CITY OF WOLVERHAMPTON COUNCIL

Menopause in the Workplace Guide

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1.0 Introduction

The City of Wolverhampton Council (the Council) is committed to raising awareness and understanding of the menopause and ensuring all employees receive the support they need in the workplace.

The guide has been developed to assist both managers and employees in fostering an environment in which colleagues can openly and comfortably instigate conversations or engage in discussions about the menopause. It aims to minimise the impact the menopause can have on people at work by supporting employees through the menopause and creating an environment where everyone is treated fairly and with dignity.

It is not only those who identify as a woman who will experience menopause. This guide is applicable to all gender identities including transgender and non-binary people. Some transgender men, if their ovaries remain and no hormone therapy is given, may experience the menopause. Transgender women if undertaking hormone therapy may have menopause-like symptoms when they stop taking medication for surgical transition. Non-binary people and intersex people or people with variations in sex characteristics may also experience menopause at some point in their life. This guide will reference women; however, the principles will apply to all who are going through the menopause.

2.0 Definitions – What is the menopause?

The menopause is defined as a natural biological stage of life that affects women and usually happens between 45 and 55 years of age but it can also happen earlier or later in someone's life due to surgery, illness or other medical conditions. Symptoms can last for months or years with different symptoms being more prevalent at different times.

The menopause is not a single one-off event in a woman's life. There are three different stages to the menopause: perimenopause, menopause and post menopause. All stages of the menopause are different, and symptoms can vary from person to person and range from very mild to severe.

Menopause occurs when a woman stops getting periods and reaches the end of their natural reproductive life. Usually, it is defined as having occurred when a woman has not had a period for twelve consecutive months (for women reaching the menopause naturally). The average age of menopause in the UK is 51, however it can take place at any age.

Perimenopause is the time leading up to menopause when a woman may experience symptoms, but their period cycles continue to take place. Symptoms will be different for each individual and can start years before periods stop and can continue afterwards.

Post menopause is the time after menopause, when a woman hasn't experienced a period for over a year. Although the woman will no longer have periods, some women do continue to experience symptoms of menopause.

Surgical menopause occurs when an individual has a radical or total hysterectomy that removes a woman's ovaries. This means they will experience the menopause immediately after their operation.

3.0 Why does menopause matter?

Menopause and perimenopause symptoms can have a big impact on an individual's life, including relationships and work.

Support for menopause has both direct and indirect impacts on workforce retention, productivity, presenteeism and absenteeism. Ensuring employees receive the support they need is an important part of retaining experienced talent and skills. The right support would also reduce the impact of a person's symptoms on their health and wellbeing, their effectiveness at work, personal life and relationships.

Menopause is a natural part of every woman's life and it isn't always an easy transition. Research shows that women are reducing their hours or passing up promotions because of their menopausal symptoms. In the UK, almost a million of those who have menopausal symptoms could be looking to leave their jobs completely (People Management, 2022). Therefore, it is important to ensure all employees and managers are aware of the Council's commitment to supporting colleagues going through the menopause.

It is likely that all employees will know of someone experiencing the menopause, such as friends, partners, family, or colleagues. It is important to understand that the menopause may not only impact the person going through it, but also the people supporting them.

4.0 Symptoms of menopause

The Council understands that every woman experiencing the menopause is different, and therefore is not feasible to set out a structured set of specific guidelines. The body can be affected by menopause in numerous ways, causing a number of symptoms. The duration and severity of these symptoms varies across individuals, with some likely to experience severe and/or bothersome symptoms and some not experiencing symptoms requiring additional help or support.

Symptoms can manifest both physically and psychologically, including but not limited to:

- Hot flushes

- skin sensitivity
- problems with memory and concentration (sometimes referred to as 'brain fog'
- difficulty sleeping
- headaches
- panic attacks
- night sweats
- palpitations
- joint pain
- skin/hair changes
- irregular and/or heavy or light periods
- anxiety and loss of confidence.

You can find out more about menopause symptoms on the NHS website.

Employees are encouraged to speak to their General Practitioner (GP) for their medical health and menopause symptoms in the first instance. It may be helpful for employees to write down the symptoms they are experiencing before seeing their GP. For further information on attending medical appointments, refer to the Working Hours Policy. Appendix 2 provides additional guidance on how to discuss the menopause with a GP.

