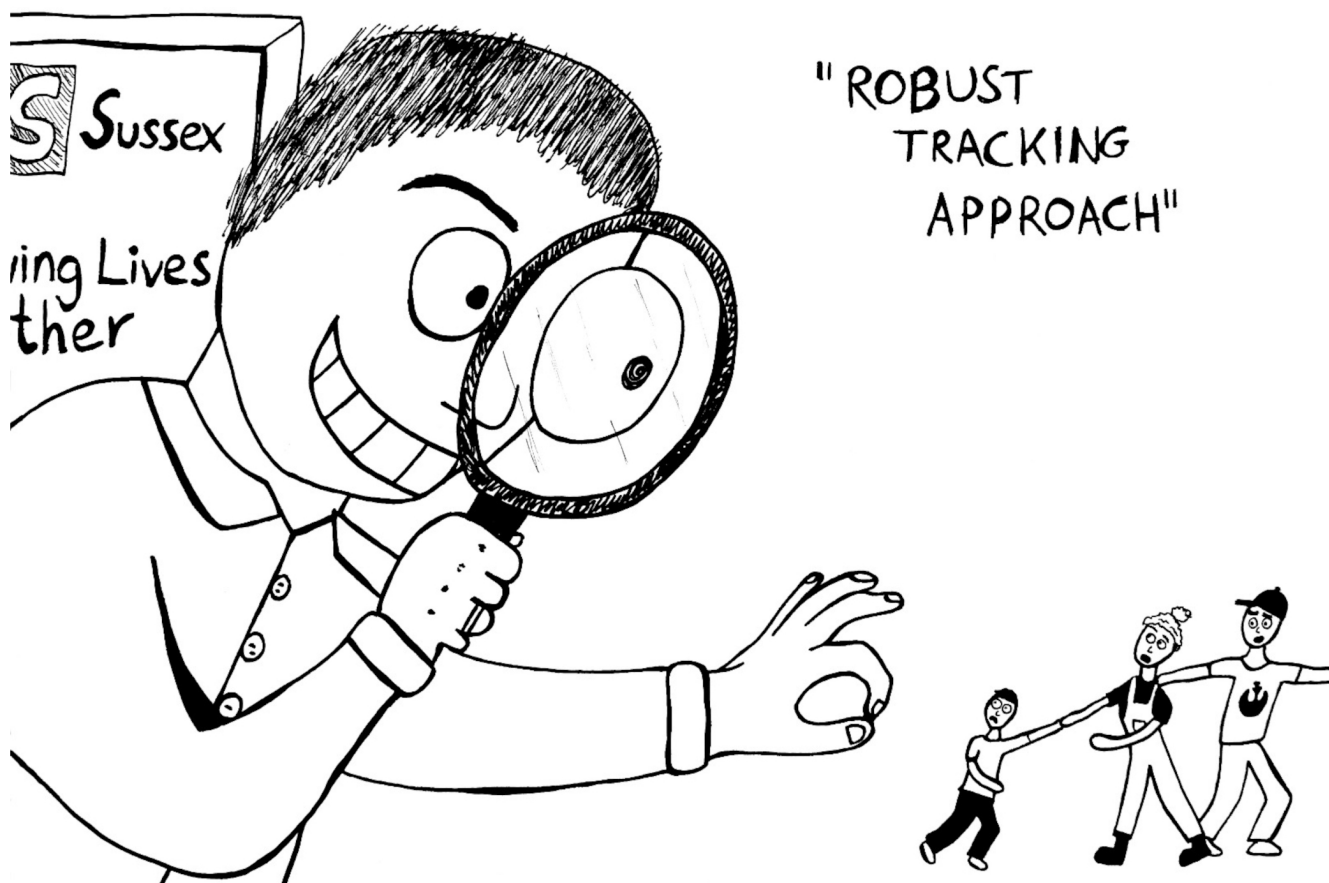


Robust Tracking Approach

The NHS seems eager to leave trans young people and their families nowhere to hide – the ICB's Terms of Reference already set out how they would be tracked through the system, their data kept for 20 years, their health care choices scrutinised in perpetuity.

Under the ongoing threat of being reported to social services for accessing private care, some families have fled abroad, leaving relatives, friends, careers behind to find peace elsewhere. Some have stopped using the NHS entirely at great financial cost – they moved all their health care into the private sector to escape the continued invasion of their privacy.

These families felt exposed, vulnerable and powerless in a process that had serious implications for the children's future. The investigation has disrupted family dynamics, destabilised otherwise well-functioning young people and driven some parents to suicidality.



