

# Facebook Comment Backlash May Leave UK Christian Homeless

Facebook and the First Amendment have been at the center of a debate over the anti-homosexual comments of teachers in Florida and New Jersey. Now, a housing association manager in England is meeting with ill treatment over some same-sex comments of his own.

Adrian Smith, 54, was demoted and took a large pay decrease after he noted on his personal Facebook page that celebrating same-sex weddings in churches would be “an equality too far.” The comment, only available to his friends, was posted with a news story about gay marriage.

He added: “If the state wants to offer civil marriages to the same sex then that is up to the state; but the state shouldn’t impose its rules on places of faith and conscience.”

Trafford Housing Trust in Grater Manchester says the comments are against their equal opportunities policy. Smith is now taking legal action against the company, asking for compensation and an admission that they violated his rights to free speech and his freedom of religion.

Smith’s salary was reduced by approximately \$22,000 and he was given a final written warning stating that any further offenses would result in his firing. The company also told Smith he had been spared his job only because of his long 18 years of service.

Mike Judge, of the Christian Institute think-tank, said Smith now faces homelessness.

“His pay is being reduced in increments, so he is not in immediate trouble,” *MailOnline* reported Judge saying. “However, as it goes down, in two or three months he is going

to have trouble paying his mortgage. His only hope is that his employers see sense and reverse their decision.”

Peter Tatchell, a political campaigner on gay and lesbian issues, described the housing association’s actions as “excessive and disproportionate.”

He said: “Adrian Smith’s opposition to churches being compelled to hold gay marriages is shared by much of the population, including many equality and human rights organizations. In a democratic society, he has a right to express his point of view, even if it is misguided and wrong.

“Freedom of speech should only be limited or penalized in extreme circumstances, such as when a person incites violence against others. Mr Smith’s words did not cross this threshold.”

The Trust disagrees, however, saying Smith’s comments appeared on a page that identified him as their employee.

“We expect employees at all levels to act respectfully. This applies in person and on social media,” said David Barrow, commercial director of Trafford Housing Trust.

Smith cannot comment on the matter because of the legal actions he is taking, but Judge said: “There seems to be a culture of fear among companies who feel impelled to launch an inquisition if anyone doesn’t buy into the equality and diversity manifesto in its entirety. This witch hunt has to stop.”