Research has suggested people from some ethnic groups may start the menopause at different ages. There are also variations in how significant the symptoms are and their perceptions, attitudes and expectations. A better understanding of these differences will improve support that may help with symptoms and increase the quality of life for women of all ethnicities and race. Further information on menopause and ethnicity is available from the British Menopause Society.

5.0 Impact of menopause symptoms at work

It is essential the Council fulfil its legal obligations in relation to supporting employees experiencing menopausal symptoms. In the UK, all employers have legal responsibility (under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974) to, where reasonably practical, ensure everyone's health, safety and welfare at work. In addition, under the Equality Act 2010, employers must ensure no employee is disadvantaged and treated less favourably in any way because of their menopause symptoms as this could be viewed as discrimination if related to a protected characteristic, such as age, disability, gender reassignment or sex.

If an employee's menopausal symptoms are having a long-term impact on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities these symptoms could be considered a disability. Managers should seek further advice from People Services on this and making reasonable adjustments.

The impact of menopause symptoms on self-confidence, mental health, and

relationships with others, will clearly have an impact not only on life outside of work but also working life. It is therefore important for managers and colleagues to be aware of these symptoms so that they can appreciate the full extent of how some employees experience the menopause and its impact on work.

Menopause can have indirect effects on other people such as spouses, partners and close family members or friends of individuals going through the menopause, which can put additional pressures and changes on relationships. As an employer, it is therefore important to foster an open and inclusive culture where employees experiencing symptoms of the menopause feel they can talk openly about their experiences and receive or be signposted to the support they need.

Employees are encouraged to have open and honest discussions with their manager about their symptoms. This will allow the manager to source suitable support i.e. referral to occupational health, signposting to further information. If employees are uncomfortable discussing their symptoms with their line manager they should contact People Services for advice by emailing HR.SupportDesk@wolverhampton.gov.uk.

Guidance for employees on having conversations around the menopause:

- Inform your manager if you would like to bring someone to accompany you to the meeting. An employee does not have the right to be represented due to the informality of the meeting. However, an employee can receive support, in the respect of a work colleague/ recognised trade union representative accompanying them to any meeting without speaking on their behalf.
- explain how your symptoms may be affecting you at work and offer some solutions that may be helpful
- complete the discussion and action plan record (Appendix 1) with your line manager
- allow some time for the manager to seek advice and schedule a follow up meeting.

6.0 Supporting employees through the menopause

Managers are key to raising awareness of the support available to their employees. It is important for managers to increase their own and their teams knowledge of the menopause. Managers should share details of the wellbeing support available on the Our People Portal, attend and encourage team attendance at organisation menopause events and support groups, such as Chatty Cafes and ensure any training available on the menopause is undertaken.

It is acknowledged that managers are not experts on the menopause, however they should have an understanding in order to be able to facilitate supportive conversations and signpost employees to support. Managers would be the first point of contact for employees if they require additional support or reasonable adjustments.

Managers should ensure they are available for their employees to speak to about their symptoms. Managers should explore the employees' duties and responsibilities to see if any aspect of their role could negatively affect an employee's menopause symptoms.

Managers should be empathetic, respectful, and have open discussions during one to ones and professional conversations as well as at regular intervals to allow employees the opportunity to raise any concerns. No assumptions should be made via these conversations, but employees should be given the time to express how they may be feeling. Being ready and willing to have open conversations appreciating the personal nature of the menopause is important and discussions should be treated sensitively, professionally and confidentially.

As the menopause can be a very sensitive topic, some employees may not want to tell their manager about their symptoms, however, being observant and asking open questions may help them feel more comfortable to speak about it. Asking open ended questions such as "How are you doing, you don't seem yourself recently?" can allow for an open dialogue to start.

It is important to acknowledge some trans, non-binary and intersex employees may not wish to disclose their menopausal symptoms as this may mean disclosing their trans or intersex status. It can therefore be particularly difficult for these employees to access support and/or ask for adjustments. Some people's needs will be different and so it is crucial to listen to people on an individual basis and allow them to take the lead on their conversations and required adjustments. Managers may signpost to staff equality forums or external resources where they may find further support.