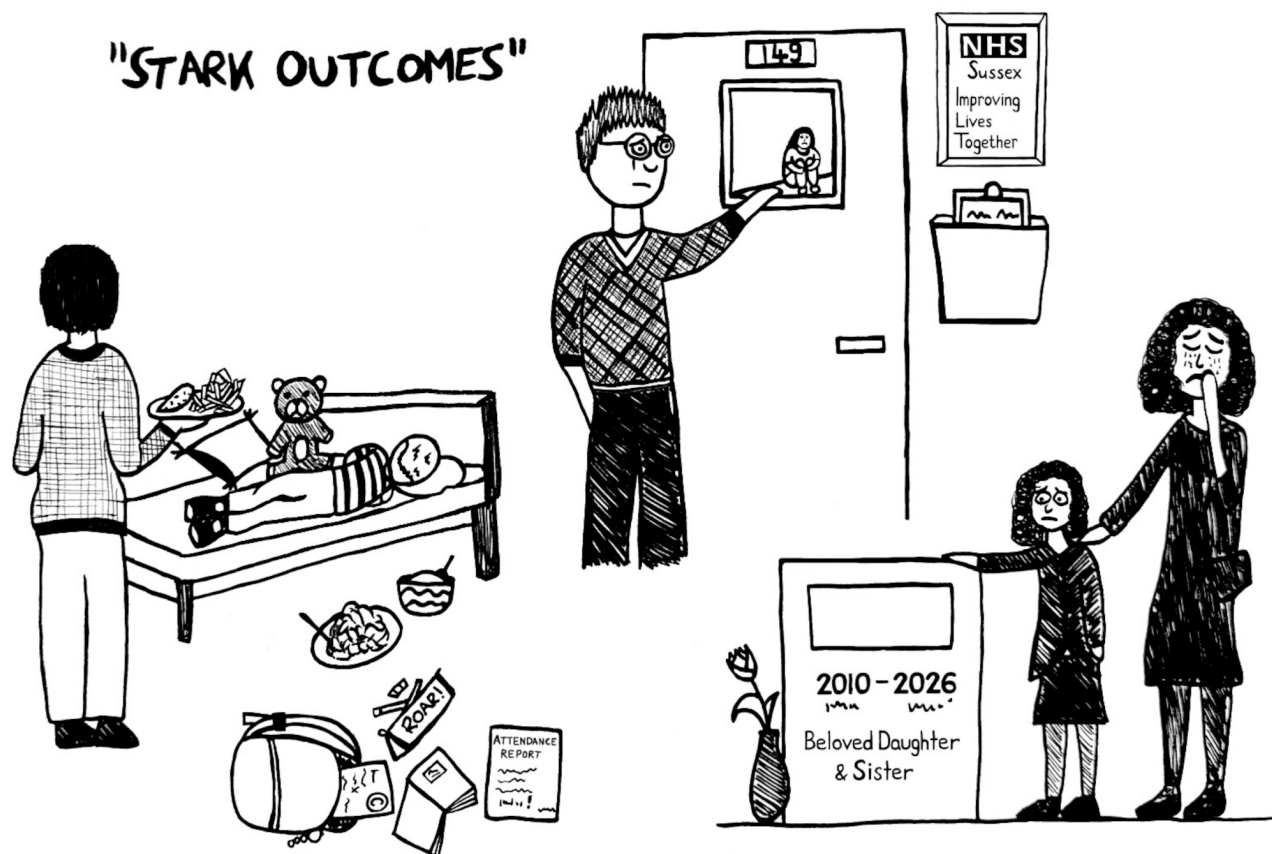
Stark Outcomes

At the beginning of the process the ICB published a Quality Impact Assessment acknowledging that the investigation would have a negative impact on patient experience and that withdrawal of care is likely to cause severe distress.

At a meeting in December 2025 one ICB representative even admitted that trans children under the age of 16 faced stark outcomes involving cessation of treatment.

But even before those outcomes materialised, the investigation had already had a devastating impact on many young people's lives. Facing the possibility of losing access to life saving health care, many started to struggle with attending school or dropped out of education altogether. Some developed eating disorders and some completely withdrew from their previously fulfilling social lives. Some started self-harming again. Some now want to die.

The NHS knew exactly what those stark outcomes were likely to be when the investigation concludes. But already in the pursuit of evidence of potential harm, they ended up causing actual, evident harm. Yet they proceeded, approach unchanged.



Improving Lives Together

Improving Lives Together is the title of the Sussex Health and Care Assembly's integrated care strategy plan for 2026-30. It aims to focus on the guiding question "How does this improve life for the people we support?"

Sussex ICB is part of this joint committee, yet their actions over the last year seem to have betrayed this guiding principle.

They used the language of bureaucracy to justify harming trans children by jeopardising their access to treatment.

They remained distant when people asked them to reach out and refused to meet families apart from two disastrous online sessions in November 2025.

They enabled the funneling of trans young people into a clinic that might subject them to conversion practices.

They accepted their role in the forced detransition of dozens of kids.

They exposed families to over a year of torturous uncertainty, anxiety and disempowerment.

How did this improve life for the people the ICB supports?



Potential Harm

The final investigation report published during an important GCSE exam week in June 2026 concluded that the 78 children were potentially harmed under WellBN's care.

No actual harm was identified or evidenced.

The children and their parents were never asked how they felt about the care they received or what impact gender affirming treatment had on their lives.

What was taken from these families never made the headlines.

In early 2025 this cohort of trans kids were getting on with growing up – enjoying hobbies and sports, excelling in school and preparing for further education, maturing into confident young adults, developing friendships, finding love...

We are all responsible for building a future where they can do that again.
A future where their voices are listened to and their experiences are believed.
A future where trans kids are free to be who they are,
free to play and free to dream.



If you are affected by any of the topics discussed and/or depicted in this zine, please reach out to one of the organisations below. Help is available!

Gendered Intelligence

*Support line for people waiting for gender affirming care
0800 640 8046*

supportline@genderedintelligence.co.uk

Switchboard

LGBTQIA+

Support Line

0800 0119100

hello@switchboard.lgbt

*You can also find Mental Health help resources and information here:
<https://clareproject.org.uk/mental-health-help/>*

SUPPORT THE FAMILIES

*There's a fundraiser where you can support the families impacted by the investigation with legal and care-related costs.
For more information and to donate, please use this QR code*



*Nightjar
July, 2026,
Brighton.*