Guidance for managers on having conversations around the menopause:

- Encourage employees to speak openly and honestly while also allowing them to decide what information they would like to disclose
- do not assume the symptoms the employee may be experiencing or make any assumptions on how they might be feeling
- discuss ways in which the employee can be supported using suggestions in the 'support available' section of this guide
- agree actions and how to implement them by using the template in Appendix 1 to record the meeting, so that all parties agree what has been discussed and any agreed next steps
- ensure this record is treated as confidential and stored securely
- agree if other members of the team should be informed and by whom
- ensure designated time is allowed for a follow up meeting
- discuss if an occupational health referral is required.

7.0 Examples of support available in the workplace

There are a number of options available to employees and managers when considering ways in which to support with the menopause. These include:

- Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) - helpline – 0800 136 6310, access via the Our People Portal or visit cwc.workplacewellbeing.com directly
- Occupational Health referral - further information on occupational health services and referrals is available HR intranet
- flexible working – the Council's Flexible Working Policy allows employees to request permanent changes to their contract
- minor adjustments to the workplace – such as desk fans, quiet areas, washroom facilities, temporary changes to work pattern.

All support should be discussed and agreed between employee and manager. Below are some examples of adjustments/support which may be explored to assist with common menopause symptoms.

- **Hot Flushes**
  - Request temperature control for their work area, such as a fan on their desk (where possible a USB connected desk fan)
  - opportunity to move away from a heat source and get fresh air outside
  - easy access to drinking water
  - access to a quiet area if there is a need to manage a hot flush
  - move desks away from heat sources/radiators if possible.

- **Irregular and/or Heavy or Light periods**
  - Easy access to washroom facilities
  - availability of sanitary products in washrooms in council buildings – this is currently being piloted by Facilities and products are available in a number buildings, such as Civic Centre, Hickman Avenue, Priory Green and Strengthening Families Hubs
  - ensure field/flexible workers have access to toilet facilities and sanitary products
  - understanding that employees may need to go to the toilet more often.

- **Headaches**
  - Easy access to drinking water
  - availability of quiet areas to work.

- **Difficulty sleeping**
  - Consideration to be given to flexible working, such as temporary change to working pattern/shift
  - referral to Occupational Health.

- **Low mood**
  - Agree time out from others, when required and if possible
  - signpost the employee to the EAP.

- **Loss of Confidence**
  - Ensure regular one to one meetings are held to consider the option of additional training and support where specific concerns have been raised
  - signpost the employee to the EAP and relevant e-learning modules.

- **Poor concentration**
  - Discuss times of day when concentration may be better or worse and adjust working pattern accordingly, where possible
  - review task allocation and workload
  - provide the opportunity to work in quiet areas when required
  - reduce interruptions where possible.

- **Skin sensitivity**
  - Consider looser fitting uniform and fabric that is light and breathable. Further information is available in the Dress Code Policy
  - consider ways in which the employee can work in a comfortable working temperature.

For further support on adjustments, contact People Services by emailing HR.SupportDesk@wolverhampton.gov.uk.

8.0 Additional support and self-management techniques

Additional resources can be found on the menopause wellbeing support page under the wellbeing@work section of the Our People Portal, which includes information on chatty cafes, menopause teams channels and eLearning modules.

Employees experiencing the menopause can also receive support via a number of external services such as those listed below. In addition, there are a number of self-management techniques which include:

- Not smoking - this can help reduce hot flushes
- exercising regularly - this can help with boosting mood, increasing sleep, and reducing hot flushes
- healthy eating - eating a balanced and healthy diet may be able to reduce symptoms
- reducing spicy food, alcohol, and caffeine - a reduction of this can reduce hot flushes
- taking sufficient breaks and rest - to assist with mood and stress levels.

9.0 Links to external resources

Organisation	What service do they provide?
National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) -	NICE guidelines explain how your GP will determine what types of treatments and interventions they can offer you - https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng23/ifp/chapter/About-this-information
NHS	Provides an overview of menopause - http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Menopause/Pages/Introduction.aspx.
The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologist	Offers further information in a dedicated area of their website at https://www.rcog.org.uk/en/patients/menopause/.
Daisy Network	Premature Ovarian Insufficiency (POI) information and support on very early menopause. You can find out more at https://www.daisynetwork.org.uk.
Hysterectomy Association	Information on hysterectomy. This provides an insight into surgically induced menopause because of having a hysterectomy. Further details can be found at https://www.hysterectomy-association.org.uk.
Henpicked	Provides information on managing menopause, and an insight into women's stories: https://henpicked.net/menopause/
TUC	TUC's guide Supporting women through the menopause https://www.tuc.org.uk/resource/supporting-working-women-through-menopause
Unison	Menopause Factsheet produced by Unison https://www.unison.org.uk/content/uploads/2013/08/Briefings-and-CircularsMenopause-Factsheet2.pdf

Wellbeing of Women	Information on what menopause is and common symptoms and treatments https://www.wellbeingofwomen.org.uk/your-health/menopause
Bupa	Bupa has a women's health club which has a lot of information on the menopause and support available https://www.bupa.co.uk/womens-health/menopause-support
Menopause Matters	An independent website providing up-to-date, accurate information about the menopause, menopausal symptoms and treatment options https://www.menopausematters.co.uk/
Balance app	Founded by Dr. Louise Newson, the only menopause app certified by ORCHA and recognised as a safe, accredited, compliant and trusted feature in digital health libraries for the NHS. The balance app provides evidence-based information to better inform people and help them feel prepared and empowered during the perimenopause and menopause. https://www.balance-menopause.com/balance-app/

Appendix 1 – Confidential Discussion and Action plan – Template

Employee/Resource ID	
Job Role	
Manager	
Date of discussion	
Summary of discussion	
Agreed actions	
Date of next review meeting	
Employee's signature	
Manager's signature	

Appendix 2 - GP Guidance Sheet – how to talk to your GP about menopause.

If you are suffering from menopausal symptoms to the point they are getting in the way of you enjoying life, it might be worth talking to your GP.

Below are some helpful, straightforward tips to help you get the best from your appointment.

Don't wait. It is all too common for women to feel they must simply 'put up' with menopausal symptoms as a part of life, but if they are affecting you, there are things you can do and support available. There is no need to wait until symptoms feel unbearable.

Read the NICE guidelines. This stands for National Institute for Health and Care Excellence and these guidelines are what your GP will use to determine the type of conversations to have with you and treatments to offer. There are guidelines for patients which are useful to read before you see your GP so you know what to expect.

Prepare for your appointment. It is easier for your GP to understand what is going on if you provide them with all the information. That may sound obvious, but blood tests to say where you are on the menopause transition are not always available or accurate – your hormones can fluctuate daily during this time. So, your GP will be thinking about what to recommend for you, based on your symptoms.

Keep a list of your symptoms, your period cycle, hot flushes, how you are feeling, and any changes you've noticed. Write them down and take them to your appointment, as this may assist your GP in finding the right solution faster. And, if you have any preferences about how you would like to manage your symptoms, discuss this too - for example, if you'd like to try hormone replacement therapy (HRT), or not.

Ask the receptionist which GP is best to talk to about menopause. They may be able to help you find the best GP to speak to – it might not be your usual GP, it could be someone who has had special training in the subject.

Ask for a longer appointment. If you think your standard appointment will not be long enough, try to book a double appointment, as some surgeries do offer this.

Don't be afraid to ask for a second opinion. If you feel you have not received the help you need, ask to speak to someone else. Do not be put off, you know how you are feeling, and how it is affecting you.

Ask if there is a menopause clinic in your area. Occasionally, there are regional clinics, specifically devoted to menopause. If there is one in your area, and you think this would be helpful, ask for a referral.

Take your partner or a friend with you. Your partner, or a friend, will know how the symptoms are affecting you. They could support you at the appointment and find out how they can continue supporting you.

What to expect from your GP

They should:

- Talk to you about your lifestyle, and how to manage both your symptoms, and your longer-term health
- offer advice on hormone replacement therapy and other non-medical options
- talk to you about the safety and effectiveness of any treatment.

They should not:

- Tell you that it is just that time of your life. Whilst menopause is a natural stage, it doesn't mean there isn't help available to help you manage the symptoms
- advise they do not prescribe HRT. It is an available choice, depending on your medical history
- impose unnecessary time restrictions, such as prescribing a medication once, or for a year or two. This is an ongoing conversation, and if your symptoms persist, you will still need help to manage them.

Your GP is there to help and support you, and you should feel comfortable and confident in talking to them about your symptoms, and any help you need. Don't think you have to struggle through menopause when there is help and support available.

All employees can access counselling by contacting the Employee Assistance helpline on 0800 136 6310, access via the Our People Portal or visit cwc.workplacewellbeing.com directly.